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Reconstructing Presence: AI Animation, Interactive Mapping, and Post-Traumatic Testimony in Alaska *and* My Country – My DreamLand

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Abstract: This paper examines how live performance, AI-generated imagery, and audience interactivity co-produce theatrical meaning in *Alaska* and *H.E.R.O.E.S.: My Country – My DreamLand*, two hybrid projects by the Mariupol Theatre in exile after the 2022 siege. In *Alaska*, AI animations—viral organisms, shifting European borders, authoritarian broadcasts—interact in real time with live testimonies, folk-based lamentations rooted in tradition, and recorded war sounds. In *My Country – My DreamLand*, spectators co-create AI maps of utopian countries via custom software; their designs and video presentations form a living digital archive displayed in real time. The paper outlines the process (prompt design, projection integration, AI-assisted subtitles), discusses audience reception and trauma-aware facilitation, and proposes a practice-based framework for AI in documentary theatre addressing presence, authorship, and ethics under extreme political and emotional conditions.

Keywords: AI dramaturgy, trauma and theatre, devised performance, participatory art, documentary theatre, digital mapping, exile.

In recent years, the accelerating presence of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital systems in performance[2] has challenged conventional notions of

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[2] Steve Dixon, Digital Performance: *A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 3–5.

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authorship, embodiment, and presence. While theatre has long absorbed technological innovations—from mechanical stagecraft to cinematographic and virtual media—the arrival of AI introduces a new ontological and ethical tension[3]: how can theatre remain human when its visual, textual, or acoustic components are generated by non-human agents?

This question becomes especially urgent in contexts of trauma and exile, where artistic creation functions as both a survival strategy and a form of collective testimony. The Mariupol Theatre—destroyed during the 2022 siege of its city and now dispersed across Europe—has developed two performance-based projects that explore this frontier: *Alaska* (2021–2025), a devised documentary work on youth, war, and identity; and *H.E.R.O.E.S.: My Country – My DreamLand* (2024–), a participatory performance and digital installation in which audiences co-create AI-generated maps of imagined nations.

Both projects act as laboratories for AI dramaturgy, a term describing the collaborative interaction between algorithmic systems and live human presence in creating theatrical meaning. Drawing on trauma-informed theatre, practice-as-research[2], and digital performance studies,[4] this paper argues that technology can serve as a prosthesis of memory and empathy rather than as a tool of automation. It suggests that, under conditions of displacement and crisis, AI can amplify rather than diminish theatre's human and ethical dimensions.

Research Questions

This study addresses four interrelated questions:

1. AI and Dramaturgy: How can AI function as a dramaturgical partner within devised, post-traumatic theatre practices without replacing human creativity or emotional intelligence?

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[3] Sarah Bay-Cheng, Performance and Media: *Taxonomies for a Changing Field* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 22–24.

[4] Nisha Sajnani and David R. Johnson (eds.), *Trauma-Informed Drama Therapy* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 2022).

2. Audience and Participation: In what ways can participatory AI systems—such as the digital mapping in My Country – My *DreamLand*—transform spectators into co-authors of civic and emotional narratives?

3. Ethics and Trauma: How can digital technologies be integrated into trauma-informed creative processes without aestheticizing suffering or violating participant safety?

4. Longitudinal Transformation: What qualitative changes in narrative, embodiment, and collective identity emerge through repeated cycles of creation and performance in exile?

Who We Are

We are the Mariupol Theatre working in exile across Europe after the destruction of our institution during the 2022 siege. Our ensemble carries the loss of a city, a stage, and colleagues, while sustaining a living practice that continues to gather people, tell stories, and build new forms of presence under displacement. The company's current artistic director, Evangelos Kosmidis, has led a body of devised and documentary work that engages youth, mixed-ability groups, and multilingual communities[5]. Our projects are built from interviews, story circles, and workshop labs where participants articulate their concerns[6] friendship, family, identity, war, and the pursuit of safety—in their own languages.

