INCOMMON. Affective Environments and Politics in a Digital Archive of Italian "New Theatre" (1959-79)

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Abstract

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This paper examines the theoretical framework and design of the digital archive developed within *INCOMMON. In praise of community. Shared creativity in arts and politics in Italy (1959–1979)* (www.in-common.org), a five-year research project funded by the European Research Council and hosted at Iuav University of Venice under the direction of Annalisa Sacchi.

Performance studies' engagement with the question of archivability – gaining prominence since the 1990s – has prompted a rethinking of the archive as a site of epistemological negotiation and power. This critical discourse challenges the notion of the archive as a neutral repository, instead interrogating its role in shaping cultural memory through processes of selection, categorization, and exclusion. The archive thus emerges not as a passive space of preservation, but as an active agent in the construction of cultural memory.

Building on these perspectives, the paper explores how *INCOMMON* responds to such challenges by proposing an atlas that not only preserves but seeks to perform: one that resists the hegemonic custodial authority traditionally associated with archival practice and instead embraces the political, relational, and affective dimensions of performance. Conceived not as a stable ground, but as a dynamic field of interaction between materials, memories, and users, the archive reimagines how theatre histories might be assembled, experienced, and transmitted.

Structured through multiple user interfaces – referred to as "views" – each offering distinct modes of access, navigation, and interaction, the digital atlas becomes an inhabitable space where documents move, activate relationships, and generate conversations, choreographies, and new possibilities for engaging with history and historiography. The archive is not a neutral container, but a performative and affective infrastructure that challenges linear historical narratives, decentralizes accounts of Italian theatre, and foregrounds the ephemeral, the relational, the spectral, and the collective.

By investigating how the *INCOMMON* archive reconfigures the relationship between research and creation, visibility and invisibility, presence and absence, this paper aims to address broader questions about how we might rethink theatre histories through a digitally constructed space, without silencing what resists capture, and without denying the political charge embedded in acts of remembering.

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Introduction

This article examines the potential to reconceptualize the archives of the Italian 'New Theatre' (1959–1979), a period of experimental, collaborative, and politically engaged theatre practices that emerged across Italy between the late 1950s and the late 1970s, as dynamic, affective, and political environments rather than merely static repositories of documents. The project *INCOMMON: In Praise of Community. Shared Creativity in Arts and Politics in Italy (1959–1979)*, funded by the European Research Council, has gathered, digitized and analyzed thousands of documents from the Italian 'New Theatre' scattered across private collections, municipal archives, and forgotten boxes.

This initiative resulted in a digital platform that goes beyond mere cataloguing; it transforms these materials into relational cartographies reflecting artistic and political life.

The first section of this paper focuses on the entanglement between archive, performance studies, and affect theory. Drawing on a complex genealogy that spans philosophy, performance studies, and cultural theory, INCOMMON adopts the idea that performance archives are not complete representations but affective constellations where persistence and loss remain inextricably entangled. Such an approach avoids a positivist narrative of 'full documentation', foregrounding instead the incompleteness, fragility, and relationality of archives as constitutive of their epistemological power.

The second section explores how INCOMMON addresses these challenges by proposing a digital archive not as a neutral, stable repository, but as a field of forces where contrasting tensions coexist and contend. Rejecting the notion of a fixed foundation, the archive operates as a dynamic space of interaction where materials, users, and memory practices intersect to reshape how theatre histories are constructed and encountered.

Structured through multiple user interfaces – referred to as 'views' – the digital atlas offers diverse pathways of access and engagement. Rather than simply presenting information, it becomes an inhabitable space where documents are set in motion, activating relationships and generating new possibilities for engaging with history and historiography.

The INCOMMON archive reframes archiving as a dynamic, embodied, and affect-driven operation. The archive itself becomes a performance: not a passive collection, but an active environment where memory, affect, and politics converge.

1. Archiving differently: archive, performance, affect

In the 1990s, the so-called 'Archival Turn' (A. Stoler, 2009; S. Callahan, 2022) rekindled the attention of philosophers, historians, cultural theories and artistic practices toward the institution of the archive. What Hal Foster (2004) called the 'archival impulse' fueled a wide range of contemporary artistic and discursive practices that challenged the idea of the archive as a neutral custodian of memory, highlighting instead its omissions, thresholds, regimes of exclusion, and complicity with hegemonic strategies of power.

