
Visual and Sound Analysis of Onírica Mecánica's *Alicia y las ciudades invisibles* Independent Theatre in Commercial Networks

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Abstract

This article reflects on the possibility of independent theatre finding an outlet in venues usually considered commercial by analysing the production *Alicia y las ciudades invisibles* by the company Onírica Mecánica based in the Region of Murcia. This will require a definition of independent theatre in a broad and contemporary sense, forming the basis of the 2nd Conference on Independent Theatre held in Barcelona at the Institut del Teatre. Thus, it argues in favour of conducting research into the company's work in object theatre and through the production analysed examines whether the characteristics of independence are found in Onírica Mecánica's poetics. Finally, it tackles the initial question bearing in mind all the preceding considerations. The methodology used is framed within the analysis of the productions, focused on the theatrical plasticity (set design, lighting, characterisation, costumes, graphic design and audiovisual design) and on sound design, formally describing each element and then finding its dramaturgical meaning. The aim is to identify the aesthetic-stylistic strategy of the show, its staging objective and core of dramatic conviction.

Keywords: independent theatre, analysis of productions, theatrical plasticity, dramaturgy, commercial theatre

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Introduction

In Spain the term “independent theatre” is traditionally associated with a popular politically committed movement and with avant-garde theatre initiatives, which developed in the Franco era, the Transition period and the first years of democracy (Fernández Torres, 2019). The historical definition of independent theatre in Spain in reference to a creation of this kind in a specific era and circumstances can be more extensively and less exclusively expanded today (Jornadas de Teatro Independiente, 2019: 2). This approach was discussed in the 2nd Conference on Independent Theatre held in Barcelona at the Institut del Teatre due to the definition of the historical independent theatre as previously set out. However, there is some consensus among researchers and creators in distinguishing a given theatre – whether it is called independent, alternative, off, underground or using a similar term – that is distinguished from regular productions, usually referred to as commercial, because it maintains a specific creative philosophy. Its essential characteristics would be its creative freedom, independence from marketing, incisive character and banner of artistic and ethical commitment. In this respect, I propose to maintain the name “historical independent theatre” for the kind of theatre with such relevance in our theatre history and to use that of “independent theatre” in general for the theatre that now has the characteristics described above.

The company Onírica Mecánica, based in Cartagena, works with visual and object theatre, usually outside the most significant production and performance networks in the Region of Murcia, but at the same time touring nationally and internationally in festivals of different sizes. For twelve years it has travelled little explored routes, staging small format intimate shows for small audiences and in alternative venues. Some of them related to working with puppets, including automata, others more similar to the installation, but always with the focus on exploring a particular language through objects. Since 2017 the company has been touring *Alicia y las ciudades invisibles*

(*Alice and the Invisible Cities*), a production conceived for theatres with proscenium stages that, despite being the first time a show by the company has had this arrangement, maintains both its creative independence and artistic commitment to object theatre and its peculiar organisation and creation system, which I will explore later in more depth. Therefore, it now requires premises that had been beyond its reach and avoids the alternative distribution networks it has normally frequented, although the show is also fully adaptable to a venue of this kind.

The aim of this article is, first, to explain the framework of Onírica Mecánica as an independent theatre company according to the broad and contemporary definition set out at the start. Secondly, to argue for the interest in studying this company's work, based on the type of artistic creation it develops and its creative process. And, finally, to question whether the creative independence and artistic commitment of independent theatre are at odds with its performance in venues that are considered "commercial", understanding them as those that have diverse programming aimed at a majority audience for profit, and where the aesthetic commitment and the vision of the creators are usually limited by marketing and audience attendance (Tirao, 2008: 12). Therefore, I propose a distinction between independent venues and independent companies, and even, independent projects, as such independence does not have to be total or maintained over time throughout the production, performance and distribution phases.

To achieve these objectives, I start from the general and later move to the particular. I first reflect on the company's type of work and poetics, as well as how it tackles the creative processes, and then analyse its latest production: *Alicia y las ciudades invisibles*. In this way I hope to establish the characteristics that justify including the company in independent theatre while determining whether a show like this, intended for large venues and commercial networks, can still be a champion of the company's independence.