Since 2021, *Alaska* has served as a core case of this practice. Developed first with teenagers in Mariupol and later with collaborators across Europe, *Alaska* accumulates fragments of everyday testimony, folk-based mourning gestures, and a polyglot textual fabric. In parallel, *H.E.R.O.E.S.: My Country – My DreamLand* extends the stage outward into an interactive civic exhibition: audiences co-create AI-generated maps of imagined countries and optionally record short video presentations of their "dreamlands," which are assembled into a growing digital archive. Across both works, we use digital and AI tools to amplify embodied presence rather than replace it.[7]

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[5] Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 33-36

[6] Jonathan Fox and Jo Salas, *Personal Stories in Public Spaces: Playback Theatre* (New Paltz NY: Tusitala, 2021).

[7] Susan Broadhurst and Josephine Machon (eds.), *Performance and Technology: Practices of Virtual Embodiment and Interactivity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 14–18.

Trauma, Exile, and Collective Practice

The ensemble's mobility has become both a challenge and a methodology. Working in exile, across shifting cultural and linguistic landscapes, requires constant adaptation and redefinition of belonging. Each rehearsal and workshop turns into a moment of translation between languages, memories, and the lived experience of loss.

Trauma reshapes perception, language, and the sense of safety.[8] It alters both how stories are told and how bodies occupy space. Within this process, theatre becomes not only an artistic form but also a collective framework of recovery — a rehearsal for reclaiming agency. The stage becomes a framework for co-witnessing.[9]

Our performances avoid direct representation of violence. Instead, we use physical and sonic metaphors — movement scores derived from breathing patterns, heartbeats, or repetitive gestures of care. In Alaska, war sounds are deployed carefully to acknowledge acoustic memory[10] rather than to reproduce terror. This attention to sound, rhythm, and silence allows us to speak of destruction without aestheticizing pain.

Methodology and Ethics

This research employs a practice-as-research (PaR) methodology, in which artistic creation serves both as method and outcome of inquiry. Rehearsal and performance become laboratories of embodied knowledge, where theory and practice converge through experimentation, documentation, and reflection.[11] The study combines qualitative observation with devised and participatory performance. Each stage—rehearsal, audience interaction, and post-performance dialogue—produces material such as testimonies, reflections,

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[8] Sue Jennings, *The Handbook of Dramatherapy* (London: Routledge, 1994), 12–15.

[9] Renée Emunah, *Acting for Real: Drama Therapy Process, Technique, and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 52.

[10] Carolyn Birdsall, *Nazi Soundscapes: Sound, Technology and Urban Space in Germany, 1933–1945* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 89–90.

[11] Robin Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

and audience responses, analyzed inductively for recurring themes of trauma, resilience, and collective authorship. The process follows trauma-informed creative principles that ensure safety, clear participation boundaries, and voluntary disclosure. Rituals of arrival and closure help participants leave intense creative states in a grounded way, supported by debriefing circles and quiet spaces.

Given the Mariupol Theatre's dispersed, transnational structure, a hybrid methodology is applied, combining live collaboration with digital tools—translation systems, cloud-based archives, and AI-assisted visual generation. These technologies extend, rather than replace, the ensemble's communicative capacity, reflecting the postdigital condition of contemporary performance.[12] Ethically, the work follows the trauma-informed model prioritising safety, trust, collaboration, empowerment, and cultural sensitivity. Sensitive material is preceded by clear advisories, and all recordings are stored securely on EU-based servers. In this framework, ethics and aesthetics are inseparable. Artistic practice becomes, in Boal's words, a "rehearsal for reality," where performers and audiences collectively imagine ways of rebuilding together after rupture.[13]

Case I - Alaska

1. Context and Stage Language

Alaska emerged from a devised and documentary process initiated with teenagers in Mariupol in 2021 and later continued in exile. The performance is multilingual and multi-modal: live testimonies delivered by actors intersect with folk-based mourning choreographies and a sound environment including recorded bomb and rocket strikes. These embodied layers intertwine with AI-driven visual projections, forming three main image regimes: animated depictions of viruses and bacteria; a digital dictator delivering propaganda; and cartographic sequences of a constantly mutating Europe.

