Convivial, Technovivial and Liminal Arts

Pluralism and Singularities

Jorge DUBATTI

Universidad de Buenos Aires, Academia Argentina de Letras

https ://doi.org/10.17184/eac.10169

Abstract: This article argues that the arts can be divided into convivial, technovivial, and liminal. It is important to accept this pluralism and its singularities because conviviality, technoviviality, and the liminality between conviviality and technoviviality affect eight dimensions in both the artists who create and the spectators: events, experiences, practices and, consequently, different philosophies of practice, politics, epistemologies, languages, technologies, and pedagogies.

Keywords: artistic experience - epistemologies - languages - technologies – pedagogies

---

Pluralism is a philosophical position that "emphasizes the diversity of perspectives provided by our experience of the world, without judging it possible, convenient or necessary to apply a reductive procedure that would lead this multiple experience back to a more basic or fundamental unity" (Cabanchik 2000, 100). I propose the coexistence and multiple exchanges of a plurality of artistic manifestations in contemporaneity (but also verifiable throughout history): convivial arts, technovivial arts, and liminal arts between *convivio* and *tecnovivio*, which should not be reduced to a homogenizing unity, but rather perceived (and enjoyed) in their singularities and differences.

For three decades now I have been developing the field of the Philosophy of Theatre (Dubatti 2019a) and investigating, under the name *convivio*, human relations gathered territorially, in physical space and physical presence, in proximity, at a human scale, in, from and with the "flesh of the world" (borrowing the wise expression of Merleau-Ponty, 1985), without technological mediation (through instruments or machines) that would allow the subtraction/deterritorialization of the physical presence of bodies. Convivial studies are concerned with the mutual affection of living beings in physical space, the zone of experience and subjectivation produced in territorial encounter, and

the physical materiality of bodies as part and extension of that space, as a founding event of existence.

I call *technovivials* those human relations at a distance, deterritorialized[1], through technological mediation that allows the subtraction of the physical presence of the living body in territory and replaces it, in mediated contact with the other, with a telematic and/or virtual presence, without bodily proximity, on an expanded scale enabled by instruments and machines.

The formative question of *convivio* is what happens between two or more people who come together in physical space and physical presence, how they relate, what their experience is like, and what relevance and difference this event has in their lives. The origin of *convivio* lies in the very origin of the human, and as such appears represented in cosmogonic myths (for example, the first meeting of Adam and Eve in the biblical Genesis). The formative question of *tecnovivio* is different: what happens between two or more people when they relate at a distance through technologies, what their experience is like and what existential relevance it holds. It is said that the first *tecnovivio* is also found at the origins, many millennia ago, but its history is very different from that of *convivio*: its beginning might correspond to the invention of communication through smoke signals or drums, or to the creation of drawing and writing.

We may speak of a fertile and immeasurable convivial culture, which exceeds and precedes the arts. Instances of *convivio* include face-to-face encounters in physical territories of nature, homes, streets, transport systems, bars and restaurants, markets, etc.; "in-person" classes; demonstrations of protest or public support in public spaces; political rallies; gatherings with friends to share a meal; wedding celebrations; football matches in stadiums; religious services in temples; care for the sick in hospitals; theatrical events in auditoria, non-conventional spaces or open-air venues, and so forth.

As examples of the productive and inexhaustible technovivial culture, we may highlight the book and printed matter (the culture of reproducibility, in Walter Benjamin's terms), telephony, cinema, radio, television, video, digital communication through networks (e-mail, Skype, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, blogs, etc.), as well as streaming, YouTube, among many other technologically mediated practices that enable deterritorialization.

There is, however, a third zone: crossings, hybridity and mixture, juxtaposition, exchange or community between *convivio* and *tecnovivio*. I call it liminal, both in the sense of connection, passage, "in-between" and threshold, and as a shared boundary between both experiences. The culture of liminality between *convivio* and *tecnovivio* is expressed, for example, in intermedial and/or transmedia forms; in convivial encounters increasingly technovivialized (such as the habit of recording territorial gatherings, taking photographs while travelling and relating to the travel experience through them); in the growing awareness (and resistance) to the presence of surveil-

[1]The image conveyed by the expression "hanging from the cloud" to refer to the Web connection is illuminating in this regard.

