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## Theatre as Contagion: Making Sense of Communication in Performative Arts<sup>1</sup>

# ABSTRACT

Contagion is more than an epidemiological fact. The medical usage of the term is no more and no less metaphorical than in the entire history of explanations of how beliefs circulate in social interactions. The circulation of such communicable diseases and the circulation of ideas are both material and experiential. Diseases and ideas expose the power and danger of bodies in contact, as well as the fragility and tenacity of social bonds. In the case of the theatre, various tropes of contagion are to be found in both the fictional world on the stage (at least since Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*) and in many theories defining the rules of interaction between theatre audiences, fictitious characters and/or performers. In consequence, the historically changing concept of contagion has in many respects influenced how mimesis was conceived and understood. The main goal of my article is to demonstrate how the concept of contagion has changed over the last few decades and how it may influence our understanding of the idea of mimesis and participation in performative arts. This will be achieved in two steps. Firstly, I will compare the concept of contagion as the outbreak narrative that had influenced, among others, Antonin Artaud's *The Theater and the Plague* with the more recent and dynamic concept of epidemic structured around the tipping point. Secondly, I will look for performative art forms with similar structure of audience responses, analyzing Mariano Pensotti's project *Sometimes I Think, I Can See You* (2010), in order to demonstrate new forms of performativity and (re)presentation.

**Keywords:** contagion as communicable disease, epidemic as metaphor, the tipping point, mimesis, participation in performative arts.

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The epidemic of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) in the mid-1980s brought the idea of emerging infections to public attention once again. This, in turn, has dramatically undermined the prevailing narrative about the triumphant progress of epidemiology, which was born at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As a consequence, the conviction that mankind has eventually triumphed over nature was put into question. In the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, accounts of newly surfacing diseases with alarming mortality rates began to appear with increasing frequency in scientific publications and the mainstream media worldwide: Avian Influenza, atypical pneumonia known as SARS, mad cow disease (BSE), Ebola, Marburg, and—most recently—the Zika virus, which in a few months may spread throughout Europe although, as of today, no vaccine or preventive drug is yet available. Significantly, at the same time and due to the ever increasing mobility of our global society, methods of fighting contagion have changed, as has the conception of communicative diseases and the ways they spread. This has far-reaching consequences beyond the field of medicine, as contagion is not only an epidemiological fact.

The word “contagious,” as Priscilla Ward has recently reminded us, means literally “adjacent, placed side by side” (12–13), and the medical usage of the term is no more and no less metaphorical than in the entire history of explanations of how beliefs circulate in social interactions. The circulation of such communicable diseases and the circulation of ideas are both material and experiential. Diseases and ideas expose the power and danger of bodies in contact, as well as the fragility and tenacity of social bonds. For this reason, as early as 1976, William McNeal insisted that infectious diseases have shaped populations and civilizations since the dawn of humanity and therefore “ought to be part of our understanding of history” (5). In the case of the theatre, playhouses were closed on health grounds, for example during the bubonic plague in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is worth recalling that the reason for closing them was not only that a playhouse was a place where a large crowd gathered but also the belief that the theatre, unlike religious and secular places of congregation, was morally dubious. Obviously, that is not the only link between infectious diseases and theatre. Various tropes of contagion are to be found in both the fictional world on the stage (at least since Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*) and in many theories, mostly from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which tried to define the rules of interaction between theatre audiences, fictitious characters and/or performers. It is in the last case that contagion has subverted the traditional concept of mimesis as a defining link between an artefact and reality (be it on the level of their structures or external appearances). Now the emphasis of the concept of theatre communication as contagion

has visibly shifted once again: the intended impact on the audience mattered, and it might but did not need to be determined by the mimetic character of the performance. The main goal of my article, therefore, is to demonstrate how the concept of contagion has changed over the last few decades, and how it allows us to go beyond the idea of mimesis as the still privileged basis of communication in many theories of performative arts.