Onírica Mecánica's Poetics and Creative Process

Onírica Mecánica

The company was created in 2008 by the Melilla-born Jesús Nieto after his training and career in Madrid, where he studied film directing and spent several years working in television. He also studied dramaturgy with Mauricio Kartun and Gabriel García Márquez, in addition to attending the Royal School of Dramatic Arts (RESAD) as an external student. He himself says that "he gets bored quickly" so that after a few years doing a job he always looks for a way to leave his comfort zone with a new one (J. Nieto, personal communication, 14 August 2018). This is reflected in his shows, where there is a continuous search for new paths of expression and communication with the audience, taking the risk of the unknown and not settling for the use of a given resource. His professional objective changed when he joined Enrique Vargas' company Teatro de los Sentidos, which also led him to be one of the founders in Madrid of La nave de los locos, a venue that in turn gave rise

to the company Teatro en el aire. These companies, which are still active, develop ideas for so-called sensory theatre, a discipline that transcends the exclusively visual- and sound-based theatre to involve the perception of the audience through the other senses, stimulating their emotionality through theatrical play (Fernández, 2013: 18; Teatro de los Sentidos, 2017). So this theatre requires the border between audience and show to be diluted in order to foster their creative participation. For example, *El laberinto de Ariadna* by Teatro de los Sentidos blindly led the audience through the labyrinth so they would experience different sensations; for its part, in Teatro en el aire's *La cama*, the audience were lying down to experience the situation from this perspective.

Later, Jesús Nieto started to develop his own line of research focused on memory and the relationship between people and objects in what he called Onírica Mecánica. The company, which moved to Cartagena in 2010, has created shows such as *El rumor del ruido* (2016), *Frágil* (2014), *Morfología de la ceguera* (2013), *Circo interior humano* (2011) and *El extraño viaje de un hombre y un pez* (2009), among others, pursuing its own creative system and outside the usual circles of performance, which paradoxically has included several puppet festivals and international tours in countries like South Korea, Poland and Russia. The common points of these shows are an enormous involvement of plasticity, the pre-eminence of corporality over orality, and the also the regular presence of Nieto himself as a manipulator of objects whose action is the protagonist of the theatrical event. But, above all, its main characteristic could be its way of approaching the creative processes.



Figure 1. Jesús Nieto working in *El rumor del ruido*, a multi-award winning show that proposes a journey through the different real and imaginary sounds created live. Source: Onírica Mecánica.

The company is Jesús Nieto and Jesús Nieto is the company. Everything starts and ends in his mind, from a foundation in which he shares an idea with some collaborators, who, initially, do not specify whether they will participate as actors or designers. Thus, his way of working is born out of adapting the structure of each project to the people available to him rather than the reverse. For him, the traditional structure of a theatre production, where the responsibility of each craft is specified in a person separately, is obsolete (J. Nieto, personal communication, 14 August 2018). Instead, he conceives creation as a total work of art that takes place simultaneously, so that the aesthetic and stylistic decisions for each stage element are progressively revealed as does the meaning in relation to the other elements. Thus, the company's creations involve in-depth research processes, which require a time of not less than one year and normally continue after the pieces are premiered, and may undergo extensive changes as they are performed. Moreover, each show explores the identity of the company; it is not subject to an *a priori* aesthetics or a work method but rather explores its own poetics without preconceived limits.

The interest of Onírica Mecánica as an object of academic research is two-fold. The first is its exceptionality in the company's environment, outside professional organisations in the Region of Murcia, and unique in both the thematic and work style. In addition to this, it should be said that the theatre of the peripheral regions of Spain, in general, has not been widely studied, and therefore to look at shows developed outside major creative centres such as Madrid or Barcelona becomes especially attractive. The second aspect is its search for new theatre perspectives based on exploring the sensorial through the object. It is notable that its shows, sometimes not (or not extensively) put on in the region in which they were created, have had more than one hundred performances, most of them outside Spain, which, therefore, confirms the audience's interest in the project, as well as its profitability. But, in any case, it maintains its own way of conceiving productions outside the typical structures, its own creative processes and the usual absence of external factors that limit the conditions of creation.

Object theatre

Object theatre's predominant dramaturgical focus is on objects, which are more significant than the actors, based on the premise that Jesús Nieto aptly puts into words: "the vehicle of emotion does not have to be an actor" ((J. Nieto, personal communication, 14 August 2018). They work with inert elements from which they can extract their poetic power by reinventing their everyday use and endowing them with a dramaturgical meaning (*World Encyclopedia of Puppetry Arts*, 2019). This usually implies a limitation of the text in favour of visuality as the first way to have an impact on the audience's sensoriality. Actors thus become "manipulators" of these objects, bringing this discipline closer to that of puppet theatre, whose boundaries often intersect. In fact, Onírica Mecánica has often performed its shows in puppet fairs and festivals, such as the Fira de Titelles de Lleida, where several have received awards.