The aim is not spectacle but layered semiotics where human presence, historical imagery, and machinic generation co-construct meaning. The piece

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

[13] Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (London: Pluto Press, 1979).

addresses how digital representation interacts with trauma, displacement, and memory through embodied and visual means. Alaska treats AI and digital media as co-authors of scenic discourse while maintaining the primacy of live presence.[14]



Fig. 1: Group photograph in the working process of *Alaska*



Fig. 2: Actors on stage during the performance *Alaska*

[14] Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2006).

2. AI Video Generation: Why It Did Not Work

We experimented with AI-based video generation to expand the visual vocabulary beyond pre-rendered assets. Despite iterative prompting, the models often diverged from the intended tone and compositional constraints. Outputs were technically coherent yet emotionally misaligned with the trauma-sensitive aims of the work. These deviations were not neutral: visual rhetoric in documentary theatre carries ethical weight.[15]

Our attempts to stabilize the AI pipeline improved consistency but did not solve the core problem: the generated video did not listen to the stage. It neither respected the fragility of live speech nor the ritual slowness of mourning choreography. We therefore withdrew AI video generation from *Alaska*, retaining only those animated sequences whose dramaturgy could be fully supervised and aligned with live timing.[16]

3. AI Music Generation: Why It Did Not Work

A parallel trial concerned music. We reworked an early draft based on an existing recording, asking the system to explore genre variants while preserving lyrics whose poetic integrity was non-negotiable. The models failed along two axes: they altered the lyrics despite explicit constraints, and even when the sound mix appeared "clean," it erased the emotional cadence of the composition. The result was material that was technically polished but dramatically tone-deaf to the performance's trauma-sensitive rhythm.

Because the lyrics in Alaska are not decorative but constitutive—anchoring testimony, pacing, and ethical address—any alteration compromised authorship and meaning. Our musical language must remain human-composed or human-edited, especially where lyric, breath, and silence carry memorial and ritual functions.

4. AI-Assisted Subtitles: What Worked (and With What Limits)

Where AI demonstrably supported *Alaska* was multilingual access. We used AI-assisted workflows to accelerate the creation of surtitles for international

[15] Baz Kershaw, *The Radical in Performance Between Brecht and Baudrillard* (London: Routledge, 1999).

[16] Robin Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

contexts, reducing production time from days to hours and enabling real-time adaptation during touring. However, two major limitations required consistent human oversight.

First, poetic and idiomatic nuance — automated translations often flattened idioms or misread metaphors, especially in passages drawn from folk laments or multilingual testimonies. Editorial revisions by bilingual collaborators remained indispensable.

Second, timing and prosody — accurate rhythmic alignment with live delivery was essential. In trauma-related material, surtitles could not crowd breath or overlap silence; line lengths were manually adjusted to preserve emotional pacing.

Within these constraints, AI-assisted subtitling worked: it improved inclusion without dictating meaning, supporting spectators' comprehension while preserving the actors' agency over tempo and voice. In short, AI served accessibility rather than dramaturgy per se, and that distinction proved crucial.[17]

5. Audience Reception and Facilitated Reflection

Audience engagement around Alaska developed along two parallel paths:

(a) post-performance discussions moderated by the ensemble, and

(b) optional pre- and post-show questionnaires exploring perception, affective response, and comprehension, particularly in multilingual settings.

Qualitative observations across presentations suggest three consistent shifts:

Stability of voice and presence: performers who initially hesitated to share testimony later demonstrated more grounded delivery and self-limitation — choosing what to reveal and what to keep symbolic. Narrative reframing: repeated cycles showed a transition from injury-centered narratives toward survival-centered storytelling, without erasing pain. Spectator comprehension: audiences exhibited greater clarity regarding geopolitical context and stronger engagement with performers' personal stakes, especially when AI surtitles and cartographic projections were combined.

[17] Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics* (London: Routledge, 2008).