Michel Foucault's *Archéologie du savoir* (1969) was pivotal in redefining the archive as an epistemic apparatus: not a neutral collection of documents, but the system that governs the appearance, organization, and circulation of statements. This move displaced the archive from the domain of preservation into that of power and discourse, turning it into a field of rules and exclusions that structure knowledge. In the Italian context, Carlo Ginzburg extended this redefinition through the 'evidential paradigm' and the practice of the microhistorical method. For Ginzburg, the archive is not the site of exhaustive reconstruction, but of conjectural reasoning based on fragments, traces, and clues. His work emphasized the incompleteness and opacity of documents, showing how archival research is necessarily interpretative, partial, and conflictual. In this sense, Italian historiography made an early contribution to debunking the positivist illusion that archives are transparent windows on the past.

Jacques Derrida's *Mal d'archive* (1995) added a further decisive layer by showing that the archive is constantly haunted by its own lack and by the violence of selection that institutes it. Derrida foregrounded the paradox that the archive both preserves and erases, simultaneously guaranteeing memory and enacting forgetting. This 'archive fever' exposes the archive as a site of desire, anxiety, and power, destabilizing any notion of neutrality. In parallel, sociological and philosophical traditions, such as Maurice Halbwachs's work on collective memory (1950) and Paul Ricoeur's *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (2000), have emphasized that memory and forgetting are social processes entangled with identity, trauma, and the ethics of remembrance. Together, these perspectives reinforce the notion that archives do not merely conserve facts but mediate how communities remember, narrate, and imagine themselves.

This rethinking had a central impact on Performance Studies, which was formalized

as an academic field in the Department of Performance Studies at New York University in the early 1980s by Richard Schechner.

One of the most significant theoretical interventions in this debate came from Peggy Phelan, who, in her book *Unmarked. The Politics of Performance* (1993), famously wrote: "Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance" (p. 146). From a feminist perspective, Phelan frames disappearance not as a flaw, but as a radical form of resistance. The impossibility of archiving performance becomes an act of opposition to capitalist logics of reproduction and control, challenging an archival system that seeks to stabilize what is inherently transitory and contingent.

This excess that defines performance – described by Phelan as its uncontrollable, anti-archival surplus – is re-examined by Rebecca Schneider, another key figure in Performance Studies, in her essay *Performance Remains* (2001), later expanded in *Performing Remains. Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (2011). Rebecca Schneider revisits this antagonistic relationship between performance and the archive, identifying it as both a distortion within Western historiography and a limitation of performance theory itself. "In privileging an understanding of performance as a refusal to remain," she asks, "do we ignore other ways of knowing, other modes of remembering, that might be situated precisely in the ways in which performance remains, but remains differently?" (2011: 98). The notion of remains proposed by Schneider echoes the idea of a vital residue, embodied in the material substance of the stage, in the living bodies of actors and spectators and transmitted through long, delayed temporalities, a 'time lag' through stories, memories, and new relationships between bodies and events (R. Schneider, 2011: 143).

The critique of archival Western normativity, briefly touched upon by Schneider, is fully embraced by Diana Taylor, who in *The Archive and the Repertoire* introduces the concept of the 'repertoire' to name all those oral, bodily, ritual, and gestural practices that escape the stabilizing grip of the Western archive:

> **"The repertoire enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge" (D. Taylor, 2003: 16).**

The shift from archive to repertoire marks a significant methodological change: knowledge production and transmission are no longer confined to fixed protocols of documentation and written culture, but include the multiple pathways of oral memory and embodied culture. Epistemologically, archive and repertoire exist in dialec-

tical tension (p. 21), opening access to alternative ways of knowing, not only through direct consultation of what remains, but also through storytelling and embodied recollection and interpersonal exchange.

In other words, the archive – traditionally anchored in preserving the past through stable, material, and written sources – begins to uncover new forms of memory production tied to the body, shaped by subjectivities, and unfolding within affective and relational dimensions.

If Taylor reframed the archive as a field of tension with embodied memory, drawing attention to the politics of what is written, preserved, or embodied, excluded, Saidiya Hartman (2008) deepened this perspective by exposing the silences and absences of the archive in relation to slavery and Black life, and by elaborating 'critical fabulation' as a method to ethically re-narrate the lives occluded by archival violence. Hartman thus radicalized the recognition of the archive as affective, fractured, and haunted by what it cannot contain.

When memory no longer obeys conservationist logics but those of lived and embodied experience – charged with emotional intensities and tensions – archival studies encounter the Affective Turn (Clough & Halley, 2007). In *The Autonomy of Affect* (1996; 2002), Brian Massumi describes affect as "an irreducibly bodily and pre-emotional intensity" (2002: 222). Because of its liminal and unruly nature, this dimension is not traditionally retained by the archive, neither as a form of knowledge nor as a means of its transmission.

An affective archive, by contrast, reclaims the intelligence of affect and its capacity to generate and circulate knowledge (Sedgwick, 2003). "Affect circulates not only through bodies, but through ideas, styles, and discourses — shaping how knowledge is produced, received, and reproduced." (Gibbs, 2010: 186).