Published in : BRISTAULT CANOVA, Juliette ; CHANTRAINE BRAILLON, Cécile ; ŽUGIĆ BORIĆ, Anamarija (dir.), *Performing Arts in the Digital Age. Research, Archives, and Innovation*, Editions des archives contemporaines, ISBN: 9782813005588, doi: 10.17184/eac.9782813005588

lance cameras in public and private space, the feeling of being "watched"; in thinking or imagining orality as writing while perceiving it; in the interference of the digital world in territorial behaviours, and so on[2].

A fundamental clarification that avoids confusions typical of binarism is necessary: *tecnovivio* should not be exclusively identified with technologies, nor should it be thought that there are no technologies in *convivio*. Just as there are technologies of *tecnovivio*, there are also technologies of *convivio*. Technologies of *convivio* are those implemented within the sphere of conviviality: the design of spaces and the distribution of artists, technicians and spectators within the zone of territorial event; lighting (daylight, candles, oil, gas, electricity, etc.); safety, cleaning and administration; the design and use of stage machinery; sound design; acting, directing, scenic rewriting of texts, and so on.

I insist: *convivio* and *tecnovivio* share (in Aristotelian terms, a "proximate genus", *Metaphysics*[3]) the fact that both make use of technologies that are constitutive of them. Yet in *convivio* not everything is technology, much less the principle of its occurrence.

Following Aristotle once more, if this is where the proximate genus lies (what *convivio* and *tecnovivio* have in common), we may also identify a "specific difference" (the singularities that distinguish them). In *convivio* there is an irreducible core resistant to technologies, resistant to language and communication, constituting a zone of experience of ineffability, illegibility and infancy (in the etymological sense of the word: where we do not speak, as Agamben explains, 2001), a zone of intensity in which a "de-wording" occurs and which constitutes one of the affirmative experiences of existence.

This dimension of vital "sensation", as the Argentinean director Mauricio Kartun expressed in one of his seminars, constitutes the basis of the triadic structure of all re-pre-sensation (sensation + presentation + representation) (Dubatti 2020d, 86).

This ancestral, primordial, archaic core, which is renewed in every situation of *convivio* (in all practices of convivial culture), demonstrates that—contrary to what is often lightly asserted—not everything is technology, nor can everything in human experience be organized by technology. Another Argentinean director, Eduardo Pavlovsky, defines this core in the following terms (faithfully preserving his punctuation): "Series of multiplications – which are merely sketches – meaningless – just lines that escape – ungraspable – uncapturable, which at times give rise to a multiplication that produces an event – a deviation from history – creating a new level of intelligibility. These series of sketches – like Winnicott's meaningless speech (Reality and Play) in free association – prepare the event" (Pavlovsky 1998, 19).

This core of *convivio*, irreducible to technologies, constitutes its most radiant attribute and makes it unique. By contrast, *tecnovivio* (as its name indicates) is founded on

[2] On liminality, in general and specifically in theater, see Dubatti, ed., 2017 and 2019b. For further information on these concepts and those of *convivio* and *tecnovivio*, see Dubatti's articles in the Bibliography.

[3] The Aristotelian distinction between "proximate genus and specific difference" in his *Metaphysics* (1970), to which I will return, is a valuable tool against binary thinking and in favor of complexity.

Published in : BRISTAULT CANOVA, Juliette ; CHANTRAINE BRAILLON, Cécile ; ŽUGIĆ BORIĆ, Anamarija (dir.), *Performing Arts in the Digital Age. Research, Archives, and Innovation*, Editions des archives contemporaines, ISBN: 9782813005588, doi: 10.17184/eac.9782813005588

technology and depends entirely upon it. The term *con-vivio* differs from *tecno-vivio* precisely in the Latin-origin prefix *con*, derived from *cum*, in turn related to the Greek *sun/sum* (present in beautiful convivial words such as *symposium*). While *convivio* expresses the idea of "living together" (territorially gathered), *tecnovivio* implies living through and in dependence on technologies.

I do not know what will or might happen to me in *convivio* with others until I experience it (I cannot foresee either its singularity or its complexity); once in *convivio*, the vertigo of surprises, sensory stimulations, associations, feelings, thoughts, memories, emotions and abductions generated in the zone of affectation with others will be such that I will not be able to capture it in a construction of language or through a technology. The chaotic intensity of *convivio*, its unlimited porosity with existence as a totalizing phenomenon—like the experience of dreams, childhood, love, horror, death, or the sacred—resists language yet constitutes the foundational density of our existence.