Figure 2. One of several automata in *Frágil* (2004), with Jesús Nieto on stage. This show, a co-production with the Red de Teatros Alternativos, was awarded at the Fira de Títelles de Lleida. Source: Onírica Mecánica.

Given that the work with objects in each theatre show will depend on the meaning that the objects acquire in the *mise-en-scène*, the research by the actors and/or manipulators based on improvisations and experimentation with the stage elements becomes essential, from a more gestural than textual perspective, in search of the dramaturgy of the production, which usually arises from the theatrical play with objects. Therefore, the conflict does not lie in the relationships between characters but in the relationships between characters and objects, and even between the objects themselves.

In Onírica Mecánica, Jesús Nieto is interested in exploring what he calls “objects without memory”; that is, everyday objects made of contemporary materials, such as glass, plastic or metal: a folding chair or a glass of water. For him, these elements cannot be considered “loaded” objects in the sense that a rocking chair or a trunk could be as bearers of a certain antiquity in their use or materials, and therefore potential evokers of sensations more related to emotional memory (J. Nieto, personal communication, 14 August 2018). Rather these are materials that reflect the immediacy of the everyday, in an effort to connect with the audience.

Analysis of the *Mise-en-Scène* of *Alicia y las ciudades invisibles*

Dramaturgy and antecedents

The creator of *Alicia y las ciudades invisibles* calls it a “free version” of *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll. Although it reduces the spoken word to its minimum expression, the show’s structure essentially coincides with that of the original, since most of the scenes are a reflection of those described in the story. The show tells the story of the young Alice, the only human in a world in which the actor-manipulators bring the characters of the Cat, the Hare,

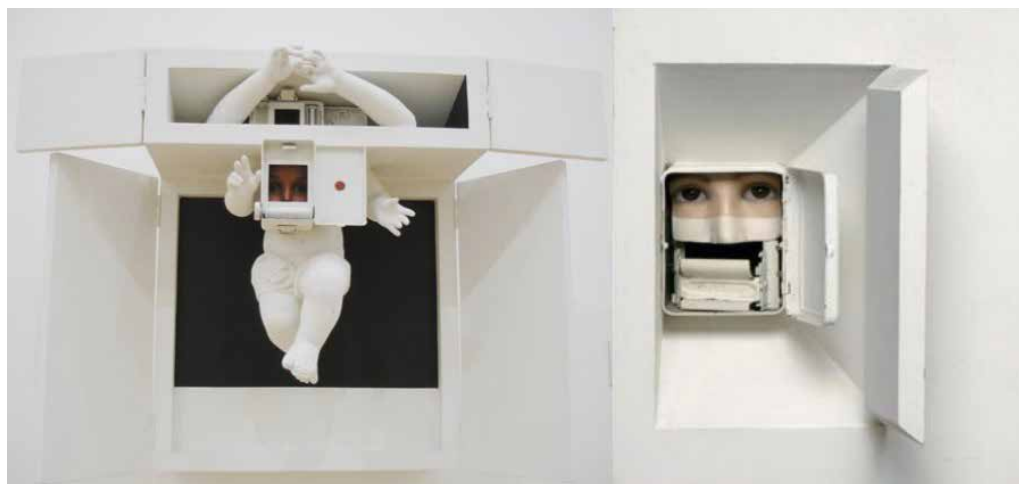


Figure 3. Some of the references from the work of the artist Bernardo Salcedo, where the artificial is confronted with the human. Source: Onírica Mecánica.

the Mad Hatter, the Caterpillar or the Queen of Hearts to life through the use of objects. It even features Alice's characteristic change in size, skilfully resolved as we will see later. In this respect, *a priori* we could talk of adaptation in the sense described by Pavis (1998: 35) of "transposition or transformation of a text or genre into something else." However, M. Lax (2014: 155) distinguishes this term from "version" as in this case reality and its peculiarities are reinterpreted with an active presence of the author, while adaptation seeks to communicate a specific universe adjusting as much as possible to its original characteristics. In the case of *Alicia y las ciudades invisibles* the construction of the universe has changed from the original, some scenes have varied or disappeared, and layers of meaning have been added to most of them; so from a theatrical perspective we must indeed speak of "version".