Affect reconfigures the archive as a space of movement and change. No longer a cold site of accumulation, it becomes a vibratory environment shaped by interactions and tensions among subjects, materialities, geographies, and temporalities. If knowledge is touched, felt, disrupted, then the archive may become an affective infrastructure where relations between the individual and the social act as transindividual intensities that contribute to the social organization of knowledge.

If affect, relation, and collaboration produce knowledge – and by extension artistic works – then the archive can collect not only documents, but also lived experiences, wounds, desires, and memories that find no place within the official circuits of his-

tory. In this sense, the archive has to be also an 'archive of feelings' as proposed by Cvetkovich (2003), encompassing both material and immaterial traces of emotion and connection.

The affective dimension in the archive should not be seen as secondary to the documentary one. On the contrary, it is precisely the intertwining of passions, conflicts, intimacies, and disputes — often found in private letters, marginal notes, and annotations — that constitutes the standard fabric making artistic production intelligible. The affective archive, therefore, does not merely gather 'things' but brings forth connections: it is a cartography of social and emotional relations that made the existence of an artistic scene possible.

INCOMMON positions itself within this broader genealogy. By engaging with Foucault's epistemological turn, Ginzburg's evidential paradigm, Derrida's critique of archival desire and violence, Halbwachs's sociology of collective memory, and Ricoeur's hermeneutics of memory and forgetting, while also drawing on the redefinition of the archive advanced by Performance Studies and affect theory as contested and affective, the project articulates a specifically Italian contribution to archival theory. The archives of Italian New Theatre are not simply incomplete; they are actively fractured, traversed by tensions between institutions and counter-institutions, official documents and personal traces, memory and forgetting. It is precisely in these fractures — in the interplay of power, affect, and imagination — that we locate the epistemological and political potential of the archive.

2. INCOMMON digital archive

The ERC-funded project *INCOMMON: In Praise of Community. Shared Creativity in Arts and Politics in Italy (1959–1979)* was a five-year research initiative (2016–2022) hosted by Iuav University of Venice and directed by Annalisa Sacchi. Between the 1960s and 1970s, Italian counterculture represented in fact both an artistic laboratory and a political experiment. From its inception, INCOMMON was designed to delve into the intricate interconnections among three domains: the political and philosophical context of the Italian extra-parliamentary Left, the emergence of experimental and performative arts in Italy (Italian 'New Theatre'), and the networks linking artists and activists. These three dimensions, often treated in isolation in scholarly work, are examined within a unified framework that associates cultural production with social imaginings of the common.

Philosophers such as Mario Tronti, Paolo Virno, and Giorgio Agamben conceptualized autonomy, commonality, and biopolitics. At the same time, artists such as Carmelo Bene, Giuliano Scabia, Carlo Quartucci, and collectives like Falso Movimento and Gaia Scienza developed performative practices that challenged notions of ownership, authorship, and institutional hierarchies. Italian artists' networks included visual artists, musicians, filmmakers, poets, theatre makers, and activists, who together forged alternative spaces of imagination and sociability. However, as several scholars have noted, this rich history of Italian counterculture remains largely underexplored in its intersections with political philosophy and archival practices, a lacuna that INCOMMON sought to address.

The emphasis on ephemerality and the refusal of commodified art objects aligned with radical political imaginaries that resisted the circulation of capital in cultural production. Performances, time-based works, and collaborative experiments thus became strategies of resistance against museification and copyright regimes, privileging transformation and collectivity.

The digital archive at the heart of the INCOMMON project (www.in-common.org) was developed to explore how theatrical events and performances can be deposited – documented, reactivated, and reimagined – within a digital environment. The INCOMMON archive contains over 2,000 documents kept in cellars and boxes scattered around Italy and is made up of a variety of formats and materials: stage photos, sketches and scripts, invitations and playbills, contracts, private letters and newspaper articles. Rather than aiming for completeness or fidelity, the archive embraces a curatorial approach that allows performance to remain 'differently'. This means resisting historiographical rigidity in favour of a system capable of accommodating excess, gaps, subjective entanglements, and layered relationalities.

Designed and developed by Gabriele Colombo of DensityDesign Lab (Politecnico di Milano) in collaboration with the INCOMMON research team, the digital atlas intentionally destabilizes the conventional notion of the website as a static container of archival material. Rather than following a logic of preservation and display, the archive seeks to articulate a dynamic use of digital space - one that can be inhabited, traversed, and experienced. Documents do not simply reside there; instead, they shift, interact, trigger new relational constellations, and choreograph forms of attention and discovery.

