

Curriculum Vitae

NICOLAS BENACERRAF

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EDUCATION

Ph.D. **Theatre & Performance**, The Graduate Center, City University of New York, Expected 2025.

Dissertation: "The Theatre of Public Relations: Edward Bernays and the Dramaturgy of Mass Persuasion"

My dissertation performs a multidisciplinary critique of Public Relations as the most insidious form of social power today, demonstrating theatre's promise as a vital tool for demystifying and undoing its influence. I tell the story of PR's founder, Edward Bernays, specifically his 1934 campaign to sell Lucky Strike cigarettes to American women by staging a fake charity event called the *Green Ball*. As dramaturgical sociology, my analysis uses theatrical vocabularies to identify PR as a genre of persuasive performance - one whose efficacy stems from deceptive theatrical acts in the spaces of everyday life. This archival investigation offers a rare window into the backstage of American capitalism, which has worked tirelessly to widen inequality while evading the critical spotlight.

Committee: Prof. David Savran (Chair); Prof. Erika T. Lin; Prof. Bertie Ferdman.

M.F.A. **Scenic Design for Performance**, California Institute of the Arts, 2012.

M.A. **Aesthetics & Politics**, California Institute of the Arts, 2011.

Thesis: "The Unintended Revolution: Students for a Democratic Society, The Weathermen, and the End of the Student Left"

B.A. **Sociology & Theater** (High Honors), Wesleyan University, 2008.

Thesis: "Disrupting the Social Script: The Unwelcome Transgressions of Avant-Garde Performance"

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

2023-present **Adjunct Lecturer**, Brown University, Department of Theatre Arts and Performance Studies, Brown/Trinity MFA program in Directing.

2018-22 **Doctoral Teaching Fellow, Adjunct Lecturer**, Brooklyn College, Department of Theater.

2014-16 **Full-Time Lecturer** (Rank of Professor; Co-Head of BFA in Design & Technology), Kean University, Theatre Department.

2012 **Adjunct Lecturer**, California Institute of the Arts, School of Theater.

Other University Positions

2023-present **Curricular Reform Research Fellow**, PhD Program in Theatre & Performance at The Graduate Center.

2023 **Senior Public Humanities Fellow**, PublicsLab at The Graduate Center.

2019-22 **Mellon Public Humanities Fellow**, PublicsLab at The Graduate Center.

2017-18 **Research Assistant** to Professor Erika T. Lin, The Graduate Center.

2009-11 **Graduate Teaching Assistant**, California Institute of the Arts.

2007 **Teaching Assistant**, Wesleyan University, Theater Department.

ARTS AND ACTIVIST WORK

Artistic Leadership

2020-present **Director & Co-Founder**, Edge Effect Media Group, NYC. www.edgeeffectmedia.org/

Edge Effect is a “think and do tank” that brings experts from widespread disciplines into group study and collaboration, using the edge-blurring techniques of devised theater. Founded with Jess Applebaum.

2014-22 **Director for Live Performance**, NYC. www.nicbenacerraf.com/

19 leadership projects drawing on expertise in directing, design, producing, and dramaturgy. Major Works: *EVERYBODY IS GONE* (Berlin, 2022); *CANNABIS, A Viper Vaudeville* (La Mama, 2022); *UP & AWAY* (Lincoln Center, 2015-18).

2006-20 **Scenic Designer for Live Performance**, NYC.

30 design projects for live performance, including plays, musicals, concerts, installations, and happenings.

2006-20 **Co-Artistic Director & Co-Founder**, The Assembly Theater Project, NYC. www.assemblytheater.org/

The Assembly is a devised theater company dedicated to creating slow-cooked works about pressing social issues. Major Works: *IN CORPO* (Theatre Row, 2023); *SEAGULLMACHINE* (La Mama, 2018); *THAT POOR DREAM* (New Ohio, 2015); *HOME/SICK* (Collapsible Hole, 2011; National tour, 2012-17). Founded with Jess Chayes, Edward Bauer, and Stephen Aubrey.