The story is passed through the prism of the impossible urbanism of Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, which further distorts the meaninglessness of Carroll's work, increasing the abstraction to encourage the audience to reflect on the reality they inhabit. Like Calvino's work, the cities presented are places through which to question why their society inhabits them (Calvino, 2017: 7) and also imaginary places that are in the hidden details of reality but invisible to our eyes (Onírica Mecánica, n.d.).

The show has an artistic antecedent as a result of its research process, consisting of the installation *La ciudad invisible*, presented in Cartagena during the art festival Mucho Más Mayo in 2017, in which the viewer-visitor explored the labyrinth alone, meeting different characters inspired by the universe of *Alice in Wonderland* for various sensorial experiences. They also encountered inert elements and had to decide what to do about them, such as bottles full of water and glasses with several voices saying "drink me" or refrigerators full of mountains of different salts. This particular space was staged as part of the creation of imaginaries for *Alicia y las ciudades invisibles* and allowed some of the ideas and concepts that would later form this show to be shared with the audience, where the protagonist is now Alice, embodied by an actress but at the same time seeking the involvement of the audience on her journey.

The visual references used by Jesús Nieto to define the plasticity of the show have to do with the use of audiovisuals on the stage, unrealistic sets, puppets and the confrontation between the human and the artificial. The search for a reflection on contemporary materials and the use of technology would be based on these references.

Metodología

I have already said that the common thread of the *mise-en-scène* rests on the elements of theatrical plasticity and sound design. It is particularly appropriate to use a specific system of analysis that, following an adaptation of Jara Martínez's system of analysis for the performing space (Martínez Valderas, 2017: 112-113), expands the study to the other visual and sound elements. This analysis formally studies each of the elements of the theatrical plasticity and sound space to reveal its dramaturgical meaning in the whole of the *mise-en-scène*, manifested through its aesthetic-stylistic strategy. The relationship between the aesthetic-stylistic nature of each significant element can be one of harmony when they all coincide, or of coherent contradiction when they are different in a dramaturgically justified way (Hormigón, 2002: 166) – for example, if a realistic interpretive code coexisted with expressionist lighting and an abstract set. The aesthetic-stylistic strategy allows us to discern the objective of the *mise-en-scène* and, with it, the core of dramatic conviction or proposal for the global meaning of the show.

With the aesthetic-stylistic strategy concept, I follow Martínez Valderas (2017: 58-59) to refer to the communicative intention of a creator towards the audience; his/her way of developing the aesthetics, or the objective of the *mise-en-scène*, by means of a specific style in a specific sign group or the overall performance of the show. The objective of the *mise-en-scène* refers to what the creator seeks to get from the audience, materialising the core of dramatic conviction, which is that deep meaning that the creator wishes to bring to the stage with the show, which can be summarised in one sentence (Hormigón, 2002: 158).

The analysis is based on those elements that make up the theatrical plasticity and sound space: graphic design, set design (where I cover all the objects on stage, including the ones that can be manipulated, because of their contribution to the visibility of the *mise-en-scène*), lighting, costumes and characterisation (these last two linked because they refer to the cast), audiovisual design (inclusion of audiovisuals in the theatrical plasticity) and sound design. In each section, I will relate the conclusions to the company's place within independent theatre.

Graphic design

Through the poster, the graphic design involves the start of the audience's relationship with the show (Ruesga, 2011: 88), as well as being present in the dossier and other promotional materials. Moreover, while the lighting when turned off and the set when put away cease to have meaning, the graphic design can never lose its meaning, preceding the show and lasting beyond it. It becomes, therefore, another element of the theatrical plasticity that must

Therefore, the poster is a “call to action” for the character, who needs to break the conventional and make decisions throughout her journey, and for the audience, who must also participate in them and even transfer them to their own lives. Its message is coherent with the one that at the beginning I identified as typical of independent theatre: it calls for reflection and a break with what is established, seeking to mobilise the audience.

Set design and objects

There is a scenographic abstraction through contemporary materials such as glass, plastic and metal, with predominantly white or transparent colours. This consciously evokes an aseptic environment in such a way that the place or time in which we could locate this *Alice* is the here and now of the show, although we cannot go back to any known space for lack of references. Similarly, the lines used in the elements and compositions are mostly straight, leaving their definition supported by lighting. This conveys a general feeling of forced regularity, of calm about to break, something that happens just at the end, where the direction of the lines is fundamentally diagonal, while the predominant colour becomes red.