This conceptual and infrastructural orientation aligns with Diana Taylor's reflections in the essay *Save As... Knowledge and Transmission in the Age of Digital Technologies*. As she observes:

> **"If the repertoire consists of embodied acts of transfer and the archive preserves and safeguards print and material culture – objects – what to make of the digital that displaces both bodies and objects as it transmits more information faster and more broadly than ever before? [...] This digital 'archival' practice, I believe, can prove profoundly anti-archival." (Taylor, 2010).**

A comparable model can be found in the 'Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics' whose digital platform does not merely document performances but activates them as politically situated practices. Like INCOMMON, the Hemispheric Institute's approach to archiving emphasizes relationality, affect, and curatorial authorship, foregrounding how digital infrastructures can both preserve and perform acts of cultural memory. It is not only a repository of documents but a space for assembling, reactivating, and contesting historical narratives through performance-based epistemologies.

INCOMMON's digital environment does not simply digitize an existing collection of documents; it creates an experience, a relational and exploratory encounter between users and materials. It is a form of digital curation that exceeds the boundaries of standard digitization protocols. While the socialization and public accessibility of documents are certainly one of its goals, the deeper ambition is to reprogram the archive as a space of encounter, an infrastructure that fosters contact, intimacy, and activated memory.

The interface of INCOMMON thus proposes a set of interactive strategies to explore, visualize, and navigate its materials. These strategies aim to reveal the complex mesh of relations that connect performances, artists, spaces, geographies, and temporalities. Rather than framing documentation as neutral evidence, INCOMMON supports processes of subjectivization, emphasizing the affective and relational dynamics inherent in archival acts.

The atlas is articulated through five modular interfaces – 'views' – each offering a distinct mode of access to the materials. Each view is designed not only to display content but to propose a particular epistemological and aesthetic relation to the archive.

Documents are organized through a hybrid methodology that combines algorithmic logic with curatorial and editorial decision-making. The use of digital spatialization techniques invites users to explore an environment where documents are not fixed in position or hierarchy.

> **"So configured, the archive invites one to scour a digital space where documents are set side by side, rotated, overlapped, cut, and enlarged. The emphasis on the spatial distribution of the documents, and more generally on their visual transformation, makes their nature as rigidly catalogued archival objects secondary, transforming them into living material to be used to produce new, unexpected images. The archive, therefore, abandons its rigidly historiographical-conservative nature (although cataloguing of documents is available), where documents are exhibited and compulsively catalogued relics, and embraces its productive side as a useful tool for the generation of new images by creatively combining the documents."**
> **(G. Colombo, 2021: 69)**

This visual and interactive design undermines the fixity usually associated with cataloguing practices, opening instead to a processual, open-ended conception of what an archive can be and do. It transforms archiving into a practice of recomposition — a space of reconfiguration rather than closure, of movement rather than containment.

2.1 Catalogue

The *Catalogue* view serves as the most direct and least elaborate entry point into the archive. It provides users with immediate access to the collection through a spatial interface resembling a digital grid, where documents are laid out as icons. These icons appear in a random sequence, without a fixed order or predefined hierarchy, inviting users to explore via visual juxtaposition rather than linear paths or categorical taxonomies.

While the grid might at first appear to mirror traditional browsing mechanisms, it subtly introduces a narrative logic based on proximity and adjacency. The spatial configuration encourages interpretive associations between documents, their random placement thereby generating ever-shifting visual sequences, inviting users to discover connections not through indexical search terms but through the emergent storytelling potential of side-by-side images and texts.

To facilitate research and orientation, the documents can also be filtered through a set of interactive nodes. These filters – based on document type (photographs, scripts, reviews, posters, etc.), provenance, and cast – offer a curatorial framework

that allows users to recompose the archive into dynamic, user-specific collections. Depending on the combination of filters selected, documents may reappear in unexpected clusters, generating new curatorial paths through the material.

Each document in the *Catalogue* can be opened to reveal a dedicated metadata sheet. This descriptive card includes detailed information about the item: its author, date, origin, and type, along with a set of interoperable data fields that establish connections with other documents across the archive. These links are not just technical metadata relations, but meaningful indicators of co-presence, situating each document within the wider network of performances, artists, and places to which it belongs.

The metadata structure itself results from extensive research and fieldwork on cataloguing standards and project-specific needs, drawing on international protocols while adapting them to the requirements of INCOMMON (Berlangieri, 2020: 17). As a result, the sheet functions as a performative tool that renders the document as a relational node within a broader ecosystem, highlighting its historiographic, affective, and material dimensions.

In this sense, the Catalogue view may appear deceptively simple. Though it provides a relatively traditional browsing interface, it embodies a complex epistemological proposal that challenges archival fixity through randomness, invites associative discovery, and reveals the contingent frameworks of relational memory.