We make no clinical claims — our concern is ethical and aesthetic. Alaska demonstrates that AI and digital media can function as dramaturgical partners when they (i) safeguard the primacy of live presence, (ii) remain subordinate to trauma-aware pacing, and (iii) serve inclusion rather than automate affect.[18]

Case II — H.E.R.O.E.S.: My Country – My DreamLand

1. Concept and Framework

H.E.R.O.E.S.: My Country – My DreamLand extends the research initiated in *Alaska* toward a participatory model that redefines the audience's position within the performance. Conceived in exile by the Mariupol Theatre, this hybrid project invites participants to imagine and design their ideal country using AI-assisted tools. It emerged from the question: when one's homeland is lost or rendered unsafe, how can imagination reclaim territory as an act of resistance?

The title *H.E.R.O.E.S.* (Hidden European Reality of Everyday Societies) reflects the dual nature of the project — both testimony and utopia. Created after the destruction of the Mariupol Theatre and the death of its founder Iryna Rudenko, it acts as a gesture of survival: art as proof of existence. Each participant becomes a "hero" of their own imagined nation. The process transforms the act of imagining into a civic, poetic, and therapeutic ritual of reconstruction. As a hybrid performance-exhibition, *My Country – My DreamLand* combines physical presence, digital creation, and public display. Participants respond to poetic prompts such as: How big is your country? Is it surrounded by water? What colours and textures define it? Their answers generate AI images representing the geography of their dreamlands. Together with short recorded video statements, these visuals form a collective archive projected in real time during the event.

Through this integration of participation, technology, and performance, the project merges individual imagination with collective testimony, producing alternative maps of belonging — civic imaginaries shaped under the pressure of displacement.

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[18] Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

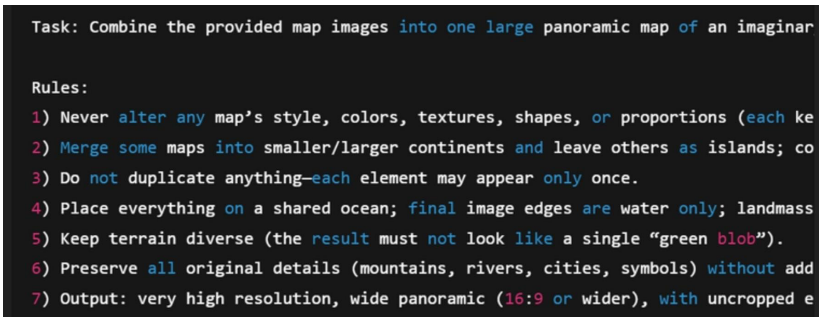


Figure 3: Screenshot of a prompt created by AI

2. Software and Interaction Design

The technical framework of *My Country – My DreamLand* is deliberately accessible. The custom-built web application (React.js / Node.js / Python) allows participation via QR scan, smartphone, or tablet. Users answer interactive multilingual questions whose responses are processed through AI image-generation APIs (Stable Diffusion, DALL·E 3). The output is a high-resolution visualization of each participant's "dream country."

These images are displayed instantly on LED screens within the exhibition area, forming a continuously evolving map of utopian nations. Participants may print their designs or record a short video introducing their country. All contributions are archived, geo-tagged, and integrated into a collective digital atlas — a DreamWorld Map accessible during and after the event.

The system is designed for low-barrier participation: no prior technical knowledge is required. The software supports multiple languages and includes real-time assistance for participants with disabilities or limited digital literacy. Ethical and aesthetic principles established in Alaska — voluntary participation, consent for recording, and trauma-sensitive facilitation — remain foundational.[19]

3. How It Worked in Practice

The first public iteration of *My Country – My DreamLand* took place during the European tour of Alaska, with presentations in Gdańsk (Poland),

[19] Eugenio Barba, *On Directing and Dramaturgy: Burning the House* (London: Routledge, 2010).

Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina), and Pécs (Hungary). Each event lasted roughly one week, allowing time for setup and collaborative creation with local communities — displaced Ukrainians, students, and citizens engaging with the themes of war, identity, and imagination. The process unfolded in three phases:

1) Engagement and Preparation — participants were introduced to the project's context and emotional framework through short theatrical warm-ups.

2) Creation and Reflection — participants generated AI-based dreamlands through the mobile interface, describing their imagined countries as expressions of hope or mourning.