This effort may seem rather vain when one takes into account the articles gathered in *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies*, a volume formative for the field. In this collection, Susan Leigh Foster in the article “Movement’s Contagion: The Kinesthetic Impact of Performance” presents a survey of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century theoretical approaches to the question of the sensory experience provided by corporeal elements on the stage. The text opens with a reference to the *New York Times* critic John Martin who in the 1930s described as contagious the effect of movement on viewers of modern dance. Unlike ballet, with its well-defined rules of choreography and the story explained in the verbal form of a libretto, modern dance was intrinsically connected to the emotions, as dance movements themselves became the vehicles for developing narrative. Essentially, the individuated experience of the dancer’s musculature, with its unconscious psychic impulses, could never be verbalized. The only way to communicate them was to make the viewers feel equivalent kinesthetic sensations, to experience “inner mimicry” (qtd. in Foster 49). What changed here is Aristotle’s understanding of theatrical mimesis as “the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself . . . an imitation not of persons but of action and life, of happiness and misery” (9–10). The imitation of action was superseded not so much by an imitation of a human body in action as by a concrete physical body on the stage in motion that emanates psychic energies and/or emotions. Therefore, when Martin used the word “contagious,” he meant precisely the rapid spread of influence or emotion from one body to another, from the body on the stage to bodies in the auditorium. The title of Foster’s article may suggest that the kinesthetic impact of performance always equals a certain type of movement’s contagion. However, she concludes that it does not need to be construed as an act of contamination to which the viewers succumb because their experience is, at least partly, contingent on the historically changing conception of the body. To prove her point, she has constructed a chronological trajectory that ends with the discovery in the 1990s of a new class of brain cells, called “mirror neurons.” They are responsible for an internal motor representation of the observed event that may have different functions, imitation being only one of them. Even if Foster stresses that imitation is one function among many others, the trajectory she has

constructed goes full circle: the link between the body on the stage and its internal motor representation in our brain is obviously analogous to the link between reality and a work of art in the traditional concept of mimesis. On the basis of the presupposed existence of mirror neurons, dancer and dance scholar Ivar Hagendoorn defined in 2004 the dancer's body as a malleable indicator of multiple scenarios that could be developed by viewers which, as a consequence, made the idea of contagion in dance theatre entirely obsolete. This is, at least, what Foster implies.

I can only agree that we need to think about the human body, taking into account the historicity of its conception. However, Foster's conclusion implies that the concept of contagion has not changed and remains universal. My goal is the opposite. As a point of departure, I will take quite an obvious example of the theatre as contagion, namely the poetic vision of Antonin Artaud. In many respects, Artaud's use of the bubonic plague as the metaphor of theatre's impact on its audience is similar to Martin's understanding of modern dance performances as a communicative disease, as summarized by Foster. However, while Martin had actual performances in mind, Artaud dreamed about possible stage means with an envisioned "magical" or "mythical" force that was put into practice only by the experimental theatres in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that used ritual rhythms (*The Living Theatre*, *The Performance Group*) or intentional violence acts (*La Fura dels Baus*) to enforce the contagious action of performance. Nevertheless, when writing about theatre, both tried to see through the structure of Western culture and civilization, and both thought that the direct communication by means of emotion and psychic impulses were much better suited to achieving the goal than articulated language and causal logic. For this reason both preferred the language of contagion when speaking about theatre communication.

Artaud never ceased to emphasize that "the theater, like the plague, is a delirium and is communicative" (27) and, therefore, he kept on explaining how "to locate the action of the theater like that of the plague on the level of a veritable epidemic" (25). He lived in an age when epidemiology blossomed in France, deeply changed on many levels by Louis Pasteur (see Latour). France was a country that witnessed unprecedented interaction between discourses of medicine and theatre, where tropes of contagion, inoculation and immunity received new currency. They were used by Dadaists, as well as surrealists who described their activities in bacteriological terms, and Artaud was active as a member of both Parisian groups. What is more, as Nicola Savarese and then Stanton B. Garner have argued, the Dutch East Indian Pavilion, where Artaud saw the Balinese dancers perform during the 1931 Colonial Exposition, included a display on the fight

against plague and other diseases. This neighbourhood was indeed one of the sources of Artaud's new theatre, one that has no connection with the logocentric basis of Western civilization and therefore is able to act like a plague, to kill or to purify.