The set is semi-fixed, formed by three panels of translucent methacrylate that make up the different spaces plus some elements of furniture that enter and leave the stage. This is central to confining Alice to the different places created, and the audience with her. From the beginning, Alice must find the key to the place where she is enclosed, and during the show she will continue to look for the way out. The search to break the physical encirclement imposed on the character, through the composition, the material and the manipulation of the objects, seems to reflect a questioning of the social conventions and habits that has a certain parallelism with what is latent in Carroll's work, although in this case the objectuality of the creation brings it thematically to the fore.



Figure 5. Alice is enclosed in a cube as she slowly increases in size. Source: Onírica Mecánica.



Figure 6. The Hare and the Mad Hatter having tea with Alice. Source: Onírca Mecánica.

Indeed, these considerations can be extrapolated to the rest of Onírca Mecánica's theatre just as to any independent theatre, oblivious to following a certain convention in how it does things, and, also, asserting a break with what is established, a nonconformity, a risk, a decision-making.

In addition, the avatar of Alice when she is tiny (two hands and a skirt placed on the manipulator's hand), whose head is a Smartphone, in an ingenious construction, forms part of the definition of the characters as do the tablet that acts as a mask for Alice when she is in water, the drums that act as the head of the Mad Hatter and the Hare, the bellows-bottles that represent the Caterpillar, and the six tablet-masks that give a face to the character of the Queen of Hearts.

A Hare and Mad Hatter whose heads are plastic drums, into which they mechanically and unquestioningly put more and more content, provides a social critique on the consumer society. These images reflect the incisive nature characteristic of independent theatre: a society subjected to images of all kinds, which consumes content indiscriminately and whose opinion and critical capacity are dependent on the environment of its favourite social network.

Lighting

One of the main functions of lighting is selective visibility, by delimiting the space of the theatrical play in each scene within the black box that the performing area is. This constrains the place already delimited by the three scenographic panels, working like them to enclose Alice in each scene. Of all the properties of light, the most used in this staging are colour and intensity.

Through cold and slightly saturated tones, the colour highlights the bareness of the materials, contributing to the aseptic nature of the scenery. There are some notable exceptions, such as the dark blue conventionally used to indicate night when Alice is in the meadow; the orange tone given off by the svoboda lamps for the descent into the rabbit-hole; and the red

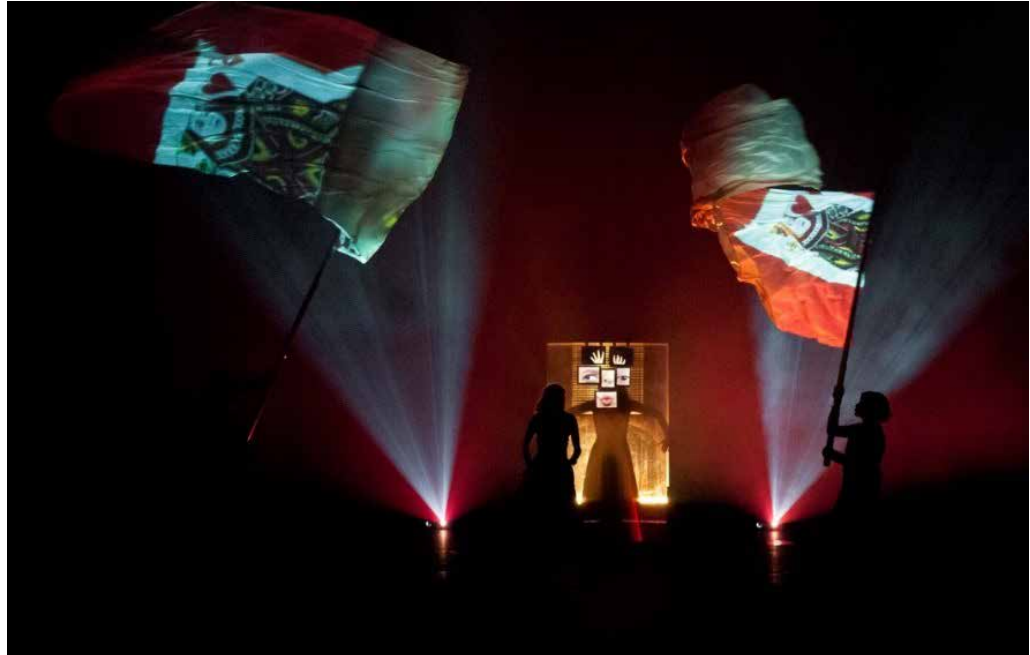


Figure 7. Red background colour, creating silhouettes of the characters and use of audiovisuals to form the Queen of Hearts and flag bearers.

that represents the conflict with the Queen of Hearts and her flag bearers. In these cases, the palette is much more expressive, with greater saturation and intensity, used at times when there is a rush to make decisions, or when changes occur as a consequence of these.