Activism Leadership

- 2020-present **Organizer**, Calling Us In: A National Antiracist Network for White Folks in the Arts.
- 2013-14 **Head of the Research Team** on "Labor, Value, and Alternative Forms of Social Organization," The Brooklyn Commune Project, NYC. www.brooklyncommune.org/
- 2013 **Member**, The Yes Men, Hemispheric Institute residency at NYU. www.theyesmen.org/
- 2011 **Member**, Arts and Culture Working Group, Occupy Wall Street, NYC.
- 2005-07 **Peer Sexual Health Advocate**, Wesleyan University, Office of Health Education, CT.

Project Leadership

- 2024 **Creative Director**, *MOURNING MACHINE*, a ritual practice and psychosocial experiment about grief, created Edge Effect, with social psychologists Mica Baum-Tuccillo and Choco Garcia Rivera. Presented at the Segal Center and Judson Memorial Church.
- 2023 **Director, Designer**, *MOOD MEDALLIONS*, an all-day interactive ritual by Edge Effect for PAC NYC's Family Day Open House, custom-designed to welcome families to the new World Trade Center theater, commissioned by the Perelman Performing Arts Center (canceled due to extreme weather).
- 2022 **Co-Lead Artist, Director of Design, Co-Producer**, *EVERYBODY IS GONE*, an original piece of "immersive journalism" about the Uyghur cultural genocide, created by The New Wild, funded by the US State Department and the National Endowment for Democracy, World Premiere in Berlin at Alte Münze.
- Co-Lead Artist, Environment Designer, Co-Producer, Associate Director**, *CANNABIS: A Viper Vaudeville*, an immersive theatrical concert by Baba Israel, Grace Galu, directed and dramaturged by Talvin Wilks, in collaboration with Urban Bush Women (dancers) and Soul Inscribed (band). World premiere produced by HERE Arts Center at La Mama's Ellen Stewart Theater.
- Director, Author**, *PUBLIC RELATIONS SEDER*, a participatory, Haggadah-based encounter to tell the story of PR, created by Edge Effect in collaboration with a community of polydisciplinary makers.

- 2019 **Director**, *SMALL TOWN BOY*, by Falk Richter, presented as part of the PEN World Voices International Play Festival, in collaboration with Berlin's Gorki Theater, at the Martin E. Segal Theatre Center.
- 2018 **Lead Artist, Co-Director, Lead Designer**, *SEAGULLMACHINE*, a fusion of Chekhov's *The Seagull* and Heiner Müller's *Hamletmachine*, developed and produced by The Assembly. World Premiere at La MaMa's Ellen Stewart Theater (April 2018).
- 2015-18 **Co-Lead Artist, Environment Designer**, *UP AND AWAY*, an immersive play for children on the autism spectrum, created by Trusty Sidekick, directed by Jonathan Schmidt Chapman. Commissioned by Lincoln Center Education and presented at the Rose Theater at Lincoln Center (2015 & 2018).
- 2012-17 **Co-Lead Artist, Co-Author, Environment Designer, Dramaturg**, *HOME/SICK*, a collectively written play about the Weather Underground, created by The Assembly. Presented by the Collapsible Hole (2011), The Living Theatre (2 productions in 2012), Wesleyan University (2014), Odyssey Theater in Los Angeles (2016), and JACK (2017).
- 2016 **Director**, *LIFE OF GUNDLING* and *THE TASK* (Excerpts), by Heiner Müller, commissioned and presented by the Martin E. Segal Theatre Center at the CUNY Graduate Center, as part of Heiner Müller Discovers America, a day-long event curated by Frank Hentschker and Antje Oegel.
- Co-Lead Artist, Production Designer**, *I WILL LOOK FORWARD TO THIS LATER*, created by The Assembly, written by Kate Benson and Emily Louise Perkins, directed by Jess Chayes. Commissioned and presented by the New Ohio Theater's Archive Residency.
- 2014-15 **Co-Lead Artist, Scenic Designer, Co-Author, Contributing Director**, *THAT POOR DREAM*, an adaptation of *Great Expectations* about class in America, created by The Assembly, directed by Jess Chayes. Presented at the New Ohio Theater (2014) and The Tank's Flint & Tinder Series (2015).
- 2014 **Co-Director, Co-Author**, *BABEL: A TRIBUTE TO ERS*, created by The Assembly. Presented as part of the Edwin Booth Award to Elevator Repair Service at the Segal Center.
- Creative Director**, *HAPPINESS MACHINE*, by Edge Effect, an immersive hoax storefront that satirized the overuse of family imagery during the holiday season. Presented at Chashama's 37th Street Storefront Gallery.
- 2012 **Co-Lead Artist, Environment Designer**, *PHAEDRA'S LOVE*, by Sarah Kane, co-directed by Marina McClure. CalArts.
- 2010 **Co-Lead Artist, Environment Designer, Dramaturg**, *THE THREE SISTERS*, by The Assembly. Presented at the Red Room and the Cherry Pit.