In his essay "The Theater and the Plague," to which I have already referred, Artaud gives an archetypal vision of the catastrophic invasion of the mythicized Black Death. He means particularly the bubonic plague that broke out in 1720 in his native Marseilles. For this reason he feels personally connected with the plague which an excerpt from his letter to Abel Gance conclusively proves. As early as 1927 Artaud wrote about himself: "I have the plague in the marrow of my nerves and I suffer from it" (qtd. in Garner 11). These and many more references to the modern etiology of contagion make his theory of the theatre as contagion similar to what Priscilla Wald in her seminal book *Contagious Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative* defined as the outbreak narrative, born at the onset of the new disciplines of bacteriology and sociology, and paradigmatic for the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and a few decades afterwards. Wald writes:

The outbreak narrative—in its scientific, journalistic, and fictional incarnations—follows a formulaic plot that begins with the identification of an emerging infection, includes discussion of the global networks throughout which it travels, and chronicles the epidemiological work that ends with its containment. (2)

All of these crucial elements can be found in Artaud's writings. I will mention only two of them that seem to be important as a backdrop for a new and updated definition of contagion.

The first element is the actor, a typical healthy carrier who literally embodies communicable disease. His function is to produce an experience of connectedness that interferes with biological, social, and metaphysical links. The second one is the fact that the outbreak narrative located the danger of infection directly in what Priscilla Wald calls "spatial promiscuity," which in Artaud's theatre of contagion boiled down to the intended elimination of the separation between the stage and the audience, prototypical for the theatre itself. Undoubtedly, Artaud was critical of an epidemiological definition of contagion, which he deemed all too rational. He was, however, convinced that the physical closeness between performers and members of the audience, enforcing an experience of direct communication, should play an important part in his Theatre of Cruelty. In the eponymous essay Artaud wrote straightforwardly:

It is in order to attack the spectator's sensibility on all sides that we advocate a revolving spectacle which, instead of making the stage and auditorium two closed worlds, without possible communication, spreads its visual and sonorous outbursts over the entire mass of the spectators. (86)

For me the phrase "the entire mass of the spectators" is of utmost importance. Indisputably, Artaud describes not only a one-sided communication, with no sign of any feedback loops, but also conceives of the theatre audience in the same manner as his compatriot and sociologist Gustave Le Bon, who defined the psychology of the crowd at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Here and there the same mechanism is to be found: an individual caught in the spirit and actions of a group surrenders personal agency and even rational thought for the sake of receiving the message from the stage straight under his/her skin. In other words, the mimetic relation between the performance and the external reality became less important than the direct communication between the stage and the audience turned into a crowd in order to become a more sensitive receiver of what the theatre wanted to communicate. And this is precisely what changed in a set of new metaphors of contagion introduced at the threshold of this century, when the internal dynamic of the crowd became the very centre of attention as evidenced by the theory of the Tipping Point.

In his book *The Tipping Point. How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, *The New Yorker* writer Malcolm Gladwell looks at major changes in our society that so often happen suddenly and unexpectedly. He asks why crime in New York dropped so dramatically in the mid-1990s, how the apparently moribund brand of Hush Puppies shoes became fashionable in a few months' time and then was available in every mall in America, and how an unknown writer ended up as a best-selling author. Although it may seem that these phenomena have nothing in common, in his opinion they share a basic, underlying pattern. Gladwell concludes: "Ideas and products and messages and behaviours spread just like viruses" (7). Even if he argues that it makes sense to use a model of outbreak of infectious disease, Gladwell does not focus so much on the very idea of contagion. Rather, he prefers to analyze these phenomena as social epidemics, that is, he looks especially at the dramatic moment when they reach their critical mass, which he calls "the Tipping Point." Thus he is clearly not interested in the outbreak narrative and the problem of finding the responsible carrier of a given disease: "Patient Zero," as defined by Wald. Instead, he pays close attention to the dynamics of epidemics, the extreme disproportion between the cause and the end result which visibly indicates that we are losing control of the course of events. Importantly, an epidemic may tip in

more than one way. As Gladwell argues: “The world of the Tipping Point is a place where the unexpected becomes expected, where radical change is more than possibility. It is—contrary to all our expectations—a certainty” (13–14). Gladwell’s remark helps us to understand why the outbreak narrative, structured as a whodunit, cannot describe the contemporary world where pragmatic laws of causality no longer apply. This global world needs another model of contagion which could be useful in analyzing both emerging infections and new ways of social communication, including the ones emerging in performative arts.