Days later, memory involuntarily allows us to recover traces of the convivial experience that we did not even register as having lived at the time. What is the limit of the "flesh of the world"? By contrast, in *tecnovivio* everything appears organized from the outset by the frameworks of language (such as, for example, the rectangle of the screen or the book). The vertigo of navigation, paradoxically enclosed within rectangles. Infinite liminality with life, in the territorial immersion of physical space in *convivio* with other bodies, confronted with the rectangular configuration of the screen as principle (in the double sense of beginning and foundation). It has been pointed out that technovivial hypertext navigation is limitless; however, its rectangular textual dimension (the screen) is the sine qua non condition that organizes the experience.

We may conclude that *convivio* and *tecnovivio* provide matrices of occurrence. For *convivio* to exist, we need at least two people physically present, gathered territorially, interacting in proximity in physical space. For *tecnovivio* to exist, in its two variants, we need either one person and a machine, or at least two people at a distance, in a reterritorialized relationship mediated by machines. The liminal combinations of these two singular matrices of occurrence are, in turn, numerous; however, a limitation arises, which I shall now address: the relations between *convivio* and *tecnovivio* are not symmetrical, and this very asymmetry illuminates their difference as events.

If the experience of quarantine and physical isolation during the pandemic demonstrated anything, it was the failure and impotence of *tecnovivio* in substituting *convivio*. Technovivial culture, undoubtedly a fundamental part of our lives, could not and cannot take the place of the practices and experiences of conviviality. As I have already indicated, the relationship between *convivio* and *tecnovivio* is asymmetrical: *convivio* can include within its matrix of occurrence all technovivial forms, but *tecnovivio* cannot resolve the inclusion of the materiality of bodies and physical space, of the "flesh of the world" (Merleau-Ponty 1985), which it transforms into something else (bundles of light, signs, language, virtuality, telecommunication, rectangular screen texts).

Published in : BRISTAULT CANOVA, Juliette ; CHANTRAINE BRAILLON, Cécile ; ŽUGIĆ BORIĆ, Anamarija (dir.), *Performing Arts in the Digital Age. Research, Archives, and Innovation*, Editions des archives contemporaines, ISBN: 9782813005588, doi: 10.17184/eac.9782813005588

The experience of the pandemic also made it possible to distinguish convivial arts, technovivial arts, and liminal arts between *convivio* and *tecnovivio* (of crossing, mixture, hybridity, alternation, etc.). I call convivial arts those whose occurrence is founded sine qua non in *convivio* and whose experience centrally reconnects with the core irreducible to technologies. The theatrical event, both in its most conventional sense and in its liminal forms, by virtue of its centuries-long history, requires a convivial matrix. *Convivio* is a foundational part of the singularity of the theatrical event.

Theatre is an event insofar as something happens, occurs, takes place. It exists insofar as it occurs, and while it occurs. An event is the transition from one state to another, which certain agents (in this case actors or performers, technicians, and spectators in *convivio*) cause or experience. Theatre differs from other artistic events (cinema, literature, sport, science, etc.) by its singularity as an event, which may be thought of in two principal ways: a logical-genetic definition: for theatre to exist, a concatenated triad of sub-events must occur—*convivio*, corporeal *poíesis*, and spectatorship (*expectación*).

A pragmatic definition: theatre is the zone of experience and subjectivation that arises from the multiplication of *convivio*, corporeal *poíesis*, and spectatorship.

I call the first logical-genetic because it states the components that cannot be absent and their chronological order of appearance: first *convivio*; within *convivio*, someone produces corporeal *poíesis*; and within *convivio*, someone begins to spectate that corporeal *poíesis*. Consequently, for theatre to exist, as I have already noted, at least two people in *convivio* are required: someone who produces corporeal *poíesis* (actor, performer) and someone who spectates that production of corporeal *poíesis* (spectator); from their interaction arises the territorial zone of experience.