- 2009 **Co-Lead Artist, Scenic Designer, Dramaturg**, *CLEMENTINE AND THE CYBER DUCKS*, by The Assembly, written by Krista Knight, directed by Jess Chayes. Presented at the Ontological-Hysteric Theater.
- 2007 **Co-Lead Artist, Environment Designer**, *DAGUERREOTYPE*, by The Assembly, written by Stephen Aubrey, directed by Jess Chayes. Presented at the Abingdon Theater.
- 2006 **Co-Lead Artist, Environment Designer**, *WE CAN'T REACH YOU, HARTFORD*, by The Assembly. Presented at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, Bedlam Theatre (Fringe First Award nominee).

Scenic Design for Live Performance

- 2024 *FROLIC*, a multisensory experience built from the ground up for children on the autism spectrum, by Trusty Sidekick Theatre Company. World Premiere at Chelsea Factory, then presented by The Rose Theater in Omaha and the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust (all in 2024).
- 2017-24 *WORD. SOUND. POWER.*, an annual hip-hop and spoken word concert directed by Baba Israel. Produced and presented by the Brooklyn Academy of Music (2017, 2018, 2019, 2024).
- 2023 *IN CORPO*, a new musical by The Assembly, Nate Weida (music/book/lyrics), Ben Beckley (book), and directed by Jess Chayes. World Premiere at Theatre Row.
- 2020 *THE BAD INFINITY*, a short film adapted from the plays of Mack Wellman, written and directed by Graham Sack, produced by Staging Film.
- 2019 *LOOKING AT YOU*, an opera by Kamala Sankaram (music) and Rob Handel (libretto), and directed by Kristin Marting. Produced by HERE Arts Center and Opera On Tap.
- MOTHER COURAGE*, directed by Emily Whelan. Produced by the Oakland Theater Project and presented at Mills College in Oakland.
- 2018 *A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE*, directed by Emily Whelan. Produced by the Oakland Theater Project and presented at the Alice Collective in San Francisco.
- Associate Scenic Designer: *RICHARD III*, directed by Elizabeth Williamson. Presented at Hartford Stage. Designed by Nick Vaughan
- 2017-18 *FOREIGN TO MYSELF*, a devised play by Goat in the Road Productions about PTSD in the veteran community, directed by Chris Kaminstein. Presented at the New Orleans Contemporary Arts Center (2017) and University of New Orleans (2018).

TEAR A ROOT FROM THE EARTH, a new opera about cycles of war in Afghanistan, combining Afghan and US folk music traditions, created by The New Wild. Presented at the New Ohio's Ice Factory (2017) and BRIC (2018).

2017 *THE LIGHT PRINCESS*, a new musical for young audiences by Alex Bechtel (music) and Anthony Lawton (book/lyrics), directed by Steve Pacek. Commissioned by the Arden Theatre in Philadelphia.

2016 Assistant Scenic Designer: Taylor Mac's *A 24-DECADE HISTORY OF POPULAR MUSIC*, directed by Niegel Smith and Taylor Mac. World premiere production at St. Ann's Warehouse. Designed by Mimi Lien.

IDIOT, adapted from the Dostoevsky novel by Robert Lyons, directed by Kristin Marting. Presented at HERE Arts Center.

2015-16 *HOLDEN*, written and directed by Anisa George. Presented at the FringeArts Theater in Philadelphia (2015) and the New Ohio Theater (2016).

2014-16 Six plays and musicals produced by the Kean University Theatre Department: *ELEKTRA*, *IN THE HEIGHTS*, *THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST*, *THE LOVER*, *CHILDREN OF EDEN*, and *PETER PAN*. Mentored 3 students in designing faculty-directed projects: Katherin Lopez on *RUINED*, Valentina Garcia on *KISS THE BRIDE*, and Sahirah Johnson on *JULIUS CAESAR*.

