

# Past theatre productions: from archive to virtual reconstruction

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# Background

## **Research project on Marivaux's stagings :**

- Creations' and creative process' archival documents
- From the 18th to the 21st century
- European and non-European stages

# Can we visualize productions from the past ?

- **reconstitution hypothesis**

but

- **documented**
- **historically and philologically well-founded**

# Corpus

## **Theatrical staging:**

- **Performance of a known and preserved theatrical text**
- **Defined space: stage dimensions and shape**
- **Information added by:**
  - **Set models, costume models, photos...**

# What kind of documents?

- **Prompt books**

(whose typology differs according to the theatrical traditions of different contexts)

**In France: *Relévés de mise en scène*:**

meta-writing: recurring formulas

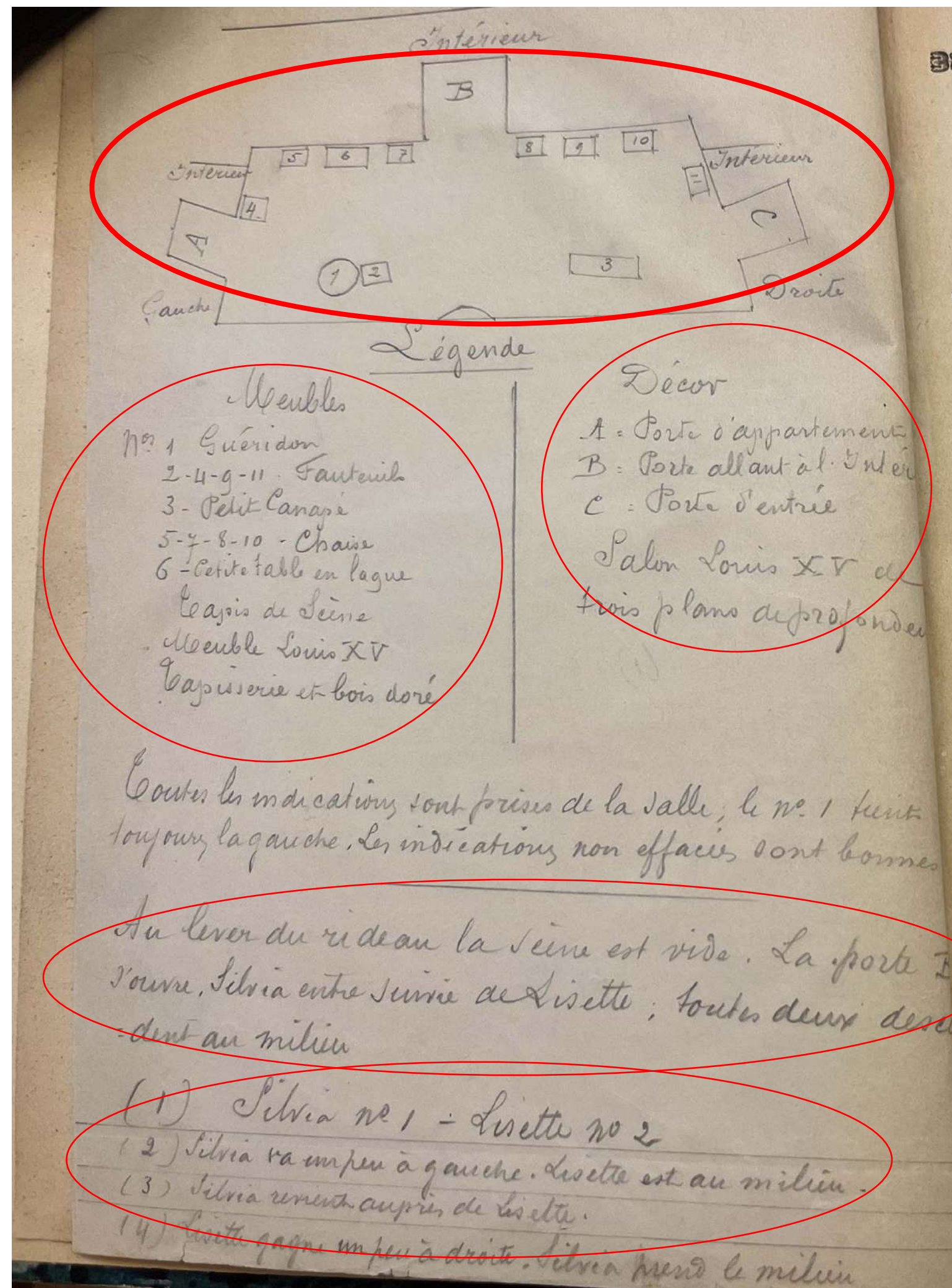
typology definition of:

actions, movements, displacements, proxemic situations and mimics

# Which steps for reconstruction?

- studying the documents containing the stage and actors directions essential for imagining the staging as it had been conceived at the time of creation
- comparing the annotations on a performance recording with the indications contained in the staging notes for that performance
- proposing a reference ontology, ordered by categories of actions and spatiotemporal reference points.