3) Presentation and Exhibition — video testimonies were displayed during the exhibition, creating a living archive in which each new contribution dialogued with the previous ones.

4. Artistic and Ethical Reflections

While *Alaska* revealed the expressive tension between human presence and machinic imagery, *My Country – My DreamLand* explored collaboration with AI as a form of distributed authorship. The project's success depended not on aesthetic polish but on ethical design — the ability to create a space where vulnerability and creativity coexisted.[20] AI effectively translated participants' textual inputs into poetic visuals, facilitating dialogue among participants, between human and machine, and between present and absent places. The AI system became an instrument of empathy rather than spectacle. The facilitation team remained alert to risks: the digital format lowered access barriers but could evoke strong emotions tied to loss. To mitigate this, trauma-informed principles guided the process — clear explanations, optional withdrawal, and debrief circles after each session.

Ethically, the project insists on participant ownership. All images, videos, and texts remain under the control of the Mariupol Theatre team, with consent required before public display. No personal data beyond pseudonyms is stored. In this way, the digital infrastructure mirrors the project's moral architecture: open, but never exposed.

[20] Nisha Sajnani and David R. Johnson (eds.), *Trauma-Informed Drama Therapy* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 2022).

5. Outcomes and Observations

My Country – My DreamLand demonstrated that AI can function as a facilitator of imagination, not as a replacement for human creation. Participants described catharsis upon seeing their visions materialize as landscapes. The project deepened audience reception, transforming spectators into co-authors through active reflection. The resulting DreamWorld Map stands as both artwork and research data — a visual record of how people imagine safety, justice, and belonging after violence.

Finally, the project reaffirmed a shared principle with Alaska: technology's value in trauma-sensitive theatre lies in mediation, not simulation. The digital interface creates symbolic distance, allowing safe expression and preserving agency.

Work in Progress – Measuring Change in Trauma Narratives

Our work with *Alaska* and *My Country – My DreamLand* continues as a living laboratory. Both projects evolve through each new city and encounter, forming a longitudinal observation of how narratives, emotions, and forms of presence transform over time. We do not seek to "measure" trauma in quantitative terms, but to trace the subtle shifts that accompany collective recovery. Participants who once hesitated to speak now do so with steadier voices and clearer boundaries. Gestures that once expressed paralysis give way to signs of rootedness and agency. Testimonies once centered on absence now acknowledge endurance — the persistence of relationships, memory, and creativity despite loss.

1. Observing Narrative Shifts

Across multiple iterations, participants re-narrate identical events differently. Their language becomes less fragmented, more reflective, and at times infused with humor — an indicator of control over personal stories. New participants entering the ensemble gradually adopt shared storytelling rituals, learning to communicate without overexposure.

In *My Country – My DreamLand*, transformation manifests through evolving AI imagery. Each "dreamland" visualizes an internal state at a given moment; when revisited, it often shifts — colors brighten, landscapes expand — signaling renewed safety and hope.

2. AI as Analytical Support

We employ AI not as an evaluator but as an assistant for reflection. The same systems that generate imagery can cluster recurring motifs — water, borders, light — across time and geography, helping us visualize emotional constellations. This process is interpretive, not statistical, aiding facilitators in recognizing emerging patterns that might remain intuitive.

In *Alaska*, AI-based text analysis also supports identifying emotional registers in transcribed testimonies. These results are always cross-checked through human reading and ensemble conversation, ensuring interpretive balance.[21]

3. Theoretical and Ethical Context

This inquiry resonates with both ancient and modern understandings of theatre's relation to trauma. Aristotle's Poetics describes catharsis as the emotional release of pity and fear through tragedy. Modern neuroscience echoes this insight: studies on mirror neurons demonstrate that witnessing another's pain activates the same neural pathways as experiencing it firsthand.[22] Theatre thus becomes a site of shared empathy and affective processing.