2014 *QUEEN OF THE NIGHT*, an immersive experience created by Randy Weiner and Christine Jones, which involved a full renovation of the Diamond Horseshoe in Times Square (now known as the Sony Hall). Associate Scenic Designer.

2013 *HERE WE ARE*, written and directed by Judith Malina, The Living Theatre.

so go the ghost of méxico, Part 1, a world premiere by Matthew Paul Olmos, directed by Meiyin Wang. Produced by La MaMa.

Associate Scenic Designer: *OLD FASHIONED PROSTITUTES*, written, directed, and designed by Richard Foreman. The Public Theater.

BLACKBIRD, written by Lucia Cox, directed by Nathan Shreeve. Presented at Location One Gallery in Soho.

Design Consultant: *BETWEEN THE DOOR AND THE STREET*, by Suzanne Lacy. A site-specific social practice piece produced by Creative Time and the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum.

2010-12 *GOODBAR*, a theatrical concert by Waterwell, directed by Arian Moayed and Tom Ridgely. Developed at East River Park's Summer Stage (2010), Ideal Glass Gallery (2010-11), and Yale Cabaret (2011), with a world premiere at the Under the Radar Festival at the Public Theater (2012).

- 2012 *THE CITY*, US premiere directed by Matthew McCray at Son of Semele Ensemble in Los Angeles.
- AND THEN THERE WERE NONE*, directed by Casey McClellan. Waterwell Professional Performing Arts School.
- ON THE FRONTIER*, directed by Lars Jan. Produced by the Center for New Performance in Los Angeles.
- 2010 *BOXED*, a new opera written and performed by Danielle Birrittella, directed by Lily Whitsitt. Presented at the Wild Beast at CalArts.
- 2009 *THE MISANTHROPE*, directed by Anna Brenner. Presented at the Undergroundzero Festival at PS 122.
- #9*, a new musical by Waterwell, directed by Tom Ridgeley. Presented at the 59E59.
- 2008 Video Design: *MY NAME IS RACHEL CORRIE*, directed by Cláudia Tatinge Nascimento at Wesleyan University (2008).
- 2005–08 Twelve plays as a student at Wesleyan University: *BIG LOVE, WE CAN'T REACH YOU HARTFORD, SEXUAL PERVERSITY IN CHICAGO, MARISOL, EVERYTHING IS JUST A THING, MISS[(ED) IT], ELECTRA, BEING ORDINARY, HEART PLAY(S), BY THE WAY, WESLEY GULCH, THE FACULTY ROOM.*
- 2006 Four plays at Princeton Summer Theater at Princeton University: *BETRAYAL, WAIT UNTIL DARK, BLACK COMEDY, LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS.*

RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP

Academic Publications

In Progress: "The Death of the Mainstream: Theatre, AI, and the Future of Work"

Performance Review: "Operatic Chambers." Review of *4.48 Psychosis* opera at the PROTOTYPE Festival, 2019. *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*. 42, no. 1 (2020): 43-48.

Public Humanities Publications

"Future Visions: Provocations for the Next Performance Ecosystem," a panel at the 20th Anniversary Prelude Festival, Curated and Moderated by Nicolas Benacerraf and Jess Applebaum, live-

streamed and archived on HowlRound Theatre Commons, October 11, 2023.

<https://howlround.com/happenings/prelude-festival-2023>

"The PublicsLab Archive," an online public humanities resource documenting the methodologies and impacts of the 5-year Mellon-funded program at the CUNY Graduate Center, featuring 11 audio interviews and a rich collection of resources, Edited by Jess Applebaum and Nicolas Benacerraf. August 2023. <https://publicslab.gc.cuny.edu/archive/>.

"A Report on the State of the Performing Arts," by The Brooklyn Commune Project (co-author). December 23, 2013. <https://brooklyncommune.org/the-bkcp-report/>.

"Politics and the Aesthetics of Social Movements." *Culturebot*. September 17, 2013.

"The Economic Dilemma of Live Performance" (a pedagogical story about the "cost disease" in the style of a Passover seder) at The Invisible Dog and Cloud City. 2013.

