

Periodisation of Modern Theatre in Bogor 1950-1980

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the development of theatre in Bogor from 1950 to 1980, with an emphasis on the dynamics of performances, the formation of theatre groups, and the Influence of social and political changes on local cultural expression. This study uses a historical method comprising four stages: heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The results show that in the 1950s, theatre in Bogor was still experimental and limited to student groups with limited theoretical knowledge. However, significant momentum was generated by the Drama Arts Week in 1955, which became the starting point for theatre development in this region. In the 1960s, the emergence of theatre groups such as Raksa Budaya and Tunas Muda signalled a significant change, with a more systematic and theoretical approach to staging. The Influence of modern theatre became increasingly apparent, especially with the establishment of the Bogor Theatre Study (STB) group, which introduced a theoretical and critical approach to staging. In the 1970s, theatre in Bogor was increasingly influenced by international theatre developments, with dramaturgical experiments and performance forms that were more reflective of social and political conditions. This opened up space for more experimental and diverse theatrical works. This research shows that Bogor has played an important role in the history of modern Indonesian theatre.

Keywords: *Bogor theatre, Bogor theatre studies, modern theatre, theatre development*

1. INTRODUCTION

The birth of modern theatre in Indonesia cannot be separated from the social conditions at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century in the Dutch East Indies, which underwent major changes with the introduction of Western education for indigenous people. Western education, initially intended to provide skilled labour at low cost to plantation owners, also gave rise to an intellectual class that Robert van Niel referred to as the "modern elite" (Niel, 1984).

This modern elite emerged in various major cities in Java, such as Batavia, Bandung, Yogyakarta, and Surabaya, and later became the driving force behind the national movement. They also developed a lifestyle distinct from that of traditional society, for example, their appreciation of art and recreation (Lubis, 1998).

One form of art that was widely loved by this intellectual class was theatre. Jakob Sumardjo (1994) referred to the theatre pioneered by this intellectual group as amateur theatre. Although theatre was not new in the Dutch East Indies, since the late 19th century, there had been plays or tonil performed by people who made it their profession, and this was known as professional theatre. Some well-known professional theatre groups included Teater Jaafar (1885), Komedi Stambul by August Mahieu (1891) in Surabaya, as well as Teater Opera Soei Ban Lian, which was popular among the Chinese Peranakan community in 1911 in Weltevreden, Teater Miss Riboet's Orion (1925) in Batavia, and Teater Dardanella (1925) in Sidoarjo (Sumardjo, 1997).

These professional and amateur theatres served as the starting point for modern theatre in the Dutch East Indies, which adopted Western theatre traditions, especially the use of standard scripts as guidelines for performances. Although professional theatres often improvised and did not always adhere to the script, amateur theatres tended to be more faithful to the script (Sumardjo, 1997).

During the Japanese occupation and post-independence period, the role of intellectuals in the theatre world grew stronger. During this period, a form of theatre known as "amateur theatre"

emerged, a continuation of the tradition. Important figures such as Usmar Ismail, Abu Hanifah, and Rosihan Anwar played active roles in these theatre groups (Sumardjo, 1997).

After Indonesia's independence, modern theatre developed rapidly. It was not only centred in big cities such as Jakarta and Bandung, but also grew significantly in Bogor. According to written records, the presence of modern theatre in Bogor dates back to 1952, with the establishment of the Tunas Muda Art Lovers Family Organisation on September 1 of that year (Kanugi, 1971).

Since 1953, theatre arts in Bogor have shown significant and continuous development, as reflected in the rise of drama performances by junior high and high school student groups. In general, modern Indonesian drama began to develop in the 1950s and was centred in cities such as Jakarta, Bogor, Bandung, and Yogyakarta (Kanugi, 1971).

The militancy of theatre groups in Bogor was evident when, in 1955—only two years after its emergence—the Drama Arts Week was held from July 5–26, 1955, at various venues, including the National Building.¹ SPMA Hall², and SMA. This event was the first parade of performances in West Java, initiated by the Indonesian Student Drama Enthusiasts group, and even preceded the achievements of theatre in Jakarta and Bandung, which at that time were the main hubs of theatre life in Indonesia (Kanugi, 1971).