The intensity is combined with colour: there is a frequent use of back-lighting to render the silhouettes of the characters on a coloured background, low intensity lights when what is on the stage is barely guessed at, street lighting to give depth, and overhead lighting to describe the selective visibility of the spaces, as well as a dazzling effect on the audience in the descent into the rabbit-hole to increase the feeling of bewilderment.

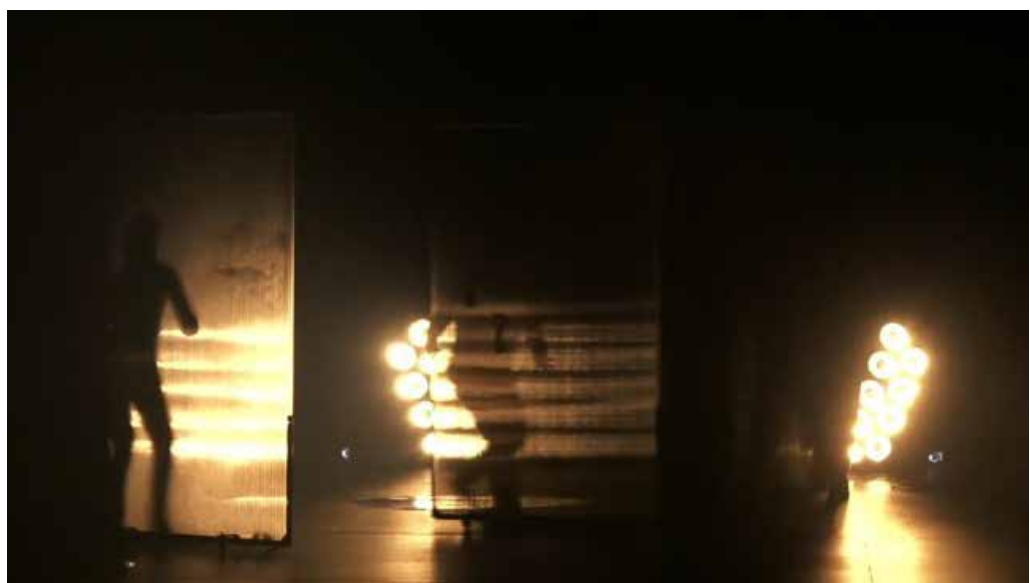


Figure 8. The descent into the rabbit-hole with the panels revolving around Alice and the svoboda lamps alternately turning on and off to create bewilderment and bedazzlement. Source: Onírica Mecánica.

Since the audience cannot tactually perceive the textures or physically feel the oppression of the spaces in which Alice is located, the lighting works continuously, through the atmosphere, to take them into the space and get them to participate in the main character's journey. The aesthetic and artistic commitment of being independent is evident within the framework of sensory and object theatre since it is not limited to showing but rather seeks the involvement of the audience in what they perceive: a sensory impact.

Audiovisual design

The audiovisual medium is present on stage in most of the show, under the premise of synthetic intermediality as described by Abuín (2008: 34): "fusion of languages from different media." According to Bell (2000: 44) we can speak of intermediality to refer to those manifestations of the audiovisual in theatre in which it has a dramaturgical sense according to which its hypothetical suppression would condition the meaning of the show. And so it is in this case, the audiovisual design, or scenic inclusion of audiovisuals, sustains the core of dramatic conviction. The video appears in *Alicia y las ciudades invisibles* in three ways:

- Tablets and Smartphones that emit the face of Alice-puppet, the mask of Alice-actress and the distorted features of the Queen of Hearts.
- The Cat's smile is projected onto the abdomen of the actor-manipulator who performs it, generating a distorted subjective double effect, similar to ideas such as Mihaela Kavdanska's *4th skin*, where the body of the performer is observed under the projection of his or her own face, instantly captured by a camera.



Figure 9. Small Alice on another scale becomes a puppet. Source: Oníríca Mecánica.



Figure 10. Double distortion effect in *4th skin* (left) and in *Alicia y las ciudades invisibles* (right).
Source: YouTube and Onírica Mecánica.

- The images of the heart cards are projected from the back of the stage at a low angle. This allows them to only be seen on the flags when they interpose in the light beam, while this is dispersed all over the stage, contributing to its lighting.