2.2 Recomposition

The *Recomposition* view brings together a curated selection of performances and theatrical events identified by the INCOMMON team as case studies. This anthology is neither exhaustive nor canonical; instead, it serves two key purposes. On the one hand, it seeks to recover performances and experiences that have remained on the margins of theatre historiography, often excluded from dominant narratives or under-documented in institutional archives. On the other, it experiments with new ways to visualize performance documents, transforming how archival traces can be organized, perceived, and activated.

At the heart of *Recomposition* lies the ambition to offer an immersive, affect-driven encounter with the performative event. This involves more than merely presenting documentation: it composes an encounter. Each event is accessed through an interactive slideshow, where materials layer, overlap, and unfold in sequence to evoke

the density and fluidity of the performance itself. While the accumulation of visual material might appear random at first glance, it reflects a deliberate editorial design process that blends archival research with graphic design.

The curatorial strategy at work in this interface relies on juxtaposition and layering, producing a unique archival configuration for each slideshow — a singular recombination of the performance's multiple afterlives. What emerges is not a fixed representation, but a performative assemblage of fragments, a kind of visual and conceptual choreography. Documents shift in and out of focus, images dissolve and reappear, scores overlay photographs, programs and sketches collide. In this continuous interplay, the archive assumes the shape of a mutable body: one that is never static, but always capable of recombination and renewal.

This compositional strategy bears a strong resemblance to the technique of collage, long associated with the experimental languages of the artistic avant-gardes. Collage destabilizes the integrity of the work, deconstructs the singularity of authorship, and opens the image or document to interventions, cuts, and dislocations. *Recomposition* undermines the monumental status of the archival document and resists the notion of a definitive artwork, opening it instead to fragments, cuts, decompositions, and reassemblies that produce continual suspensions and shifts of meaning.

By emphasizing instability and partiality, the *Recomposition* view challenges conventional documentary expectations. It reimagines archival objects not as evidence of a fixed past, but as mutable materials, open to transformation each time they are reactivated. Rather than reconstructing a chronology of the event, the interface reveals the event's multiple temporal layers, visual heterogeneity, and affective residues.

In this sense, each slideshow is not merely a presentation of sources, but a creative visualization of the archival remains, staged through the interface. What is assembled is not the event 'as it happened,' but the performative potential of its traces. Through composition, juxtaposition, and distortion, the slideshow becomes a minor historiographic gesture, one that values affective density over factual completeness.

The result is an archive that resists narrative linearity and instead proposes visual constellations as a mode of thought. It encourages a form of historical engagement that is less about reconstruction and more about resonant, open-ended association and recombination.

2.3 Performance Remains

This view draws its title from Rebecca Schneider's previously mentioned essay *Performance Remains* (2001), where she rethinks the archival status of performance not as disappearance but as differential persistence. In a passage particularly resonant with INCOMMON's conceptual and visual approach, she writes:

> **"Performance does not disappear when approached from this perspective, though its remains are the immaterial of live, embodied acts. Rather, performance plays the 'sedimented acts' and spectral meanings that haunt material in constant collective interaction, in constellation, in transmutation." (Schneider, 2011: 90)**

The notion of *constellation* that Schneider evokes — a dispersed yet relational formation of traces — takes literal form in the design of this interface, where documents are arranged on a dark digital plane, evoking the image of a star map. Instead of appearing as a linear list or fixed taxonomy, documents are distributed across a visual space that serves as a surface for display and interaction. Here, spatial proximity is used to suggest aesthetic affinity, as 'spatial proximity becomes an indicator of visual similarity' (Colombo, 2021: 72). This spatialization is generated through a two-step algorithmic process: a visual similarity algorithm first measures graphic features across the documents, followed by a dimensionality reduction algorithm that translates those values into relative distances.

The result is a constellation-like visual field in which documents tend to cluster based on shared formal characteristics, such as belonging to the same collection or having been produced by the same artist or collective. This approach does not reflect a narrative structure or a thematic taxonomy, but rather foregrounds affective, stylistic, and subjective kinships. "The criteria of visual similarity are not defined in advance," writes Colombo, "but emerge from the documents themselves, and are amplified by the proximity of those documents in the visual space" (Colombo, 2021: 73).

The path through this constellation is entirely open-ended: users are free to zoom in and navigate in any direction, with no predetermined sequence or correction of discontinuities. The interface does not attempt to erase archival gaps or harmonize discrepancies. On the contrary, it embraces them, allowing the collection's unevenness and fragmentary nature to shape the experience of exploration. Each document serves as a node in a shifting network of affinities, echoes, and proximities.

What this view foregrounds is not only the materiality of documents but also the

presence of subjective agencies within them. Visual traits detected by the algorithm often reflect aesthetic decisions, authorial gestures, or collective styles, revealing the embedded labor, the partial perspectives, and the situated practices that shape the archive.