# Example 1 : a script annotated by an actor (around 1860)



**Plantation**

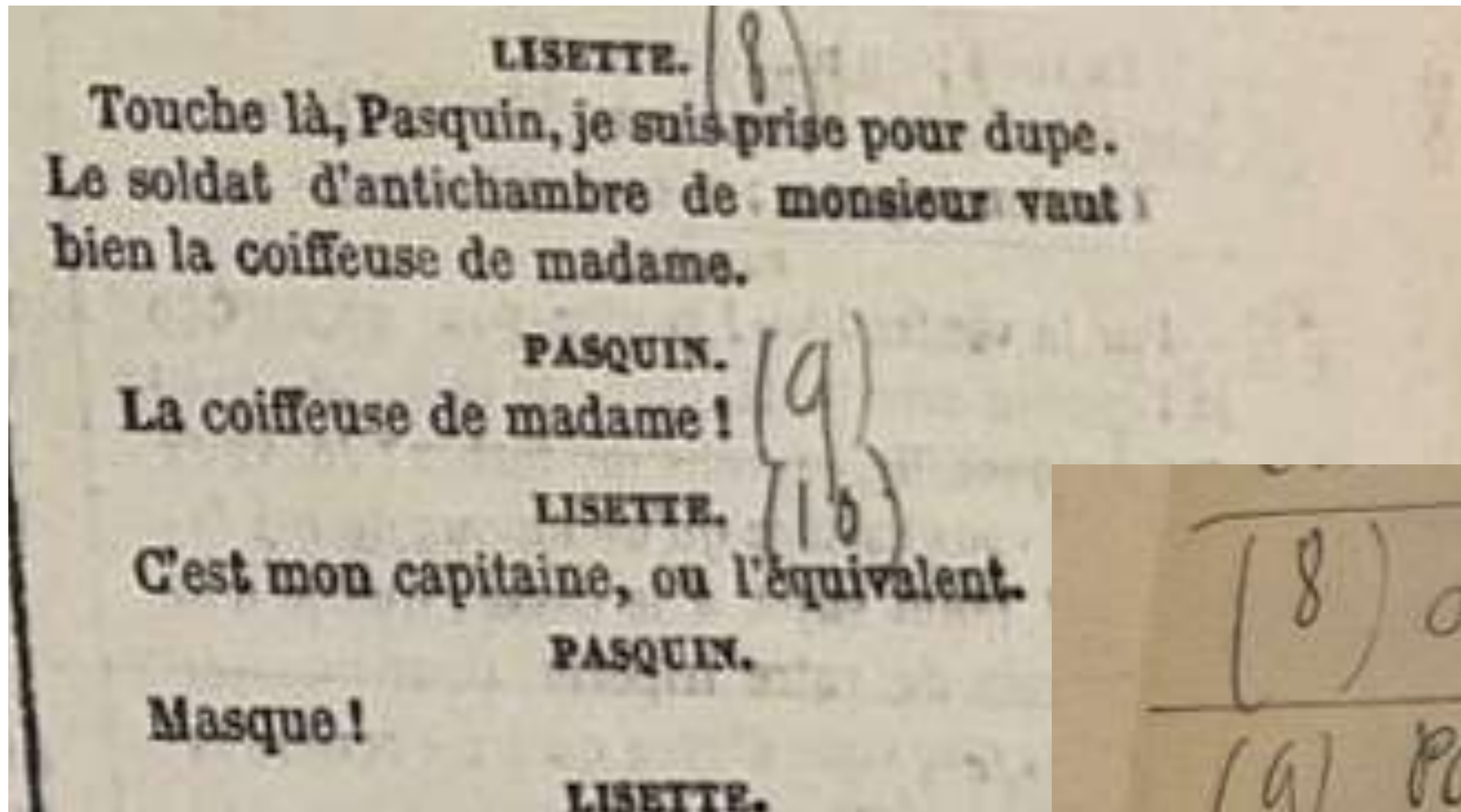
**set design / props**

**entrance of the two characters at the beginning (from where and to where)**

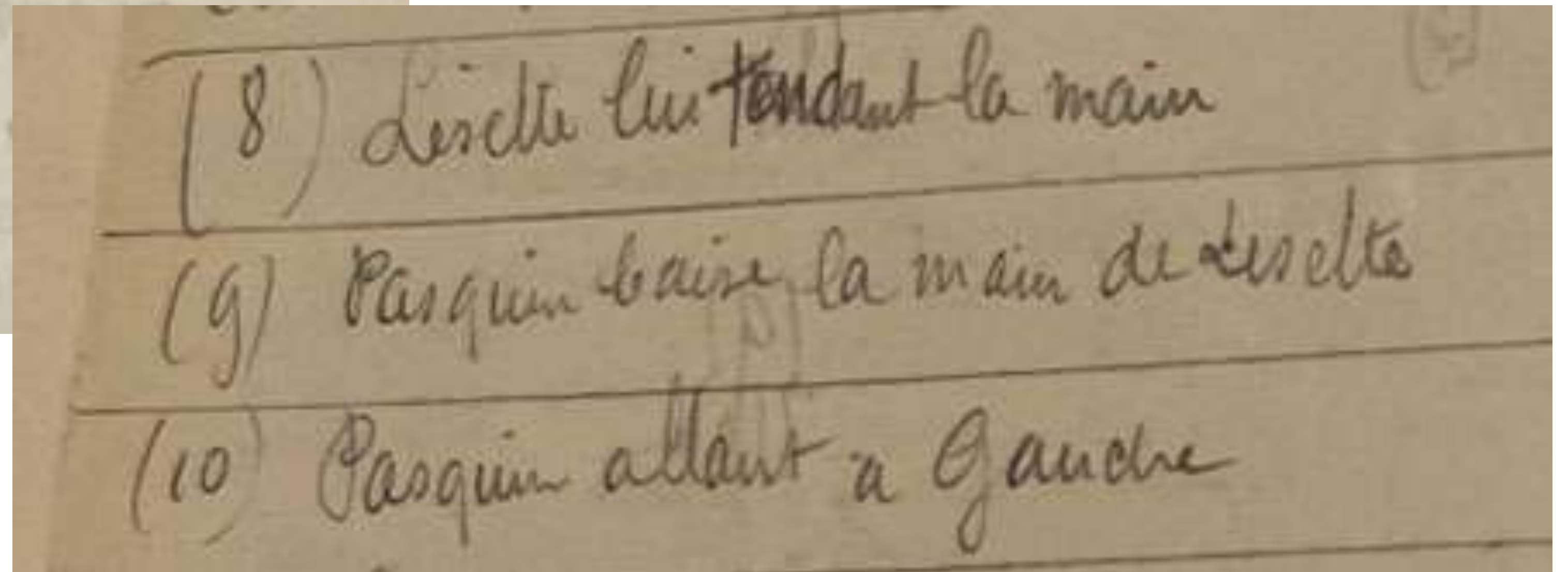
**successive moves by the two actors**



# Example 