



On Repeat: Exploring Automaton and Tiché through Drama and Dance

Mathieu Van der Straeten & Anna Geenen

Repetition is a fundamental aspect of human experience. It shapes our rituals, our gestures, the ways we speak, move, and relate. It offers safety and predictability, yet it also carries pleasure — and at times, destruction. In line with the conference theme *Repetition and Return*, this workshop explores how repetition can become a site of creative transformation within the arts therapies.

Drawing on psychoanalytic notions of *automaton* (the automatic) and *tiché* (the accidental encounter), we consider how what recurs is never purely the same. As Brian Eno suggests, “repetition is a form of change”; each return contains the possibility of surprise. For the therapist, this raises an essential question: how do we meet repetition — do we articulate and give form to it, or do we interrupt and transform it?

Through the combined media of drama and dance, we will engage in a series of improvisational explorations that make repetition tangible on multiple levels — in gesture, voice, relational dynamics, and embodied movement. Structured play and improvisational exercises, inspired by Developmental Transformations (DvT) and the work of Marian Chace, will guide us to trace recurring patterns and experiment with subtle deviations.

The interdisciplinary nature of the workshop highlights how narrative, language, and relationship interact with rhythm, embodiment, and nonverbal communication. In this shared space, the exploration of repetition becomes a way to encounter both what returns and what escapes — a dynamic, evolving, and creative movement between structure and rupture, between familiarity, surprise, and transformation. Together, we will discover in repetition not monotony, but possibility.



Biography

Mathieu Van der Straeten is a dramatherapist, researcher, and educator at Artevelde University of Applied Sciences in Ghent, Belgium. With over 15 years of experience in psychiatric care, he has developed a practice informed by work with clients facing substance abuse, trauma, and complex psychological challenges. His clinical approach integrates improvisation, play, and psychoanalytic perspectives to support transformative therapeutic processes. Alongside his academic teaching and research, Mathieu runs a private practice where he offers therapy, clinical supervision, and training for professionals in the creative arts therapies field.

Anna Geenen is a dance and movement therapist based in Ghent, Belgium. She works at the Dr. Guislain Psychiatric Hospital, where she supports people living with chronic psychotic conditions through dance improvisation, with a strong focus on everyday encounters. Anna is passionate about the role of play, both in therapy and in daily life. She is the founder of *de speelplaats* ('the playground'), a space dedicated to rediscovering play as adults. Through team-building sessions and workshops, she invites participants to reconnect with movement, curiosity, and creative expression.

Recent Publications

Bockstael, S. & Van der Straeten, M. (2024). **A developmental approach to complex trauma**. In Sajnani, N. & Johnson, D. (Eds.) *Trauma informed dramatherapy (2nd ed.)* (pp. 58–77). Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas.

Van der Straeten, M. (2017). **Diagnostiek en dramatherapie vanuit psychoanalytisch perspectief**. In Demuyneck, J. & Geldhof, A. (Eds.) *Creatieve therapie* (pp. 161–173). Leuven: Acco.