Rather than offering a reconstruction of the event or a definitive representation, this view sustains the multiplicity of the performative trace, its instability, its visual dispersal, its capacity to be recomposed. As Colombo notes, this mode of visual organization "complicates the narrative structure of the catalogue, suggesting instead a polycentric archive in which the loss of center [...] supports the autonomy of multiple, independent stories" (Colombo, 2021: 74).

It is, in short, a mode of interaction where meaning does not reside in the document itself, but echoes across time, bodies, and formats, through relational proximities rather than hierarchical frames.

2.4 Times and places

The *Times and Places* view presents a geographical map of Italy alongside a timeline spanning from 1959 to 1979. Each city is represented by a circular marker, with its size proportional to the intensity of experimental performance activity documented in that location over the two decades. The result is a visual distribution of theatrical presence, making it possible to perceive clusters, absences, and rhythms within the broader affective and historical ecosystem of Italian performance.

The background data – city names and event years – have been extracted from an extensive study of bibliographic and historiographic sources on Italian 'New Theatre'. Rather than importing an existing dataset, the map was constructed through a process of reconstruction, synthesis, and translation of secondary literature into a visual form.

What distinguishes this interface is its ability to reposition each event within its geographic and temporal context. Through this dual axis of visualization, each performance is anchored in space and time, making it possible to see not only the singularity of the event, but its relation – whether close or distant – to other events that occurred in the same period or region. This relational perspective shifts the user's focus away from the author or the individual work and toward the broader environmental and national context within which these artistic experiments circulated and took shape.

The spatial scale and visual intensity of each bubble on the map encourage comparative exploration. One can, for example, observe how different cities produced different densities of performative activity, or how specific years saw spikes in experimental work. What emerges is not a linear narrative of theatrical development, but a textured map of intensities: zones of proliferation, silence, and discontinuity.

This aerial view offers a means to track and compare clusters of events, revealing both convergences and gaps, both central nodes and marginal traces. It enables the user to follow transversal trajectories, drawing connections between temporally or geographically distant scenes. In doing so, it decentralizes historiographical authority, giving shape to a performative landscape in which context takes precedence over canon, and where patterns emerge not from chronology alone, but from affective and spatial relations.

2.5 The Shape of Community

This view offers the clearest expression of the project's methodological framework. Rather than focusing on the verticality of the individual work, it shifts attention to the broader fabric of relations from which performance emerges. The result is an affective cartography, visualized as a graph – 'a web' – that displaces the performance from the individualism of authorship and repositions it within a dense system of encounters, collaborations, and situated complicities. Creation is no longer portrayed as the isolated act of a single artist. It emerges instead as a distributed and negotiated process embedded in a larger collective ecology. In this sense, the network translates the affective and relational logic of the archive into a visual and methodological model.

The visual structure of the view is designed as a two-layered network. The first layer is grounded in historiographical data: specifically, a sociological and relational reconstruction (Brilli, 2021: 250–258) of documented collaborations among practitioners of the Italian 'New Theatre'.

The second layer introduces a critical gesture: a curated network generated by the INCOMMON team, which integrates artists, curators, photographers, and other subjectivities that are often overlooked in official theatre histories. This speculative layer is not merely additive; it actively challenges and reconfigures dominant historiographical frameworks by rendering visible figures whose contributions, though central to performance-making, have often remained undocumented.

The interface invites users to navigate these two dimensions interactively. Each node corresponds to an individual: hovering over a node highlights its links, revealing the personal constellations of collaboration that surround a single practitioner. The user can zoom, pan, and move freely through the network, choosing their own paths rather than following a predefined structure. There is no fixed hierarchy, no centre, no endpoint. Instead, the experience reflects the project's commitment to multiplicity, interdependence, and distributed agency.

The visual language of the network mirrors INCOMMON's methodological stance: that theatre history must be told not through isolated works, but through processes of co-authorship, mutual influence, situated collaboration, and political participation. The network form is not just a visualization technique; it is an epistemological statement. It embodies the refusal of linear authorship, the decentering of the canon, and the acknowledgment of marginal, minor, or invisible roles in the making of performance.