1 : a script annotated by an actor (around 1860)

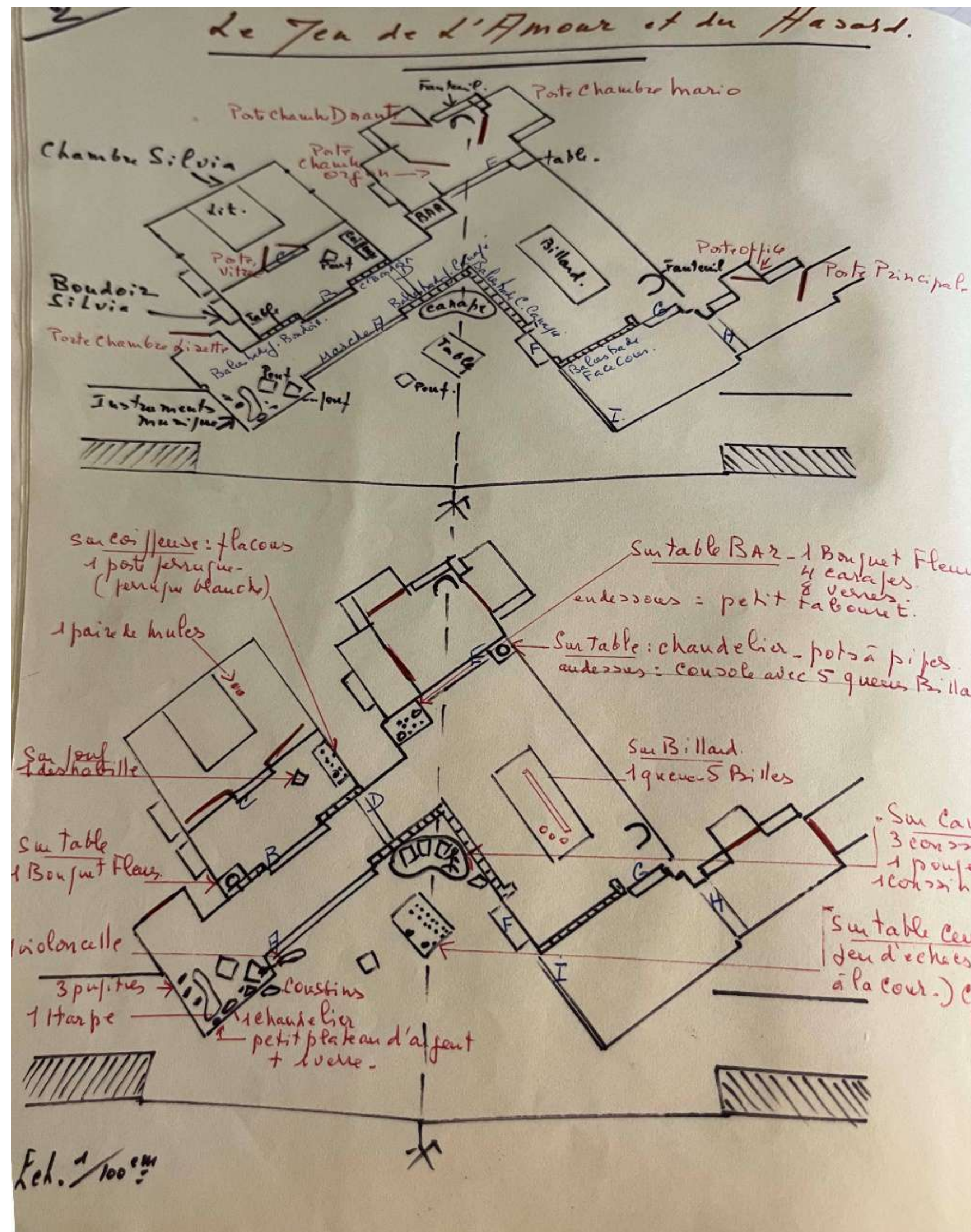


On stage the actor usually adds these words:  
*I wouldn't be surprised if these hands smelled  
of ointment!* Joking antics, but not by the  
author.





# Example 2 : *relevé de mise en scene* + video of the show (1970s)



## *Le jeu de l'amour et du hasard*

Direction : Jean-Paul Roussillon (1976)

Production : Comédie-Française



Example 2 : *relevé de mise en scene* + video of the show (1970s)

The show's video recording enables us to transform the **indications in the *relevé*** into **annotations in the video** itself