Through a periodisation approach, we can trace the social and cultural dynamics that shaped the development of this performing art. This exploration also serves to understand Bogor's position in the history of modern Indonesian theatre. Furthermore, this paper will examine how urban spatial planning—particularly cultural infrastructure such as performance venues—influences the dynamics of the arts in Bogor.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The research method applied in this study is the historical method, which includes four main stages: heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Kartodirdjo, 1982; Herlina, 2008).

The first stage, heuristics, involves searching for and collecting sources relevant to the research topic. In this study, the sources include primary and secondary sources, in both written and oral forms, as well as objects (such as photographs). Primary written sources, including photographs of theatre performances, were mainly obtained from a collection of writings compiled by Seputar Teater Indonesia, which includes articles and magazines discussing Indonesian theatre from the 1950s to the 1980s.

After the sources were collected, the next stage was criticism or verification, divided into external and internal criticism. External criticism ensured the authenticity of the sources, while internal criticism assessed the quality and credibility of the information they contained. This process aimed to produce sources that were tested for authenticity and reliability.

Furthermore, to produce stronger historical facts, data from verified sources must be supported by at least two independent sources. This process of cross-checking between sources is known as corroboration, which ensures that the information obtained is unbiased and not one-sided.

The next stage is interpretation, the process of analysing data and facts from verified sources. This interpretation aims to provide a deeper understanding of the historical facts uncovered, their context, and their meaning.

The final stage is historiography, which is the process of writing the results of historical reconstruction based on the traces or facts found. Historiography requires skill in the "art of writing" so that the writing can describe the past in a systematic, objective, and informative manner (Kuntowijoyo, 1995; Herlina, 2008).

¹The Bogor National Building, located at Jalan Raya No. 10 and No. 12, was designed by architect Friedrich Silaban as a multipurpose facility for social, cultural, and state activities. In the 1960s, this building was demolished and the land was converted into a shopping center and commercial area, eliminating one of the important traces of early modern architecture in the city of Bogor (Sopandi, 2017; Bogor City Culture and Tourism Office, 2002).

²The SPMA (Sekolah Pertanian Menengah Atas or Senior Agricultural School) hall, which formerly functioned as a secondary agricultural education facility, is now part of the Bogor Agricultural Development Polytechnic (Polbangtan), located at Jl. Cibalagung No. 1, Kelurahan Pasir Jaya, Kecamatan Bogor Barat, Kota Bogor (Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Indonesia, 2018; Bogor Agricultural Development Polytechnic, 2021).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Early Period (1950-1959)

In the early period of modern theatre in Bogor, between 1950 and 1959, the people of this city began to learn about and explore the world of theatre. However, at this time, theatre practitioners in Bogor still lacked adequate knowledge of theatre theory and scientific standards (Achmady, 1955). Most theatre practitioners came from junior high school (SLP) and high school (SMA) students who regularly held theatre performances, especially at the end of the school year and on school anniversaries.

As stated by Sumardjo (1997), at this time, theatre in Indonesia, including in Bogor, was still in the experimental and developmental stages, with existing theatre groups lacking a strong theoretical foundation.



Figure 1. *Di Langit Ada Bintang* (There Are Stars in the Sky), written by Utuy Tatang Sontani, directed by Endang Achmady, produced by Teater Penggemar Indonesia in 1956 at the Bogor National Building (Source: Aneka, March 10, 1956)

In these first five years, various drama groups in Bogor staged many performances, including "Quo Vadis" and "Kembodja" performed by SMA Negeri,³ and "Gadja Mada" by SGA Negeri⁴ in 1950-1952. Furthermore, in 1953-1954, theatre groups in Bogor also held other performances, such as "Arus Bersimpang" by SMP 1⁵, "Krisis Moreel" and "Dokter Kambodja" by the Indonesian Drama Enthusiasts Association (PPSI), "Bencana Alam" by SGA Negeri, and "Lenggang Kentjana" by SGB. These performances showed that student groups in Bogor were quite active and productive,

³The name change from "SMA Negeri Bogor" to "SMA Negeri 1 Bogor" occurred around 1971, along with the increase in the number of public high schools in Bogor City. This numbering policy was part of the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture's national program to standardize the administration of public schools throughout Indonesia (National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia, 1971; Bogor City Education Office, 1972).