These elements provide examples of both the incisive and social nature, which encourages reflection on technology from different perspectives, and the aesthetic commitment that, in this case, brings the audiovisual medium into the overall aesthetics of the show, always with a dramaturgical purpose. Distortion of the double with the cat or the projection of the flags can also have a visual impact objective, but the composition with tablets and Smartphones of the small Alice and the various Alices, as well as the Queen of Hearts, are clearly questioning the role of technology in our lives, to the extent that what we show to the world is limited by what we experience through the screen, a sense that without the video would not be plausible.

Characterisation and costumes

The characterisation of Alice is simple, with a half-length hairstyle and fringe, perhaps alluding to her adolescence, and some shiny stones on her left cheek, around her eye, that can refer to that special and incisive gaze on the world. Alice's costume is a dress that was white at the premiere, but later consisted of two overlapping pieces: the lower part silver and the upper transparent plastic. Having two costume levels consistent with the rest of the stage elements is somewhat appropriate and representative of the character and also of the core of dramatic conviction that all the elements seem to suggest. The dress is complemented by a pair of red patent leather shoes that look like a clear reference to the film *The Wizard of Oz*, another trip to a fantastic world where only the protagonist returns to the real world. In this case, like Dorothy, the only one who can take the path back is Alice



Figure 11. Alice's costume comprises a dress of two pieces, one in bright silver and the other transparent plastic, and red shoes.

herself, which recreates the myth of the hero's journey, highlighting the lesson learnt. The impact of this is even greater in Nieto's vision of the character, because when Alice returns home she is a much older woman, who in some way has let too much time go by without acting and whose life has ended up passing her by. Once again criticism and reflection in relation to the passage of time, inaction and decision-making.

Sound space

Sound is almost another character in the show. Fully present from the first scene, it contributes the sound of

birds to the country setting and introduces the footsteps of the white rabbit to begin creating tension through Alice's curiosity. From now on, the sound effects accurately accompany Alice on her journey, with especially relevant exponents when entering the rabbit-hole, meeting the Caterpillar or in the final confrontation with the Queen of Hearts. Along with lighting, sound is the main contributor to creating atmosphere, which is designed with great overall cohesion. The music is original, eclectic and percussive, featuring many ambient sounds. The aesthetic consistency of the sound with the rest of the elements is total.

Conclusions of the analysis. Aesthetic-stylistic strategy and core of dramatic conviction a

Let's consider as a reference Breyer's systematisation (2005: 75-88) for the distance of the *mise-en-scène* from reality, on an axis limited on the left by minimum autonomy and maximum fidelity, or representation; and on the right by maximum autonomy and minimum fidelity, that is, presentation. Onírca Mecánica's approach moves away from mimesis due to the rupture of the illusion by showing the resources and theatre technology elements, along with the non-realistic visual expressiveness and performative style. As described by López Antuñano (2012: 174), in the theatre of presentation

the “emotional, social, participative and ostensive of situations and experiences” predominate, characteristics shared by this creation. However, *Alicia y las ciudades invisibles* is not at the extreme of the presentational, where the here and now of the scenic event would prevail, since a story is told and the plasticity has a certain narrative function, albeit in a vague way: a fish tank, a coffee table or a meadow. We would therefore speak of creative autonomy with respect to reality; that is to say: abstraction. We are in a represented universe but under its own rules, which also show the mesh of stage creation.

Zero reality (illusory copy, fidelity)	Creative autonomy of reality	Scenic reality (99% fidelity but not illusory)
REALISTIC	ABSTRACT	SCENIC REALISTIC
REPRESENTATION	REPRESENTATION	PRESENTATION
Mimesis of a known reality	Not referring to a known reality	Performative scenic realisation

Fig. 1. Table compiled in this research on realistic, abstract and performative scenic realisation set design.

Figure 12. Breyer's systematisation of mimesis with reality (2005) as it appears in Martínez Valderas (2017: 65).

The interaction of the signs occurs in *Alicia y las ciudades invisibles* from harmony, through the use of an aesthetic-stylistic strategy that conforms to the description that Martínez Valderas (2017: 79-80) gives of “fantastic”. It is theatrical because it reveals the stage as a playful space where artifice and artistic process are evident – for example, you see the theatre technology elements and manipulators working with the objects. By generating a coherent reality in itself but not linked to any culturally recognised place, it shapes a new and plausible world, which fosters the imagination and diversion of the audience. We can also speak of postdramatic theatre to refer to this show according to Lehmann's description of it (2013: 44) due to this conjunction of prioritising presentation over representation, the importance of visuality, musicality, the use of new technologies and the presence of multiple sign layers.