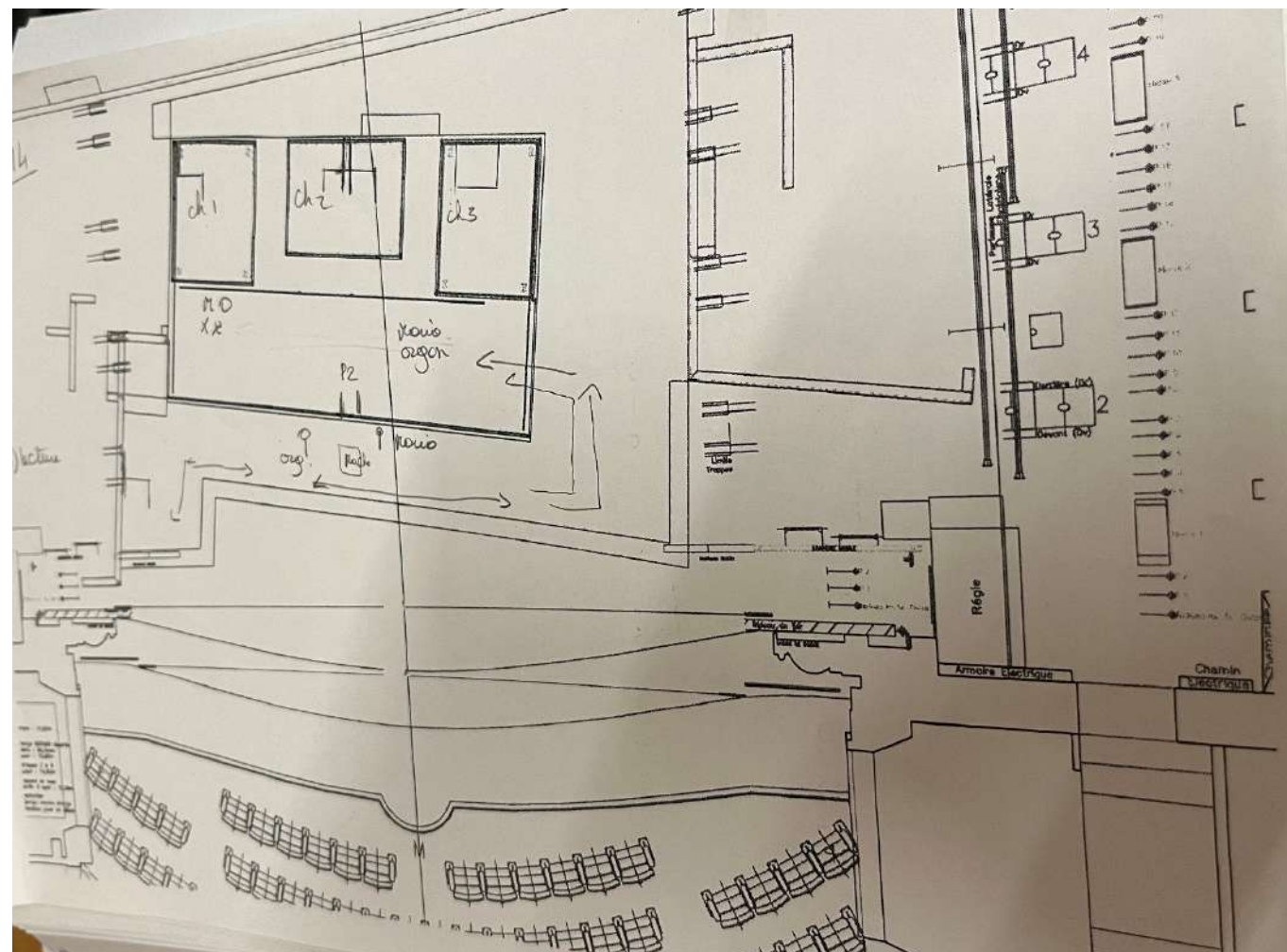
⇒ example of the labels to define an ontology

⇒ opportunity to verify the relevance of the categories of descriptive labels

⇒ purpose of making labels' transformation automatic in the virtual reconstruction



# Example 3 : *relevé de mise en scene* + video of the show (2000s)



suite p14

f+e) "voilà à qui le père n'est..."  
→ orgon reprend la lettre  
→ nous dans fosse nous euh  
→ O l'arrête de la voie "ce n'est pas leur"  
→ nous revenent d'O.

TS Bo 2 fosse J.

Ils parlent chacun d'un côté de fosse 1  
° 9 || 9 ° sorte de petit feu de cache cache.

Ils sont dans la conspiration, ils parlent bas, pour ne pas se faire entendre.