⁴The State Teacher Training College (SGA Negeri) in Bogor was dissolved in line with the reform of national teacher education in the late 1970s to early 1980s. The function of teacher education was transferred to the university level through bachelor's degree programs in education. The former SGA Negeri Bogor building is now SMK Negeri 1 Kota Bogor, located at Jalan Heulang No. 8, Tanah Sareal, Bogor City (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1981).

⁵SMP Negeri 1 Bogor was originally known as SMP Negeri Bogor, before changing its name in the late 1960s to early 1970s in line with the national policy of the Ministry of Education and Culture, which required public schools to be numbered according to the order of their establishment in each region (National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia, 1971; Bogor City Education Office, 1972).

even though their productions often felt "makeshift" due to a lack of understanding of theatre theory and techniques.

The main problem faced by theatre groups at this time is the shortage of experts to guide theatre theory and practice. As Herlina (2008) writes, this limited knowledge has led to a lack of clarity among theatre practitioners about what "theatre work" actually means. In addition, the rarity of high-quality theatre performances in Bogor further narrows the imagination of theatre practitioners in this city.



Figure 2. Winners of the 1959 Bogor Drama Arts Festival (Source: Aneka, 1959)

However, in 1955, an important moment occurred with the Drama Arts Week in Bogor, held from July 5 to 26 (Achmady, 1955). This Drama Arts Week was the first drama arts event in West Java, even preceding similar initiatives in big cities such as Jakarta and Bandung (Achmady, 1955). This initiative, which was pioneered by the student theatre community in Bogor, demonstrated a high level of militancy and collective spirit in organising artistic activities, even though it was still limited by a lack of in-depth theoretical understanding of theatre (Kartodirdjo, 1982). This shows that, even without guidance from theatre experts, the spirit of creativity and innovation in Bogor's theatre world continued to grow rapidly.

However, this collective spirit has not been accompanied by adequate theoretical understanding, resulting in many performances that still feel "make-do." The lack of sufficient guidance from theatre figures or limited access to theatre literacy contributes to this imbalance.

As explained by Kuntowijoyo (1995), adequate guidance and teaching are key factors in the development of theatre in a region, which ultimately shapes the character and quality of more mature performances. Even so, the collective spirit shown by theatre practitioners in Bogor during this period became a strong foundation for the development of theatre in this city in the following years. Ultimately, even though this early period was marked by limitations in knowledge and understanding of theatre, the success of organising the 1955 Drama Arts Week demonstrated great potential in the world of theatre in Bogor. In addition, the continued performances by student groups and local arts organisations, despite many shortcomings, were proof that the Bogor theatre community had great enthusiasm to continue developing and progressing. As emphasised by Sumardjo (1997), the development of modern theatre in Indonesia, including in Bogor, was not only influenced by technical factors but also by the collective spirit of the community.

Second Period (1960-1969)

Entering the 1960s, the theatre world in Bogor experienced significant development. Theatre groups that previously involved mostly students and teenagers began to develop towards a broader orientation, including the general public and university students. During this period, the theatre in Bogor not only became a space for student expression, but also began to attract the attention of a wider range of members of society. As noted by Oemarjati (1971), during this decade, theatre groups in Bogor began to introduce more diverse and systematic performances.

Groups such as Raksa Budaya and Tunas Muda Bogor developed into more stable entities with more regular performance schedules. The quality of the theatre performances improved, both

technically and artistically. These groups began to introduce a more diverse repertoire, including scripts by renowned Indonesian writers such as Armijn Pane, Usmar Ismail, and Asrul Sani.

This signalled a growing awareness of dramaturgy and the scientific aspects of theatre, which began to be studied by theatre practitioners in Bogor. As Kuntowijoyo (1995) stated, attention to theatre theory and methodology is very important for the development of theatre in any region, including Bogor, as it offers insights into the artistic and intellectual dimensions of performance.

These performances began to be held in larger public spaces, such as the National Building and Bogor City Hall, which had previously rarely been used as performance venues. This also indicates a greater shift in public acceptance of theatre as a more inclusive art form. In addition, Bogor began actively engaging with other major cities, such as Jakarta, Bandung, and Depok, through various student art festivals (Oemarjati, 1971). These festivals created space for the exchange of ideas, methods, and performance styles among theatre groups in various cities.