Conference Papers and Presentations

Juried Presentation: "The Death of the Mainstream: Theatre, AI, and the Future of Work," for the working group on "Changing Arts Ecologies and Infrastructures" at the annual meeting of the American Society for Theatre Research (Seattle, WA, November 2024).

Invited Participant: "Developing Dramaturgical Strategies for AI and XR alongside NYC's Contemporary Performance Scene," a two-day symposium funded by the National Science Foundation, at NYU's Tandon School of Engineering (Brooklyn, NY, September 2024.)

Keynote Workshop: "Goodbye to the Way Things Were: A Participatory Grieving Ritual to Acknowledge Change in the NYC Theater World" at A.R.T./New York's 2024 Spring Summit (New York, NY, June 2024).

Juried Presentation: "Scenography of a Capitalist Utopia: The Rise of the Superhighway and the Horizon of Hope," for the working group on "(Still) Finding Hope at the Theatre" at the annual meeting of the American Society for Theatre Research (Providence, RI, November 2023).

Juried Presentation: "The Emperor's Green Clothes: Crisis Dramaturgy as (Anti-)Political Theater," for the working group on "Do Something! Crisis and Catastrophe in Activist Dramaturgies" at the annual meeting of the American Society for Theatre Research (New Orleans, LA, November 2022).

Invited Presentation: "*SEAGULLMACHINE: A Century of Hamlets*," at the Wesleyan University Center for the Humanities conference on "Hyperbole" (2019).

Juried Presentation: "The Room Where It Happened: How *Hamilton* Constructs Its Viewing Public," for working group on "The Public's Many Theatres" at the annual meeting of the American Society for Theatre Research (Arlington, VA, November 2018).

Journal Editing

2017-18 **Assistant Managing Editor**, European Stages
Assistant Book Review Editor, Theatre Survey

INVITED TALKS

Academic Talks

2022 "Advanced Dissertation Research," Theatre & Performance program, The Graduate Center.

2021 "Public-Facing Scholarship and Artistic Practice," a professionalization event at the Theatre & Performance doctoral program, The Graduate Center.
 "Political Theater and Protest as Performance," Brooklyn College, Theater Department.
 "Erwin Piscator's Political Aesthetics," The Actor's Workshop & Repertory Company (West Palm Beach, FL).
 "Positioning the Audience in Critical Space," Hunter College, Theater Department.
 Panel Moderator: "Protest, Assembly, and the Everyday," at the CUNY Doctoral Students' Theatre Association conference on "Negotiating Quotidian: Performing the Everyday" for the Theatre & Performance program at the Graduate Center.

2020 Panelist: "Innovative Structures," Baruch College, M.A. program in Arts Administration.

2019 Panelist: "Practice-As-Research Roundtable," a professionalization event at the Theatre & Performance PhD program at The Graduate Center.

2018 Panelist: "Arts, Culture, and the Civic Environment," Baruch College, M.A. program in Arts Administration.
 "Art as Social Resistance: A Century of Hamlets, from *The Seagull* to *Hamletmachine*," Sarah Lawrence College, Theater Department.

2016 "Re-Assembling the Avant-Garde," New York University, Richard Schechner's course in the Performance Studies doctoral program.

- 2015 "Constructing Beckett's Void: Manifesting *Godot* in the Present," Colgate University's interdisciplinary colloquium on "The Challenges of Modernity," open to all first-year students.
- 2014 "Class Subconscious: The Work of The Assembly," New York University, Richard Schechner's course in the Performance Studies doctoral program.
- "Creating Sustainability in a Changing Field," California Institute of the Arts, MFA program in Producing.
- "Embodying the Sixties: The Aesthetics & Politics of HOME/SICK," Wesleyan University, Theater Department.
- Panelist: "The Intrinsic Value of Art and Science," the Undergroundzero Festival (NYC).
- Panelist: "American Theater and the Aesthetics of Democracy," Public Theater, Under the Radar Festival (NYC).