Orgon reprend la lettre à nous



# Motivation

Virtual reality is a novel way to experience theater

- better than radio
- better than television
- better than cinema

Much work on contemporary production

- 360 camera capture
- volumetric capture

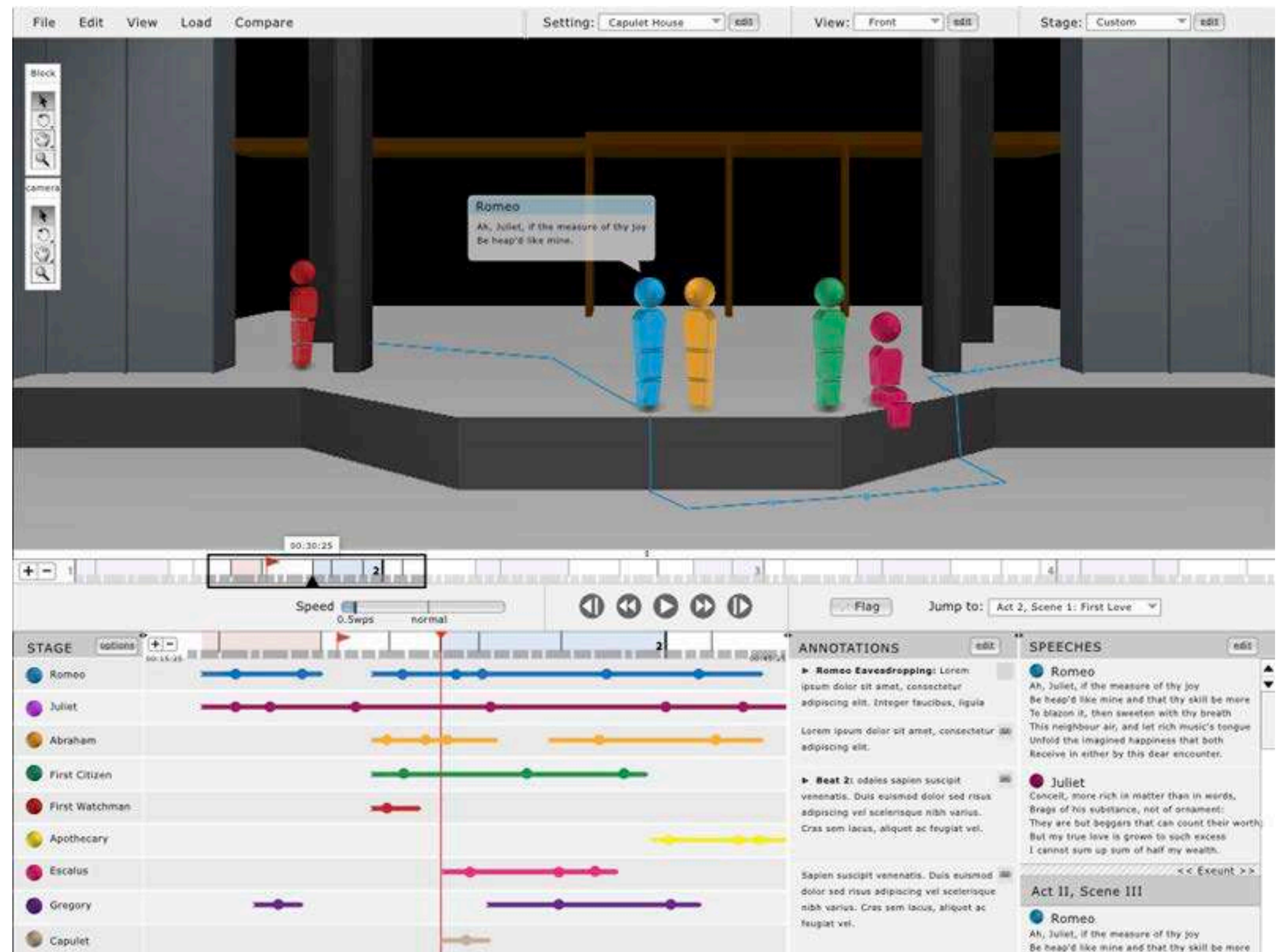
Can we use it to visualize productions from the past ?



# Research question

Can we use archive documents (prompt books / relevés de mise en scène) to reconstruct a stage production from the past and experience it in virtual reality?

# Related work



- Jennifer Roberts-smith. Performing the Archive: Visualizing Performance Reconstruction in the Simulated Environment for Theatre (SET). Cultural Histories: Emergent Theories, Methods, and the Digital Turn. March, 2012.



# Related work



- Eleni Bozia. Reviving Classical Drama: virtual reality and experiential learning in a traditional classroom. Digit. Humanit. Q. 2018.

# From archive to virtual reconstruction

Prompt books describe in detail the movements, gestures and interactions of the actors, in parallel with the text. They are written in natural language accompanied by sketches.

## Problem

They are difficult to use with computerized tools - can we re-organize them into a more formal notation, suitable for reconstructing / recreating a stage production ?

## Proposed solution

We encode the prompt book into “stage actions” written in blocking notation and organize them temporally into a non linear animation (NLA) timeline in Blender 3D



# From archive to virtual reconstruction

SILVIA But, again, what business is it of yours?

1 Why answer for my feelings?

LISETTE I believed that, on this occasion, your feelings would resemble those of everyone else.