I add theatre is the other, a radical practice of what the philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas calls the ethics of alterity. I call the second definition pragmatic because, at a given moment in the praxis of the event, *convivio*, corporeal *poíesis* and spectatorship can no longer be distinguished from one another; a "density" of occurrence is produced, resulting from the crossing, interaction and multiplication of these components. The complex set of components that integrate the theatrical event composes a specific *reomode* (Bohm 1998), which can only be defined with the verb *to theatre*. "Theatre theatres," affirms Mauricio Kartun (2015, 136–137). YouTube "youtubes", streaming "streams", the platform "platforms": singularities of each *reomode*.

In complementarity with Bohm, Arístides Vargas (director of the Malayerba group) astutely notes that, in research in the arts, we should attend to the weight of the words we use, and he warns us that we have lost awareness of what the terms we employ imply. "What does it mean to upload a performance to a platform?" he asks. Does theatre now "YouTube"? To maintain that theatre "YouTubes", in Bohm's terms of *reomode*, is doubly fallacious: theatre does not do everything that YouTube does, nor does YouTube do everything that theatre does. They may share aspects, but they respond to different *reomodes*. Let us return, for the sake of argument, to a political perspective: do theatre-makers who upload their productions to YouTube participate in

Published in : BRISTAULT CANOVA, Juliette ; CHANTRAINE BRAILLON, Cécile ; ŽUGIĆ BORIĆ, Anamarija (dir.), *Performing Arts in the Digital Age. Research, Archives, and Innovation*, Editions des archives contemporaines, ISBN: 9782813005588, doi: 10.17184/eac.9782813005588

the economic actions and multimillion-dollar commercial profits of YouTube / Google Inc.? Do theatre-makers design YouTube's regimes of control, surveillance, censorship and information processing? Rather, theatre-makers on YouTube are freelance, *ad honorem* workers—self-employed without awareness of being so—who believe they dominate and control the media.

In convivial arts, technovivial arts and liminal arts, returning to Aristotle, we may distinguish proximate genus and specific difference. They share (proximate genus) the fact that in all three there is or may be acting and spectatorship; that in all three there is or may be production of *poíesis*; and that in all three there is or may be artistic and aesthetic experience. Yet among them there are also relevant features of "specific difference". Singularities/differences traverse various planes, among them the following eight dimensions that involve both creators and audiences/spectators:

– events (according to the ontological theory derived from the Philosophy of Theatre, to which we have already referred).

– experiences (convivial arts and technovivial arts require different ways of putting the body into participation and lived experience, of risk and "trying with"; in particular, they differ in territorial *versus* reterritorialized relations) [4].

– praxis (for example, different acting praxis and different spectatorial praxis) and, consequently, different philosophies of praxis[5].

– politics (it is necessary to politicizes *convivio* and *tecnovivio* because, as Marshall McLuhan said, "the medium is the message", 1964).

– epistemologies (we require specific categorical constellations for each, such as the distinction between physical presence, virtual presence, telematic presence or objectual presence; physical body and virtual body, etc.).

– languages (a profound difference is marked by the mediation of the camera in visual or audiovisual technovivial arts, as Lotman points out when he speaks of secondary modelling systems, 1988).

– technologies (the technologies of *convivio*, as observed above, differ from technovivial technologies, for example, in their respective ways of organizing physical space and virtual space);

– pedagogies (experience shows that teaching and learning acting in *convivio* is not the same as teaching and learning acting in front of a camera).

[4] For the concept of experience, I follow the American pragmatist John Dewey (2008), who writes: "Direct experience comes from nature and man in their interaction. In this interaction, human energy is gathered, released, damaged, frustrated, or victorious. There are rhythmic beats of desire and satisfaction, pulsations of action and inaction" (18).

[5] I define the Philosophy of Artistic Praxis as the production of knowledge and thought in/from/-for/about/with theatrical praxis, from a practical reason or reason for praxis, which is rooted in the doings and knowledges of the "theatricality" of the event (Dubatti, 2020e).

Published in : BRISTAULT CANOVA, Juliette ; CHANTRAINE BRAILLON, Cécile ; ŽUGIĆ BORIĆ, Anamarija (dir.), *Performing Arts in the Digital Age. Research, Archives, and Innovation*, Editions des archives contemporaines, ISBN: 9782813005588, doi: 10.17184/eac.9782813005588

References

Agamben, Giorgio. 2001. *Infancia e historia. Destrucción de la experiencia y origen de la historia*. Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo Editora.

Aristóteles. 1970. *Metafísica*. Traduit par Valentín García Yebra. Madrid: Gredos.