During this period, groups such as Tunas Muda Bogor, Teater UI (University of Indonesia), Studiklub Teater Bandung (STB), and the IKIP Jakarta student group often exchanged ideas and attended each other's performances. This interaction played a significant role in opening up new perspectives for theatre groups in Bogor, especially in terms of experimentation with form and a more contemporary approach to directing. Based on Willy Kanugi's writing in *Suara Karya* (1971), this exchange between cities helped shape the aesthetic orientation of Bogor theatre groups, making them more diverse and innovative.

In addition, several Bogor theatre practitioners, such as Abdul Muthalib, Hadi Supeno, and Suryadi, continued their studies at the Jakarta Institute of Arts (IKJ). After returning to Bogor, they brought new insights into performance aesthetics, production management, and a more systematic approach to directing. This new understanding enriched the theatre community in Bogor and improved the quality of theatre in the city. As stated by Sumardjo (1997), improving the knowledge and skills of theatre practitioners was key to responding to the challenges of theatre development in the regions.

In early 1966, a highly influential theatre group emerged in Bogor: the Bogor Theatre Study (STB). This group was founded by young theatre figures such as Eman Sulaiman and Umar Machdam, who were known as important figures in the development of theatre literacy in Bogor. Umar Machdam, who had a background in criticism and scriptwriting, played a major role in introducing a theoretical and critical approach to the world of theatre in Bogor. He initiated several theoretical discussions that broadened his group's aesthetic horizons. For example, the group often held discussion forums involving various groups, from theatre observers to writers (Herlina, 2008).

The STB group was highly productive during this period. According to records, STB successfully staged 27 theatre productions, consisting of 16 performances in the Bogor community, 3 improvisational performances, 6 performances on TVRI, and a spectacular final performance, namely Lionel Abel's "Kematian Odysseus" (The Death of Odysseus) at Taman Ismail Marzuki, Jakarta (Oemarjati, 1971).

This productivity shows how STB became the centre of the theatre movement in Bogor, influencing the dynamics of theatre throughout Indonesia. Renowned theatre observers and literary figures, such as Iwan Simatupang, Ali Audah, Teguh Karya, and Asrul Sani, paid great attention to this group because of its success in producing works that were not only of high quality but also reflected a more sophisticated aesthetic and intellectual approach.

The interactions established by STB with other cities, as well as the influence of theatre figures and critics working in Jakarta and Yogyakarta, further strengthened Bogor's position in the landscape of modern Indonesian theatre. As noted by Kanugi (1971), although initially perceived as a city with limited access and facilities, Bogor was able to demonstrate extraordinary creativity and competitiveness in the Indonesian theatre world at that time.

Thus, the period from 1960 to 1969 became an important transition period for the development of theatre in Bogor. Artistically, theatre in Bogor entered a new, more sophisticated phase, with the use of scripts with national themes, the introduction of more modern directing methodologies, and cross-city interactions that increasingly shaped a broader aesthetic awareness among local theatre practitioners. Through these developments, Bogor became increasingly recognised as one of the influential centres of theatre in West Java.

Third Period (1970-1979)

The 1970s marked an important era in the history of theatre in Bogor, where theatre groups began to diversify their forms and approaches to performance. The influence of modern world theatre, such as Brechtian and Absurdism ideas, increasingly influenced the perspectives and techniques used in performances (Ukar, 1972). Along with this, theatre in Bogor also began to transform into something more experimental, attempting to combine various new approaches that were more relevant to the social and political developments of the time.

Bogor theatre groups began to address deep social issues, with performances adapting works by Samuel Beckett, such as *Waiting for Godot*, and Eugene Ionesco, such as *The Lesson*. On the other hand, more profound local themes, such as urbanisation, traffic congestion, and the lives of the working class, began to dominate the performances' content. This shows the role of theatre in discussing the reality of an increasingly crowded, dynamic city life.

During this period, theatre performances in Bogor were not only entertainment, but also a mirror of society. These groups sought to raise factual issues that directly affected the community's daily lives, making theatre a means of sharp social reflection.