To find out in what respect the new model of contagion should differ from the old outbreak narrative, I will take a cursory look at two Hollywood movies. They tackle the same topic, but on the structural level do it in quite different and telling ways. The first one, Wolfgang Petersen’s *Outbreak*, loosely based on Richard Preston’s non-fictional book *The Hot Zone*, premièred in March 1995. Significantly, when the film was released, a real outbreak of Ebola occurred in Zaire, where the “what if” story began to be told and strongly influenced both the plausibility of the fictional plot and the impact of the movie as a wake-up call for our contemporaries. The second movie, Steven Soderbergh’s *Contagion*, was released a decade and a half later, in 2011. It was inspired by the 2003 SARS epidemic and a 2009 flu pandemic. To ensure an accurate depiction of a pandemic event, the screenwriters consulted WHO representatives and noted medical experts. Despite, or because of, that, *Contagion* met with mixed reviews by both film critics and general audiences. The reason was the untypical way the film presented the popular subject, introducing new types of narrative about epidemic. These multifarious and multi-level relations with real-life diseases and epidemics make both films ideal case studies when one tries to identify the main changes of the dominant concept of contagion.

*Outbreak* follows closely the rules of the conventional and formulaic outbreak narrative defined by Wald. The action starts in a desolate African camp decimated by an unknown haemorrhagic virus back in 1967. The localized site of infection was bombed shortly after that by American forces. However, the virus re-emerges almost two decades later in the USA, transmitted by a monkey illegally imported to a Californian pet-shop. The monkey is quite early identified as a carrier of the disease, and the provincial town of Cedar Creedis is soon quarantined to prevent further spreading out of the epidemic. The rest of the story centres around the search for the runaway monkey and a dramatic conflict among the responsible military personnel about how to deal with the infected city in order to contain and destroy the virus. The author of *Contagious Cultures* recognized the paradigmatic character of the story told in Petersen’s *Outbreak*

and used its detailed analysis to illustrate her arguments. For this reason the film is the best choice to be compared with Soderbergh's *Contagion*. Soderbergh's film tells almost the same story, but in a significantly different way, using the multi-narrative hyper-link cinematic style typical of other movies by this director.

*Contagion* begins with a series of loosely structured images from around the world that demonstrate how the emerging infection maps the changing spaces (in each case not only the name of the city but also its population is mentioned as an important factor), relationships, practices and temporalities of a globalizing world. Importantly, the plot develops chronologically, almost day by day, starting with the second day of the emerging disease. Only in the last scene of the film, after the death toll has reached 26 million people worldwide and the cure is finally found, can we see that the outbreak turned out to be of no importance. This applies to both the figure of the disease carrier, and the identified "Patient Zero." In a style typical of epidemiological detective stories, the emerging hidden plot is recounted as it would have been done by the virus, while surveillance cameras show who did what and where. This, however, is deliberately discredited as an important source of information and predictability for those who try to fight pandemic, as well as for the viewers. Soderbergh uses all of these well-known thematic and structural conventions of the outbreak narrative in order to demonstrate their uselessness in today's global village, where pandemics have acquired entirely new dynamics. In *Contagion*, communicable disease marks the increasing connections of the inhabitants of the globalizing world. The unpredictability of their networks nullifies the typical procedures of prevention, quarantine or contention of an epidemic within a well-defined borders. What counts are small changes that will "tip" in an unpredictable way. In this way, Soderbergh very accurately depicts what Gladwell describes as a world out of this world, where pure impossibility proves its own facticity.

Soderbergh's *Contagion* demonstrates an updated concept of communicable disease. It does not, however, use the conception as a means of analyzing social phenomena, especially new ways of communication in performative arts. Many scholars (Bourriaud, Bishop) have already written about theatre communication as participation. Even if the ways of engaging spectators have changed, the agency of the audience has increased, allowing each spectator to become an active co-creator. Undoubtedly, theatre has done with illusion and re-presentation, and places a great emphasis on presentation and everything that is real and factual, but it is still involved in arranging the premises and means for spectators to become engaged co-creators. In other words, theatre still upholds the traditional concept of



mimesis, although modified and redefined. Instead, performative art forms that are structured around the tipping point, as I posit, have another *raison d'être*. They no longer engage and influence the audience. They cannot be treated as artefacts and do not communicate any messages. They merely intend to be noticed. However, even if they remain invisible, they still remain performative in the sense of self-sustainability; they are not mimetic, but “becoming,” as Gilles Deleuze would have it.