Our practice situates this mechanism within the conditions of exile. When actors embody their testimonies surrounded by images of war and displacement, they engage not only in representation but in re-contextualization. This process mirrors the principles of trauma-informed drama therapy: role distance, symbolic transformation, and ritual safety — though our approach remains artistic, not clinical.[23]

4. Evaluating Without Quantifying

Because the work unfolds across multiple countries and timeframes, we document each cycle through interviews, facilitator notes, and audiovisual materials. Rather than quantifying emotion, we analyze indicators such as

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[21] Christian Keysers and Valeria Gazzola, *Expanding the Mirror: Vicarious Emotions and Empathy, Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 13, no. 7 (2009). 314 - 321

[22] J.A. Bastiaansen, M. Thioux, and C. Keysers, *Mirror Systems in Emotion Processing*, Social Neuroscience 4, no. 3 (2009).

[23] David Read Johnson, *Drama Therapy and the Healing of Trauma*, The Arts in Psychotherapy 26, no. 5 (1999). 375 - 383

shifts in narrative structure, degrees of participation, and variations in non-verbal coordination during ensemble scenes. In *My Country – My DreamLand*, this evolution is also visible in the AI archive: early dreamlands marked by confinement (walls, darkness) give way to open imagery (rivers, gardens, light). The machine stores images, but only humans can read them in context.

5. Ongoing Challenges

This practice faces challenges of continuity and emotional labor. Displacement fragments the ensemble, requiring each iteration to rebuild trust. Revisiting traumatic memories is taxing, and AI's involvement introduces ethical concerns about data sovereignty and the aestheticization of suffering. We mitigate these through transparency, consent, and dialogue — yet the risks persist.

At the same time, the iterative process generates resilience: each restaging becomes both research and rehearsal, an ongoing act of adaptation and survival.

6. Theoretical Implications: Toward an Ethics of AI Dramaturgy

Alaska and *My Country – My DreamLand* contribute to the discourse on posthuman performance, extending what Dixon defines as digital embodiment and what Broadhurst and Machon describe as performing in the expanded field.[24] Here, AI is neither neutral nor spectacular but a relational force — a co-actor shaping rhythm, affect, and temporality.

Unlike many posthuman performances that celebrate technological hybridity, the Mariupol projects unfold within trauma's fragility. Algorithmic systems here generate not utopias but symbolic residues of lived catastrophe — collapsing borders, dispersed voices, reconstructed dreamlands. This duality between precision and vulnerability suggests what we call ethical AI dramaturgy: computation directed by empathy, automation constrained by care.

In this framework, AI does not replace presence — it reconstructs it, mediating between memory and meaning, between loss and community.

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

Theatre's task is not to measure transformation but to witness it responsibly. In both Alaska and *My Country – My DreamLand*, AI functions as mirror and amplifier of human experience. Its failures remind us of the irreplaceability of emotion; its successes reveal new ways to perceive connection across languages and geographies.

Ultimately, these projects affirm that in exile, art does more than document trauma — it reclaims presence. Every dreamland, every performance, is a declaration that we still exist, that imagination endures, and that technology guided by empathy can sustain the fragile continuity between memory and survival.

Findings and Limitations

The practice-based research conducted through *Alaska* and *My Country – My DreamLand* reveals key insights into integrating AI and digital tools within devised and documentary theatre — particularly under conditions of trauma and exile.

Findings

1. AI as Dramaturgical Partner, Not Substitute: In both projects, AI acquired meaning only when functioning as a collaborator within human-centered dramaturgy. In *Alaska*, mapping and AI imagery enriched emotional and symbolic layers of live performance but required careful ethical and aesthetic framing. When AI attempted authorial autonomy e.g. through automated visuals or sound generation it failed to resonate with the performers' vulnerability and rhythm.[25]

2. Accessibility and Inclusion Through Technology: AI-assisted subtitles and multilingual interfaces broadened accessibility across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Rather than flattening meaning, these tools preserved poetic and testimonial nuance, allowing diverse European audiences to engage without interpretive loss.