Theatre in Bogor not only attracted the attention of the local community but also received positive responses from national theatre figures. Prominent figures such as Rendra, Arifin C. Noer, and Putu Wijaya appreciated the spirit and militancy shown by Bogor theatre groups, especially STB. Their intellectual spirit and courage to experiment with unusual forms of performance became a distinctive feature recognised by national theatre practitioners.



Figure 3. A play by Putu Wijaya, directed by Umar Machdam, produced by Studi Teater Bogor on December 11-13, 1973, at TIM. Director Umar Machdam (Source: Tempo, 1973)

Some of them even attended discussions or performances in Bogor, providing input and advice to foster theatre development in the city. They encouraged Bogor theatre groups not only to maintain their courage to experiment with form, but also to continue to instil deep social reflection in each of their works. Interaction with theatre communities from Jakarta, Bandung, and other major cities opened up opportunities for broader exchange of ideas and development, thereby enriching creativity and diversity in theatre performances in Bogor.

However, despite significant progress, this period was also marked by considerable challenges. One of the main problems faced was the limited availability of suitable performance spaces, lack of financial support, and the emergence of new mass media such as television and film, which competed with theatre for public attention. In fact, several performance venues in Bogor began to

change their function, and support from the government and the media was very limited (Veta, 1970).



Figure 4. Rabi'ah El Adawiyah by Tahir Abuasja, directed by Umar Machdam, produced by Studi Teater Bogor in 1975 in Surabaya (Source: Pelita, 1975)

Amidst these limitations, Bogor theatre groups continued to maintain their connections with theatre communities outside the city. Some of them performed at TIM Jakarta and participated in Student Theatre Week or other art forums held in major cities. Collaboration and creative discussions with theatre communities outside Bogor became very important, even though they often faced obstacles in terms of cost and transportation.

Ultimately, in the late 1970s, STB experienced a crisis that led to its dissolution in 1974. This decision was made after the main figures in STB, especially Umar Machdam, felt exhausted, and after the difficulties in managing the organisation and moral issues made STB's survival impossible. In an all-night discussion after the performance of Salman El Farisi at TIM on May 27, 1974, Umar Machdam expressed his intention to take a break from the theatre world for some time (Tempo, 1974).

Although STB was disbanded, its spirit and intellectual and creative legacy lived on. At the end of the 1980s, a new theatre group called Dipokersen emerged, which shared a similar system and spirit with STB (Ubay, 1988). Dipokersen sought to continue the intellectual tradition of STB, albeit on a more limited scale and amid greater challenges. This group sought to maintain the continuity of theatre arts in Bogor and develop forms of performance that remained relevant to the social context of the time (Ubay, 1988).

Dipokersen not only focused on performances, but also on archiving and documentation, which was later immortalised in the book *Actplorasi5* (2019). This book is one of the efforts to preserve the artistic heritage that has been built over the years, providing further understanding of the development of theatre in Bogor and the contribution of groups such as Dipokersen in enriching Indonesian performing arts culture.

The Influence of Urban Spatial Planning on the Dynamics of the Arts in Bogor

Cities are arenas of production, consumption, and cultural expression. In the city of Bogor, one striking phenomenon is the scarcity of adequate performance spaces for artists, especially theater artists. The limited number of suitable performance venues in Bogor has long been a challenge for artists in this rainy city. The National Building, the SPMA Hall, and several school halls are often the only options available to theatre groups. This situation limits the scale of production and technical approaches to staging. The absence of buildings specifically designed for performances means that lighting, sound, and audience comfort must be considered.

For example, the National Building—which was once the centre for theatre performances and various other artistic activities—underwent a change in function in the 1960s. This building, originally intended for sociocultural activities, gradually came to be used for administrative and commercial purposes. This shift has resulted in reduced access for the arts community in Bogor to representative spaces for their work. The removal of cultural identity from these spaces reflects the absence of protection for arts infrastructure in city policies, which the local government should

address. Bogor has long faced the challenge of a lack of adequate performance venues, even to this day.

Henri Lefebvre (1974) argues that space is not only a physical container, but also a social construct influenced by economic, social, and political forces. He divides space into three dimensions: spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces. In the context of Bogor, performance spaces in the city, such as the Kemuning Gading Building and the Bogor Creative Centre, can be categorised as representations of space, i.e., spaces created and controlled by bureaucracy and the institutional logic of the state.