Arts & Activism Talks

- 2023 Featured Instructor: "Design for Directors," Brown University / Trinity Rep MFA Program in Directing, a six-week seminar about rethinking the design process as part of the Professional Development and Performance course for MFA directors.
- 2022 Lecturer and Workshop Leader: "Set Design Across Media," BRIC Arts & Media in Brooklyn, a free public event for "Media Maker Weekend."
- 2021 Panelist: "Making Art, Making Change: Working with a Justice-Forward Practice," by FORGE NYC (2021).
- 2019 Panelist: "Producing and Directing the Event in Mac's Plays," the Flea Theater, Mac Wellman Symposium.
- 2018 2-Day Workshop: "Devising from the Ground Up" (with Jess Chayes), at Hamilton College, Theater Department.
- 2016 Invited Panelist: "Design in Non-Traditional Spaces," at the annual meeting of the United States Institute for Theatre Technology (Salt Lake City, UT).
- 2014 Invited Panelist & Evaluator, New York University, Devised Theater Program at NYU's Playwrights Horizons Theater School.
- 3-Day Workshop: "Devising from the Ground Up" (with Jess Chayes), Wesleyan University, Theater Department.
- 2012-14 "Interpreting Theatrical Design," The New School (four semesters).

2012 Featured Artist: "Design Meeting 2012," a national showcase of emerging designers from CalArts, NYU, Yale, and elsewhere.

FELLOWSHIPS, GRANTS, AWARDS

2024 Social Practice Actionist Fellowship, a public humanities & social justice initiative at CUNY.

Telly Award Silver Prize, for my role as Producer and Production Designer of *The Bad Infinity* (film).

2023 Art Science Connect Research Fellowship, Provost's Office at The Graduate Center.

Jewish Studies Research Grant, the Center for Jewish Studies at The Graduate Center.

2023, 21 Doctoral Student Research Grant, The Graduate Center.

2020-22 National Endowment for Democracy Grant (3-time recipient of \$50k award) for *Everybody Is Gone*, a piece of "immersive journalism" about the Uyghur cultural genocide.

2019-22 Mellon Public Humanities Fellowship (3 years), PublicsLab at The Graduate Center.

2017-22 Graduate Center Fellowship (5 years), Program in Theatre & Performance at The Graduate Center.

2022 Public Humanities Early Research Initiative / Summer Research Fellowship Grant, PublicsLab at the Graduate Center.

2016 Profiled and interviewed in *TDR: The Drama Review*: "Circling Up with The Assembly: A Theatre Collective Comes of Age" by Cindy Rosenthal (cover story).

2015 International news attention for *UP AND AWAY*: featured on *NBC Nightly News with Lester Holt* (Oct. 2015); *CBS New York* (Oct. 2015); *Al Jazeera Global* (Nov. 2015); and multiple features in the *New York Times*.

2013 *L.A. Weekly* Set Design Award, for my design of *THE CITY*.

SERVICE

Departmental Service

- 2020-22 Founding Member, Committee on Anti-Racism, Ph.D. Program in Theatre & Performance, The Graduate Center.
- 2019-20 Vice President for Conferences and Awards, The Doctoral Theatre Students Association, Ph.D. Program in Theatre & Performance, The Graduate Center.
- Chair, Edwin Booth Award Committee, honoring scenographer Mimi Lien, The Graduate Center. (<https://mimilien.edwinboothaward.com/>)
- 2014-16 Member, Committees Curriculum, Assessment, Personnel, and Reaccreditation, Theater Department, Kean University.

Anti-Racism Trainings for Academics

- 2024 Co-Creator & Facilitator: "Calling Us In Monthly: An Antiracist Processing Space for White Folks in the Arts," an online discussion platform presented by Calling Us In (Sep., Oct., and Nov. 2024).
- 2023 Co-Creator & Facilitator: "Anti-Racist Mutual Listening Space," an online discussion platform presented by Calling Us In (Dec. 2023).
- 2021, 23 Creator & Facilitator: "Anti-Racist Resource Gathering," by the Anti-Racism Committee at the Theatre & Performance program, The Graduate Center (Feb. 2023, Oct. 2021).
- 2022 Co-Creator & Facilitator: "Anti-Racism in Academic Theater Spaces," an online discussion platform presented by Calling Us In (Jun. and Nov. 2022).
- Panelist: "Anti-Racist Pedagogies in the Classroom," a professionalization event at the Theatre & Performance doctoral program, The Graduate Center (Oct. 2022).