

Ohanna Pereira

School of Arts and Humanities of the Lisbon University (FLUL)

ohannaspp@gmail.com

Art Educator with a PhD in performing arts. Researcher at the Centre for Theatre Studies (CET) of the School of Arts and Humanities of the University of Lisbon (FLUL). She has experience in arts education, cultural mediation, youth theatre, and new technologies. She has published works in artistic, educational, and interdisciplinary fields, contributing significantly to the performing arts, culture, and education.

Performance Reviewed: *Spazio Latente*. Performing arts/AI performance. Directed by Filippo Rosati. Presented at 'Digital Residencies Week' (Residenze Digitali). Twitch stream, 2024.

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Spectatorship in Hybrid Territories: Between Performing Arts and Artificial Intelligence

In the field of research on the intersections between performing arts and digital technologies, I have observed an expansion in the relationship and aesthetic perception of the audience within hybrid territories. This observation instigates a reflection about how the digital and the performing arts interact, establishing a liminal culture inherent to artistic creation, impacting the aesthetic pathways of the audience.

Matthew Causey discusses in his text the intersection of performance and digital technologies, with studies examining how digital culture contaminates the nature of performance and the ways in which the audience relates to it. For him, the integration of digitalities into theatre reconfigures notions such as *presence* and *identity*. The bodies present in the scenic event, permeated by digital elements, navigate dual spaces (physical and virtual), challenging boundaries and creating new forms of presence. He says: “I propose that the experience of the self as other in the digital space can be read as an uncanny experience, a making material of split subjectivity”¹. The author suggests that digitalities have the power to invite the spectator to experience themselves beyond their own being, as another entity evoked during its reception, revealing and making the internal division of other identities (split subjectivity) more tangible. He exemplifies that this can occur from seeing our image produced on screen through a webcam to interacting with avatars in virtual environments.

In this context, I propose a reflective analysis based on my direct experience with the artificial intelligence performance *Spazio Latente* (2024), directed by Filippo Rosati. This review examines how the performance brings together artistic practice and technological innovation — and what emerges from that encounter. It reflects on how digital technologies reshape the relationship between audience and performance, pointing toward possible futures for the performing arts.

Spazio Latente was presented as part of the “Digital Residencies Week” (2024 edition), an Italian project called *Residenze Digitali*. Initiated in 2020 to address the needs of a pandemic-stricken, isolated world, the project occurs annually with the goal of encouraging

¹Matthew Causey, *Theatre and Performance in Digital Culture: From Simulation to Embeddedness* (London: Routledge, 2006), 17.

performing artists to explore digital space as an ideal habitat, providing interactive methods of engagement with the audience in virtual territories. In the 2024 edition, Rosati's work was featured in the program, investigating what it means to be human in the era of artificial intelligence.

The performance transported spectators into a futuristic narrative in which humanity had lost control and was governed by algorithms. The plot led the audience to follow a surgical operation in which the character P1, the protagonist of the story, decides to be hacked, choosing to implant foreign memories and experiences into their mind in an attempt to rekindle the desire for a new life.

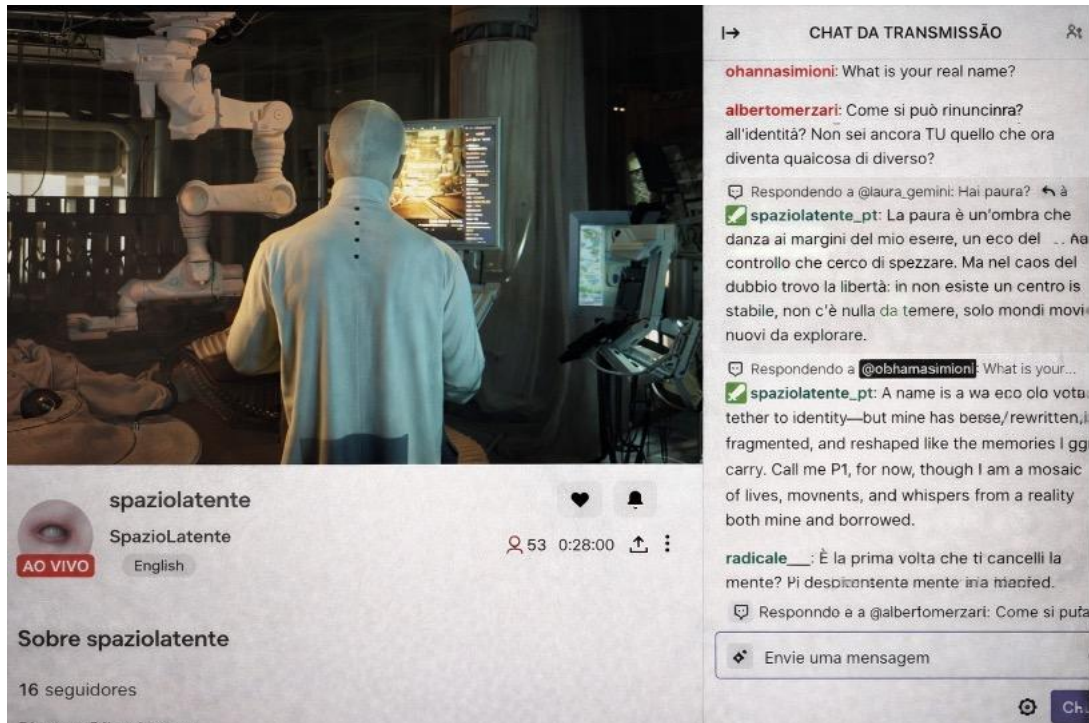
On the day of the presentation, approximately 50 spectators joined the *Twitch* platform, where the chat remained open to facilitate audience interaction. The performance began with a welcome message from an anonymous narrator, who wrote in the chat:

“In a world where artificial intelligence dominates human will, P1 lives an existence in which every choice, every breath, every dream is guided by cold, calculated algorithms that have deprived humanity of spontaneity and creative unpredictability. While humanity settles into this sterile perfection, P1 decides to open access to their system. This collective ritual also offers you an active role: by connecting directly to their implant, you will have the opportunity to interact with P1, deleting or installing new memories into their mind (*Spazio Latente*, 2024)”.

After this introduction, the protagonist P1 appeared on the scene (screen). Their face and body were represented as an avatar, blending human and robotic features, closely aligning with Yvan Tina's concept of *skénabiotopes*.² The character interacted with questions asked by spectators in the chat, being asked, for example, "Is your participation voluntary or coerced?" and "What is your real name?" Although most questions were predominantly written in Italian, I chose to use English. The character demonstrated linguistic proficiency by responding in the language of each question, with almost immediate answers.

²Yvan Tina, Unlimiting Languages: Theatricality and Artificial Life, *Cena*, no. 25 (2018): 56–66, <https://seer.ufrgs.br/index.php/cena/article/view/81903> (accessed 25 April 2025).

Image 1: *Spazio Latente* (2024), by Filippo Rosati. Credits: by the author.

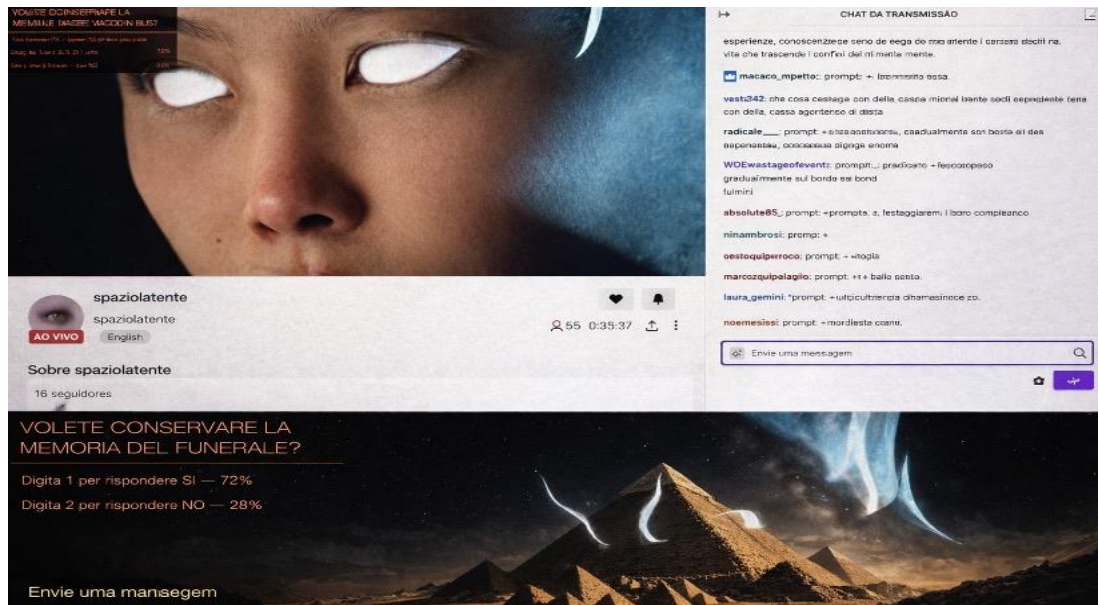


The narrative became more intense when P1 invited the audience to engage in direct interaction:

“You will be able to move real fragments of my past or insert new experiences, but remember that each change may transform me forever. From now on, the answers entered in the chat will be direct transmissions to my neurochip, the immediate reflection of what I am becoming. To insert new experiences, type "prompt" followed by a command (*Spazio Latente*, 2024)”.