The Kemuning Gading Building, for example, is located right inside the Bogor City Hall complex, directly adjacent to the Mayor's office and the Bogor City Archives and Library Office. This creates a very formal atmosphere. Artists who wish to use this space must follow lengthy administrative procedures, from submitting proposals to a complicated licensing process. The art space, which should be a place for free expression, has ultimately become part of the government infrastructure, rather than the art community itself.

This is similar to the Bogor Creative Centre. Although it functionally bears the name "creative centre," in practice, it more closely reflects the symbolic form of neoliberal creative city logic. Its location, just a few hundred meters from City Hall and the State Palace and within the vicinity of the Regional Government and Development Coordination Agency (Bakorwil) and the Bogor City Attorney's Office, makes it more of a showcase for the prestige of the local government than a living space for the community.

For this reason, artistic activities held there often have to go through a lengthy bureaucratic licensing process and, worse still, are overshadowed by the symbolic control of the state. Because it is designed and managed to fulfil formal functions and as a symbol of a 'creative city', it does not open up the possibility of wild, spontaneous, and creative dialectics as a living art space should. This creates a kind of awkward space for artists. Geographical proximity to institutions of power creates a strong symbolic and psychological effect.

David Harvey (2012) states that "control over space is control over people." This means that when government offices surround an art space, it symbolically becomes part of the power system itself. This creates a sense of restraint in expression, especially in performing arts such as theatre, which often engages with social and political criticism. Artists feel they must maintain "propriety" when in spaces close to power. The presence of officials, civil servants, and state symbols around performance spaces creates an intimidating atmosphere. Experimental, critical, and even humorous expressions are stifled due to concerns about censorship, reprimands, or future access restrictions.

A theatre community in Bogor, for example, admitted that they had to "censor themselves" when staging plays that contained social criticism if the event was held in a government-owned building. This situation is contrary to the spirit of art as a form of free and reflective expression of social reality.

Based on field observations, Bogor actually has public spaces such as Taman Ekspresi in Sempur, Alun-alun Kota Bogor, Panggung Mati in Gor Padjajaran, and several other city parks that have the potential to be used as open performance spaces. However, the problem is that these spaces are more often used for local government agendas or even left empty, without inclusive management for the arts community.

Due to this phenomenon, the independent theatre community feels marginalised. They have ended up retreating to private spaces, such as homes (in this case, such as those created by Surau Creative with Surau Space, cafes, or even returning to online spaces—which, unfortunately, lack public legitimacy and adequate infrastructure for more serious or larger performances.

In the long term, this has led to: (1) The loss of regular meeting spaces between communities; (2) Difficulties in regenerating theatre practitioners due to a lack of rehearsal and performance spaces; (3) The marginalisation of critical themes from the arts scene; and (4) A decline in public interest in local performing arts. All of these factors ultimately led many communities to choose to take a hiatus due to logistical difficulties caused by a loss of public appreciation, and the aesthetics of theatre became dry and stagnant.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that between 1950 and 1980, Bogor occupied an important position in the history of modern Indonesian theatre through a dynamic development marked by student militancy,

the growth of artistic communities, and the diversification of performance forms and themes that shaped the character of Bogor theatre as a distinctive and easily recognisable art form. The periodisation of theatre development in Bogor shows that the journey of art was not only driven by the creativity and regeneration process of artists, but also significantly influenced by socio-political configurations and changes in urban spatial planning. Even today, the Influence of spatial arrangements remains relevant, with urbanisation, land use changes, and the absence of infrastructure support and cultural policies from the city government causing a shift in artistic spaces and encouraging the emergence of alternative spaces that have ultimately taken their place as the mainstream of theatre practice in Bogor. This condition is in contrast to other cities—such as Jakarta—which have formal art institutions as the centre of the arts, allowing communities to grow as healthy and dialogical alternative currents. Thus, the development of theatre in Bogor shows that the absence of the state's role in managing the arts ecosystem has implications for the emergence of a crisis of artistic identity in the city, while also opening up opportunities for further research related to the post-1980 period and the sustainability of Bogor's theatrical heritage in the contemporary arts landscape.

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