The book *Inappropriabili. Relazioni, opere, lotte nelle arti performative in Italia (1959-1979)* by Annalisa Sacchi, principal investigator of INCOMMON, can be read as the monographic outcome of the view's guiding principle. It offers a historiographical vision grounded not in authorship, but in relation. This view challenges, as Sacchi writes:

> **"The narrative of the artist's autonomy, affirming that performance can only exist as a process of the common: a negotiated outcome of the actions of many subjectivities who, even in failure, gain power collectively." (A. Sacchi, 2024: 16)**

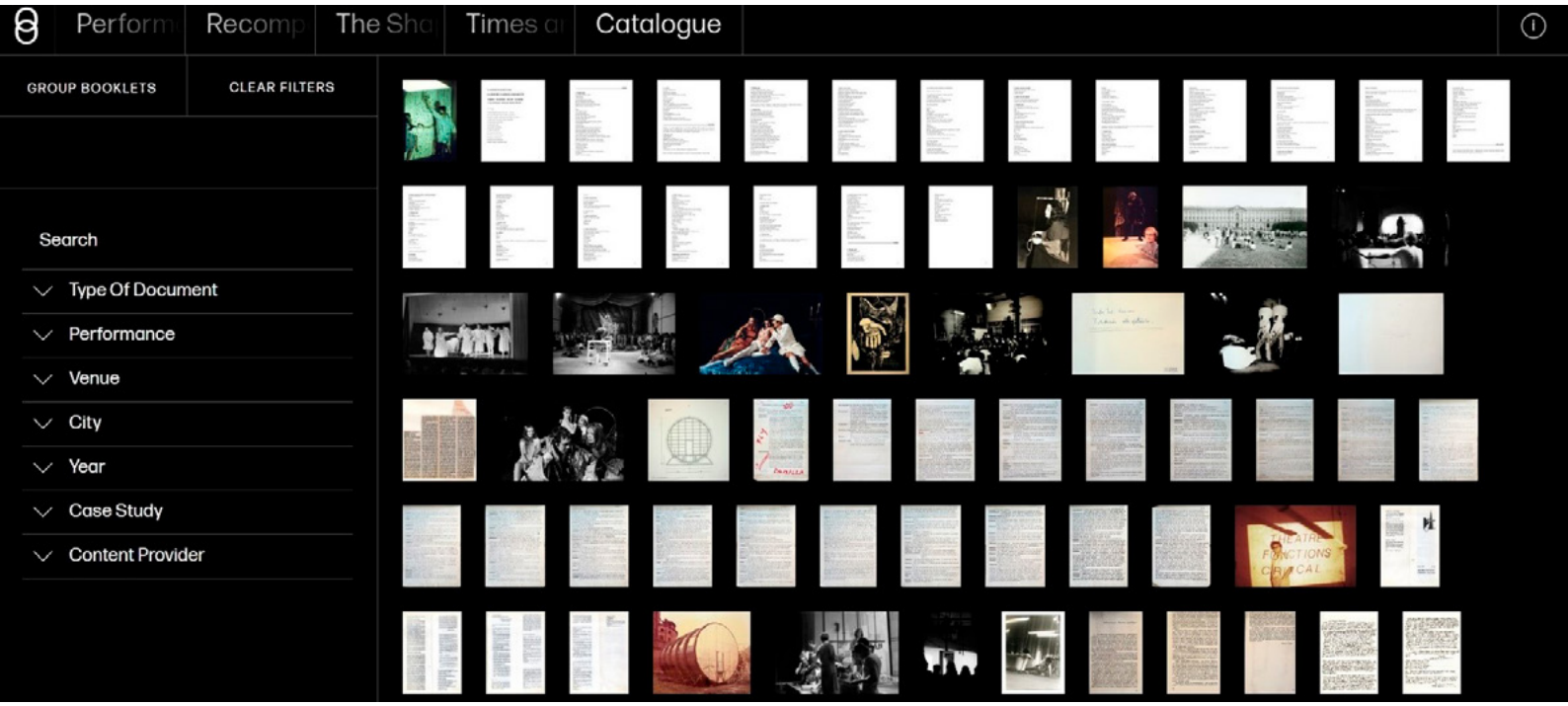


Figure 01
Screenshot from the view "Catalogue",
INCOMMON Digital Archive,
https://in-common.org/catalogue

Figure 02
Screenshot from the view "Recomposition",
INCOMMON Digital Archive,
https://in-common.org/recomposition





Figure 03
Screenshot from the view "Performance remains", INCOMMON Digital Archive, https://in-common.org/performance-remains



Figure 04
Screenshot from the view "Times and Places" (1976), INCOMMON Digital Archive, https://in-common.org/times-and-places