Benjamin, Walter. 1989 [1936]. « La obra de arte en la época de la reproductibilidad técnica ». Dans *Discursos interrumpidos I*. Buenos Aires: Taurus.

Bohm, David. 1998. *La totalidad y el orden implicado*. Barcelona: Kairós.

Cabanchik, Samuel. 2000. *Introducciones a la filosofía*. Buenos Aires: Gedisa / Universidad de Buenos Aires.

Dewey, John. 2008 [1934]. *El arte como experiencia*. Barcelona: Paidós.

Dubatti, Jorge, dir. 2017. *Poéticas de liminalidad en el teatro*. Lima: Editorial de la Escuela Nacional Superior de Arte Dramático.

Dubatti, Jorge. 2019a. « La Filosofía del Teatro como construcción científica: qué, por qué, para qué ». Dans *Teatro y Filosofía en los inicios del siglo XXI*, édité par José Romera Castillo, 107–127. Madrid: Editorial Verbum.

Dubatti, Jorge, dir. 2019b. *Poéticas de liminalidad en el teatro II*. Lima: Editorial de la Escuela Nacional Superior de Arte Dramático.

Dubatti, Jorge. 2020a. « Experiencia teatral, experiencia technovivial: ni identidad, ni campeonato, ni superación evolucionista, ni destrucción, ni vínculos simétricos ». *Rebento. Revista das Artes do Espetáculo* 12 (janvier–juin): 8–32.

Dubatti, Jorge. 2020b. « Síndrome de abstinencia convivial y artes technoviviales en la cuarentena de Buenos Aires ». *Culture Teatrali. Studi, Interventi e Scritture sullo Spettacolo* 29: 56–59.

Dubatti, Jorge. 2020c. « La peste del Edipo neoliberal ». *La Libertad de Pluma. Revista Digital* 3 (12, septembre): 1–7.

Dubatti, Jorge. 2020d. *Teatro y territorialidad. Perspectivas en Filosofía del Teatro y Teatro Comparado*. Barcelona: Gedisa.

Dubatti, Jorge, éd. 2020e. *Artistas-investigadoras/es y producción de conocimiento desde la escena. Una filosofía de la praxis teatral*. Lima: Editorial de la Escuela Nacional Superior de Arte Dramático.

Dubatti, Jorge. 2020–2021. « Entre el convivio y el tecnovivio: artes de pluralismo, convivencia y diversidad epistemológica ». *Investigación Teatral. Revista de Artes Escénicas y Performatividad* 11 (18): 17–21.

Kartun, Mauricio. 2015. « El teatro teatra ». Dans *Escritos 1975–2015*, 136–137. Buenos Aires: Colihue.

Lévinas, Emmanuel. 2014. *Alteridad y trascendencia*. Madrid: Arena Libros.

Lotman, Yuri M. 1988. *Estructura del texto artístico*. Madrid: Ediciones Istmo.

McLuhan, Marshall. 1964. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York: Mentor.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1985. *Fenomenología de la percepción*. Madrid: Editora Nacional.

Pavlovsky, Eduardo. 1998. *Psicodrama y literatura*. Concepción del Uruguay, Entre Ríos: Ediciones Búsqueda de Ayllu.

Videos

Dubatti, Jorge. 2020g. « El acontecimiento teatral, cuerpo y convivio: representaciones de la peste en el teatro argentino ». Vidéoconférence présentée dans le cadre du Ciclo Clases con Grandes Maestros Argentinos, #SeriePANDEMIAyTEATRO, présentée par David Jacobs, Instituto Nacional del Teatro. YouTube.

Vargas, A. 2020. 1° Congreso Internacional Virtual de Teatro Morón 2020. Organisé par Municipio de Morón, Teatro Municipal Gregorio de Laferrère, Instituto de Artes del Espectáculo « Dr. Raúl H. Castagnino », Universidad de Buenos Aires et Asociación Argentina de Mimo, 19 septembre 2020. YouTube.

Published in : BRISTAULT CANOVA, Juliette ; CHANTRAINE BRAILLON, Cécile ; ŽUGIĆ BORIĆ, Anamarija (dir.), *Performing Arts in the Digital Age. Research, Archives, and Innovation*, Editions des archives contemporaines, ISBN : 9782813005588, doi : 10.17184/eac.9782813005588