The aesthetics, or objective of the *mise-en-scène*, that emerges from this aesthetic-stylistic strategy is to make the audience reflect on Alice's journey by arousing their curiosity and attracting their attention through powerful images that often imply social criticism by means of reflecting on technology. For this reason, the narrative seeks to be clear despite the abstraction of the images, so that even a child audience can participate. Therefore, the dramaturgical idea is based on a coherent global meaning through all the elements staged. The core of the show's dramatic conviction is to present, through Alice's journey, the invisible cities that seek to reflect our society. A parallel reality, invisible to the naked eye, but underlying and highly influential, present in the media and social networks, where opinions and visions about reality are created, where no one questions the place they want to have, and where dreams and aspirations are ignored.

Independent Versus Commercial

Jesús Nieto could well have put on a show like others of the company, in an intimate format, with a few dozen spectators on two or three sides, and it could have been equally theatrically interesting and functional. However, his objective was to transfer to a theatre with proscenium stage the research that had already been carried out with these emitter-receiver arrangements in order to investigate the representation of sensorial and objectual work from the distance of the stalls that, on the other hand, would bring the experience to a wider audience. As this is the sole intention of conceiving the show for “large spaces”, there is no evidence that the company’s creative independence was compromised, as we have been able to see throughout the analysis.

There are other artistic disciplines in which the border between independent and commercial is not absolute: music and cinema. In the first case we have a large number of pop or indie rock bands, whose origin is found in self-production, from which in certain cases they become distributed by international record labels and top of the bill in major festivals. In cinema, renowned directors synonymous with commercial success took their first steps with independent feature films before finding themselves on the front line of Hollywood.

So, does the fact of looking for distribution in commercial networks mean theatre is no longer independent? In view of the analysis carried out, I consider that they are not correlated, so there should be no confrontation between companies, venues and shows. No, as long as the characteristics of independence are not compromised when it comes to performing such a show in a theatre, hall or circuit of those considered commercial. On the other hand, the definition should not be absolute, since artistic independence is relative to creators and spaces, especially influencing creation compared to other laws of production. And if it is true that, in this case, part of Onírica Mecánica’s habitual independence may have been subject to the rules of co-production with the Teatro Circo Murcia — whose restrictions have been, above all, temporal —, in other works of the company its independence has been practically complete.

Conclusions. Onírica Mecánica as an Independent Theatre Company

Having presented Onírica Mecánica as an object theatre company and studied one of its shows, we can summarise what characterises its work as independent theatre.

- Creative freedom. Even despite the co-production of *Alicia y las ciudades invisibles* with the Teatro Circo Murcia, Onírica Mecánica’s creative control over its productions has not been compromised. Its motivations to create and how it goes about it are absolutely its own, following a system outside any pre-established production scheme and different from the one usually found in commercial theatre.

- Independence from marketing. Since it is necessary to distribute every show within market laws, in no case do they condition the meaning of the show, either dramaturgically or aesthetically. It is a factor that, in any case, appears *a posteriori*, in the distribution of shows.
- Incisive character. In Spanish, incisive refers to something “that gets to the bottom of things, or beyond what is considered normal.” We have seen how practically every scene contains several layers of meaning that evoke reflection by the audience. And this is one of the essential characteristics of sensory theatre.
- Ethical and artistic commitment. In this case, as we have seen, the artistic commitment is manifest in all aspects of the show, as well as the ethical and critical commitment to society, which also demands an involvement from the audience. They are expected to experience the journey but also to question the experience.

Based on the study of *Alicia y las ciudades invisibles*, we see that Onírica Mecánica can be fully framed within the characteristics of independent theatre, understood in a wide contemporary sense. Moreover, due to the particular characteristics of its system of work and creation, as well as the theatrical results it obtains, I consider its research interest validated, as a case study within the Region of Murcia, very reach in terms of theatre initiatives and companies.

In addition, the company achieves its objective of putting on an independent theatre show in venues that usually programme works of a more commercial nature. Therefore, to finally answer the original question, “yes”, independent theatre can find space in commercial exhibition networks, as long as it does not lose the essence of what independent theatre does, because only then can it share those values undistorted in a space that allows for a larger audience, an objective that is ultimately desirable for most theatre.



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