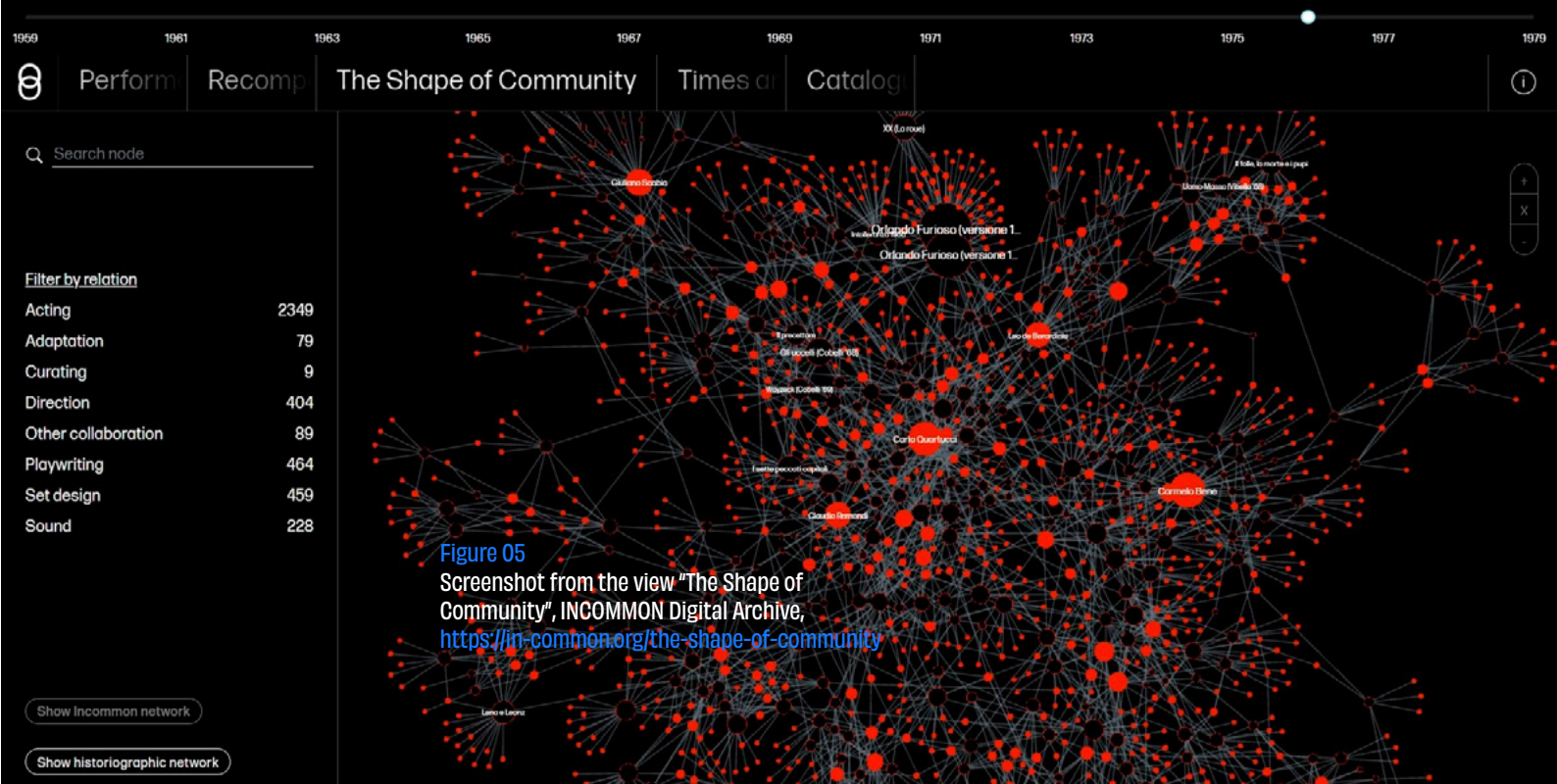


Figure 05
Screenshot from the view "The Shape of Community", INCOMMON Digital Archive, https://in-common.org/the-shape-of-community

Conclusion

The INCOMMON project demonstrates that the Italian New Theatre cannot be reconstructed through monographic approaches but only through a relational perspective, capable of grasping collaborations, conflicts, politics and shared affectivities. What emerges is a conception of the archive not as a neutral instrument of preservation, but as a collective and performative practice in itself: an act of *commoning* that restores to cultural memory not isolated works, but the social and political energies that made them possible.

By reimagining the archive as an affective and dynamic environment, INCOMMON transforms archiving into a method of relation. Documents, images, and traces no longer operate as fixed records of the past; they act as living nodes in a constellation of connections, continually reactivated through curatorial, technological, and interpretive gestures. The archive thus performs rather than merely represents: it creates the conditions for encounter, resonance, and collective imagination.

This approach reframes historiography as an embodied and situated practice — one attentive to the fragility of memory and to the affective infrastructures through which knowledge circulates. Archiving becomes a form of composition: a negotiation between persistence and loss, between the visible and the unarchivable. In embracing this incompleteness, INCOMMON affirms the political and poetic potential of the archive as a space where community itself can be continually rethought and reconstituted.

It contributes to contemporary debates in archival theory by demonstrating that archiving entails *shaping forms*: not only preserving fragments of the past, but also activating new possibilities for understanding, relation, and imagining the future.•

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