Where to look for such performative art forms? First of all, as Annika Wehrle convincingly demonstrates, in places that the French anthropologist Marc Augé called “no-places,” with reference to such purely functional, transitive places as large train or bus stations, airports, shopping malls, hotels or even large lifts. In these places without properties, strangers gather by necessity, trying to reach their places of destination as soon as possible. Nevertheless, no-places are important knots in today’s global networks. They are not polyvalent, but have the capacity to shape momentarily and form dynamic and hybrid constellations, ever changing assemblages of humans and non-humans alike. Emergent, performative events in such no-places differ distinctively from both site-specific performances and Augusto Boal’s Invisible Theatre adopted in various countries. The latter is not only conceived of as a political intervention, but is also typically based on a pre-given scenario, implemented to test certain people’s reactions in chosen places. Site-specific performances are different in this respect. They install and stabilize a theatrical space in a non-theatrical one, feeding on its real-life plausibility and veracity. Contrary to that, forms of today’s contagion theatre are conceived as a conceptual intervention, and gradually adapt to the changing demands of a developing situation. This kind of intervention, as I have already emphasized, does not have to be immediately visible to all people around, each of them preoccupied with their own goals. Their inattentiveness, and unpreparedness for an aesthetic experience, provide the very basis for an epidemic to “tip,” which always comes as a surprise. This was best evidenced by the so-called “negative performativity” of Joanna Rajkowska’s or Cezary Bodzianowski’s projects (Jopek) in Poland and by Annika Wehrle’s previously mentioned book *Passagenräume* which gives other interesting examples of Western performances of the last decade, intentionally created on the crossroads between the everyday and performative practices.

Such was the departure point for Mariano Pensotti’s project *Sometimes I Think, I Can See You*, created in cooperation with Berlin Theater Hebbel am Ufer. This performance, serving as a kind of showcase here because of its deliberately minimalistic aesthetic structure, can be situated at the border of what could be recognized as (negative) performative arts today. *Sometimes I Think, I Can See You* premiered in 2010 in Berlin, and it took

place in the metro station Hallesches Tor. It was subsequently performed within the framework of the project “Parallel Cities” carried out in various theatres, among others Warsaw’s Teatr Nowy. Performances took place in train stations in Zurich, Buenos Aires and Warsaw. In the latter case, it was performed on two consecutive nights (2–3 June 2011) on one of the platforms at Warsaw’s main train station (Dworzec Centralny). As in other places where *Sometimes I Think, I Can See You* was created before, there were no actors or performers involved but only four Polish writers with their laptops: Marcin Cecko, Sylwia Chutnik, Agnieszka Drotkiewicz and Jaś Kapela. Their main and only aim during the performance was to closely observe the people around: patiently waiting passengers, railwaymen and the homeless, as well as potential theatre viewers who came here to attend a performance announced in public and social media, and perhaps were still waiting for it to begin. Thus, four writers, located in different places on the platform, were observing what was going on for two hours, and registering live their impressions in tweets, posts or chats. Their texts were instantaneously projected on big screens to potentially be read by all; however, sometimes the texts were difficult to identify as such because of the large variety of other announcements. During the Berlin première, the director Mariano Pensotti explained the main idea of the project in the following way: “Like surveillance cameras recording anonymous individuals’ every moment in the station, each writer transforms the spontaneous progress through a public space into narratives conveying what is going on—or might be going on—inside people’s heads in parallel with the bustling life of the station” (qtd. in Wehrle 299). No member of the creative team could foresee whether the presence of well-known Polish writers, as well as their comments written live would be noticed, and how people around would react to them. The situation might have “tipped” in many ways. Perhaps somebody, feeling insulted by one of comments, would call the police. Perhaps a group of bored, beer-drinking youngsters would take the writers’ presence as an opportunity for entertainment, and they might try to enter into discussion with the performers. Perhaps, on the contrary, somebody who has recognized a celebrity would ask for an autograph, and others would join them, queuing up, which might attract the attention of the people around and turn the small gathering into a big event. One thing is certain: today’s situation will not repeat in the same form tomorrow. It will not reoccur because a performance of this type is a hardly visible intervention. Only the main idea and the location were specified, but the course of events and the message have not been predetermined. Thus, this intervention has to be located at the opposite end of the spectrum to what is usually defined as prototypical theatre art and theatre performance.