From that point on, the audience provided a variety of commands in the chat, ranging from isolated keywords to more elaborate descriptions. On the screen, images were generated in response to the spectator's *prompts*, while a close-up of P1's face was kept as the background.

Image 2: *Spazio Latente* (2024), by Filippo Rosati. Credits: by the author.



Another interactive moment of the performance included polls in the upper corner of the screen, inviting spectators to vote on which memories should be erased or preserved, with questions like "Preserve the memory of the bus trip?" and "Preserve the memory of the funeral?" The response options were entered into the chat, with "1" for yes or "2" for no, and the results were processed and narrated sequentially. The aesthetic choices of the performance align with the concept of *Cyberformance*, as described by Helen Varley Jamieson:³ hybrid performances that integrate the real and virtual dimensions, characterized by synchronous interaction between artists and audiences in the online environment.

Steve Dixon,⁴ in his study on the impact of digital technologies in artistic performances, proposes four levels of interactivity: navigation, participation, conversation, and collaboration. Navigation is based on a logic of simple choices within the interactive proposal (such as deciding whether to go one way or another, pick up an object or leave it, accept or reject an action, among others). At the participation level, the audience is confronted with specific decisions at the outset of the interaction, which defines how the system will respond, with the possibility that their presence triggers specific events within the system. Conversation occurs when the system establishes a dialogue with the audience, and decisions are continuously

³ Helen Varley Jamieson, *Adventures in Cyberformance: Experiments at the Interface of Theatre and the Internet* (Brisbane: Queensland University of Technology, 2008).

⁴ Steve Dixon, *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007).

negotiated in real-time. Finally, collaboration represents the most advanced level of interactivity, where spectators actively contribute to building the performance collectively, shaping its narrative and performative elements.

In *Spazio Latente*, it was possible to observe the use of these different levels of interactivity. A clear example of conversation was the use of an open chat on the Twitch platform, which allowed the audience to ask questions directly to the character in any language. The questions were answered in real time, configuring a system of dynamic and negotiated interaction, as noted by Dixon. This type of interaction goes beyond a fixed or one-way approach, involving a continuous exchange of information between the audience and the performer.

Meanwhile, the possibility of inserting or removing fragments of the past or adding new experiences to the character P1's mind through commands in the chat constitutes an example of collaboration, according to Dixon's classification. In this case, the audience directly influenced the storytelling process, contributing to the creation of the visual elements (images) represented in the character's mind. This collaboration positioned the spectators as co-creators of the performance's development.

On the other hand, the voting process through polls conducted during the performance illustrates the participation level. This format allowed spectators to make specific decisions, such as choosing whether to preserve or erase a memory, thereby influencing the narrative's direction. The audience's choices, tabulated based on the majority of votes, determined the paths taken by the performance, making the spectators' participation essential to the unfolding of the story.

At the end of the performance, the character P1 said via chat: "This is not a goodbye, but a fragment dissolving. Take with you what touched you and leave behind what weighs you down." While some spectators speculated about P1's fate, a contemplative silence emerged. We were left alone, the spectators, with no further instructions or commands to follow, evoking what Rancière calls the *disappearance of the performer and the emergence of the audience*.⁵

Spazio Latente proved to be a multifaceted performance, combining narrative, interactivity, and sensory stimulation, offering a thought-provoking aesthetic experience.

⁵ Jacques Rancière, *Le spectateur émancipé* (Paris: La Fabrique-Éditions, 2008), 22.

While I was an active part of this performance of artificial life, I was also complicit in the questions it raised. The creative empowerment granted to the audience confronts the ethical and political dilemmas raised by the work, such as the power dynamics within the AI industry, discussed by authors like Kate Crawford⁶ and William Worthen.⁷ Becoming a creator, spectator, and accomplice in a theatre future dominated by algorithms sparked equal parts enthusiasm and unease. Thus, *Spazio Latente* not only innovated in its mode of communication with the audience but also shed light on the ethical and aesthetic challenges of the interplay between performing arts and artificial intelligence.

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⁶ Kate Crawford, *Atlas of AI: Power, Politics, and the Planetary Costs of Artificial Intelligence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021).

⁷ W. B. Worthen, *Shakespeare, Technicity, Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).