[25] Matthew Reason, *Documentation, Disappearance and the Representation of Live Performance* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

3. Symbolic Mediation of Trauma: AI-generated visualizations (cartographic and generative) operated as mediators, enabling trauma to be expressed symbolically rather than confessionally. In *My Country – My DreamLand*, participants externalized pain through imagined geographies, transforming suffering into civic and aesthetic creation — a process echoing catharsis through making, not merely telling.[26]

4. Participatory Transformation of Audience Role: By turning spectators into co-authors, *My Country – My DreamLand* expanded participation beyond witnessing. Interactivity deepened empathy and understanding while anchoring the process in clear ethical frameworks. Participants became creators of meaning, not consumers of trauma.

5. Longitudinal Evidence of Narrative Evolution: Across multiple cycles, participants' narratives evolved from fragmentation toward coherence — from fear toward agency. This shift was traceable in vocal tone, choreographic confidence, and thematic reframing. AI tools, when used analytically, helped organize materials across time, revealing recurring motifs of light, borders, and freedom — a symbolic trajectory of emotional recovery.[27]

Limitations

Several limitations temper these findings:

1. *Conditions of Instability* — Research was conducted amid displacement and insecurity; logistical and emotional instability affected both process and continuity.

2. *Ethical Ambiguity of AI* — Despite benefits, unresolved issues persist around data privacy, algorithmic bias, and the aestheticization of suffering. These require ongoing critical vigilance.[28]

3. *Qualitative Nature* — Transformations observed are interpretive, not empirical. Knowledge emerges through practice, reflection, and witnessing rather than measurement.

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[26] Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (Stanford University Press, 2005).

[27] Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (University of California Press, 2011).

[28] Luciano Floridi, *The Ethics of Information* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

4. *Technological Unpredictability* — Rapid evolution of AI systems challenges artistic control and ethical consistency; working within such flux demands continuous adaptation and self-evaluation.

Conclusion

The integration of AI and digital media in theatre is often discussed as a question of innovation or threat — whether machines might replace human creativity. The experience of the Mariupol Theatre in exile proposes a different paradigm: technology as a prosthesis of memory, a tool for collective imagination, and a witness to survival.

Through *Alaska*, we learned that digital and corporeal presence can coexist when governed by ethical intention. AI animations of borders, viruses, and propaganda did not diminish human agency; they instead made visible the invisible forces — fear, contamination, control — that shape traumatic experience. The human body remained the axis of meaning: fragile yet defiant, irreplaceable.[29]

Through *My Country – My DreamLand*, participation itself emerged as a healing architecture. When individuals co-create AI-generated maps of their imagined countries, they symbolically reconstruct lost territories. Here, technology functions as an instrument of empathy: a mediator translating inner experience into visible form and facilitating dialogue between strangers united not by geography but by shared longing for safety and dignity.

Both projects illuminate the potential of AI to support, not simulate, human processes of remembrance and resilience. The failures of AI-generated sound or video reaffirm that emotional and ethical intelligence cannot be automated. Yet the successes of AI subtitles, interactive mapping, and analytical visualization show that, guided by care, technology can extend theatre's essential task — to make the invisible visible through shared presence.[30]

Ultimately, *Alaska* and *My Country – My DreamLand* point toward a model of AI dramaturgy grounded in responsibility. The question is no longer whether machines can create, but how humans can remain accountable for

[29] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performan*ce (London: Routledge, 1993).

[30] Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

what they create with machines. For artists working amid displacement and trauma, accountability becomes survival itself. Every performance, every image, every map asserts the same truth: imagination endures, even in exile — and theatre, with or without electricity, remains a rehearsal for humanity.[31]

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[31] Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (London: Pluto Press, 1979).

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EVANGELOS KOSMIDIS *is a director, writer, and performer (MFA, School of Fine Arts—AUTH). Since 2021 he has led the Mariupol Theatre in Ukraine, now working in exile across Europe. He received the European Theatre Convention "European Selection" award and the Intercontinental Biennale's First Global Prize for* Alaska*, a devised, polyglot performance on youth, war, and trauma. His projects integrate AI visuals, live testimony, folk-based mourning choreography, war soundscapes, and audience interactivity—including* My Country – My DreamLand*, where spectators co-create AI maps of utopian nations. He has collaborated with the National Theatre of Greece, GogolFest, and Dakh Theatre, presenting work in 12+ European countries.*