It is time to ask one important question: in what respect the renowned and extensively analyzed performances differ from the ones performed in Augé's "no-places," places of transition? In response, it suffices to compare the artistic intervention in everyday practices carried out in *Sometimes I Think, I Can See You* with Marina Abramovic's performance *Lips of Thomas*, premièred in the mid-1970s. The latter served as a main example of the basic principles of new aesthetics in Erika Fischer-Lichte's *The Transformative Power of Performance*. As Fischer-Lichte emphasizes, each participant could choose the frame of reference for the event in which s/he was just taking part. Everyone was free to identify it as a fully-fledged artistic event or, on the contrary, as a social event. Each choice presupposes dramatically different kind of thinking and behaviour during the performance, first of all in such extreme situations as Abramovic initiated. A fully-fledged artistic event allows the audience to remain distant and disengaged, so as to retain the autonomy of the artefact. The participants of a social event should intervene before the artist, for example, bleeds herself to death. In her more recent book *Performativität* Fischer-Lichte proves that this might be Abramovic's intention, by providing information about another performance from the same time, *Rhythm 0* (89–92). Supposedly, the artist was so unsatisfied with the participants' behaviour during her previous performances that in 1974 she decided to invite a group of people who were just passing by the art gallery Studio Mora in Naples, and did not look like art connoisseurs at all. Only then could she hope that one of the participants would possibly act against the unspoken rules of conduct in art galleries, and in this way her scenario will be eventually completed. For Fischer-Lichte, both of Abramovic's performances conclusively prove how important the freedom of choice is for the foundations of the new aesthetics of performance. I have no doubt that such a choice was important back in the 1970s and could be recognized today as one of the basic elements of the aesthetics of that time. The question remains, however, whether this claim still holds for all kinds of performances nowadays.

I posit that for those who were at Warsaw's main station on one of those June nights in 2011, and for many participants of other performances of this kind, the choice between two contradictory frames of reference was still possible, but that it had irrevocably lost its previous relevance. After all, Pensotti's *Sometimes I Think, I Can See You* was not as self-referential and meta-aesthetic as many of Abramovic's performances from the 1970s. Moreover, it did not require the active involvement of the participants at all. The performance itself engaged neither with art nor with reality. It merely provided a framework for everyday practices but not in the same way as Marcel Duchamp, who exhibited such everyday objects as a urinal

or a bicycle wheel in an art gallery. The framing in the case of Pensotti's performance did not turn a piece of reality into an art object or an artistic event. It was only an attempt at drawing people's attention just like a policeman does or a person wearing an ostentatious dress or make-up. Possibly many commuters had no clue that they were close to a performance or an unusual event. And those who did realized it could fall back upon an infinite number of scenarios to understand what was going on around them. But these scenarios did not differ a bit from the scripts that govern behaviour on a train platform. The title *Sometimes I Think, I Can See You* expressed the core of the performance's concept: those taking an active part and those completely unaware of it were dealing with the same matter of potentiality, inventing their own alternative histories or worlds. In other words, the performance did not possess Yuri Lotman's dual structure typical for works of art. Therefore, if we wish to talk about mimesis in this case, we might do so only in such a way as René Girard did in *A Theatre of Envy* when writing about the mimetic character of desire, and other types of social communication whose dynamic is basically the same as those analyzed by Gladwell in *The Tipping Point*.

The example of *Sometimes I Think, I Can See You* proves that what is needed today is a profound verification of the rudiments of traditional aesthetics, primarily the concept of mimesis, authorship and autonomy, and the specificity of aesthetic experience. Moreover, it should be taken into consideration that in this case we are dealing with a type of performativity which differs from the one analyzed by Fischer-Lichte who clearly distinguished artistic and cultural performances. The new performativity of the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century emerges because of the fact that this operation is not possible any more, and such an impossibility creates the very source of these kinds of performances. It was not my aim to provide a proposal for such a new aesthetics here but only to flag its necessity. I wanted, at the same time, to demonstrate that a revisited and redefined concept of contagion could provide useful means to tackle an analysis of performative dynamics as an assemblage of humans and non-humans. I emphasized that those who deliberately or not became participants in *Sometimes I Think, I Can See You* had a choice of infinite number of scenarios, in order to intentionally refer to Foster's article "Movement's Contagion." I referred especially to the fragment which alluded to Ivar Hagendoorn's description of the dancer's body as a malleable indicator of multiple scenarios that could be developed by viewers. For Foster, this was the best proof that the old metaphor of contagion has become entirely obsolete nowadays. Nevertheless, when we treat the concept of both the human body and contagion as historically chang-

ing, we may find each of these concepts helpful to analyze contemporary performances that go far beyond the borders of traditionally understood mimetic art.

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