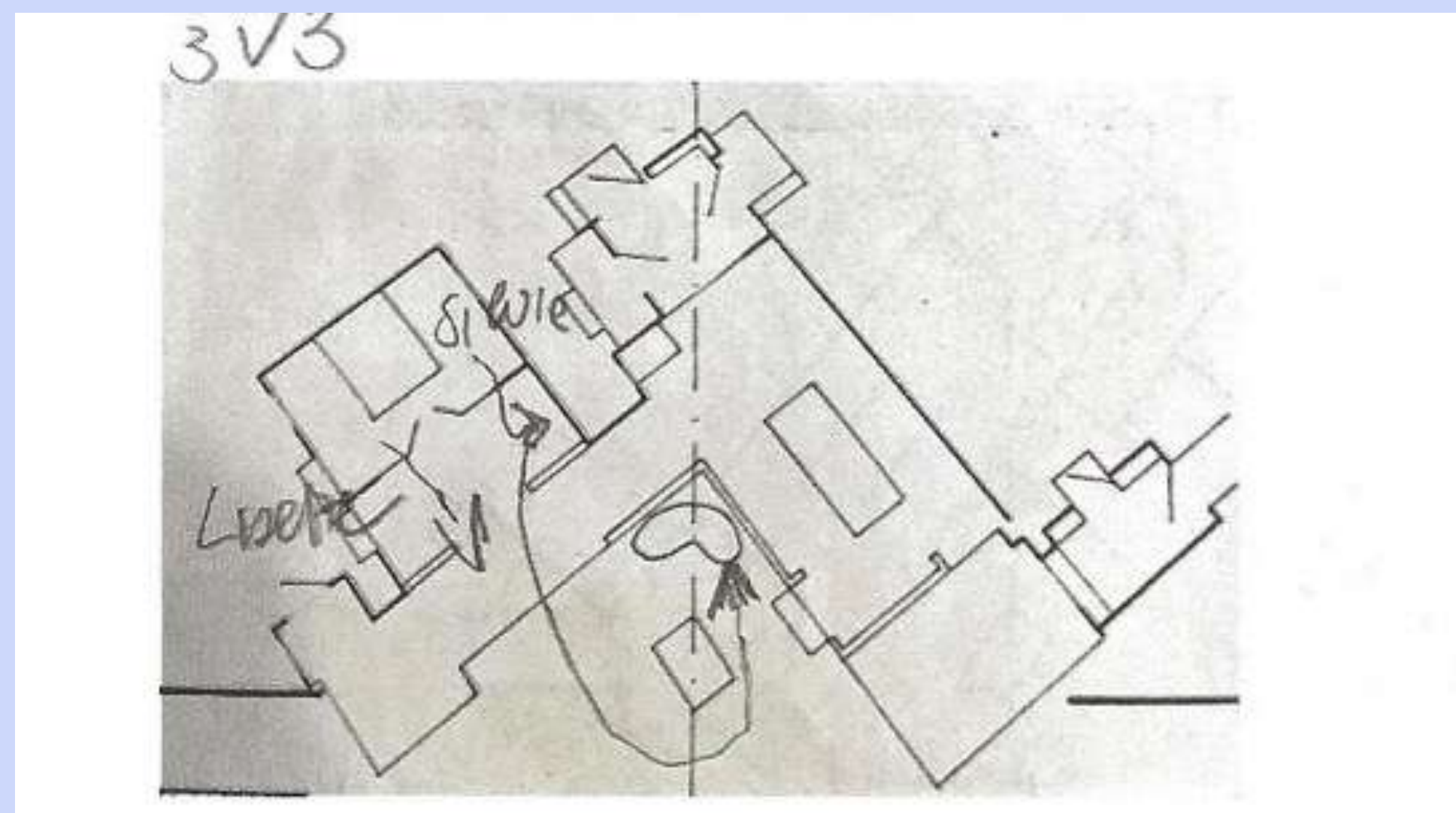
2 3 Your father asks me if you are happy that he is marrying you.

Silvia is lying on the right side of the bed. Lisette standing on the left side.

1 Silvia throws back the sheet and sits on the edge of the bed with her legs to the right. Then she will put on slippers

2 Silvia gets up, goes down, grabs the dressing gown placed on the pouf in front of the dressing table; then continues her movement to the right of the central table.

3 When Silvia is in place, Lisette goes down to step B (right foot on step A)

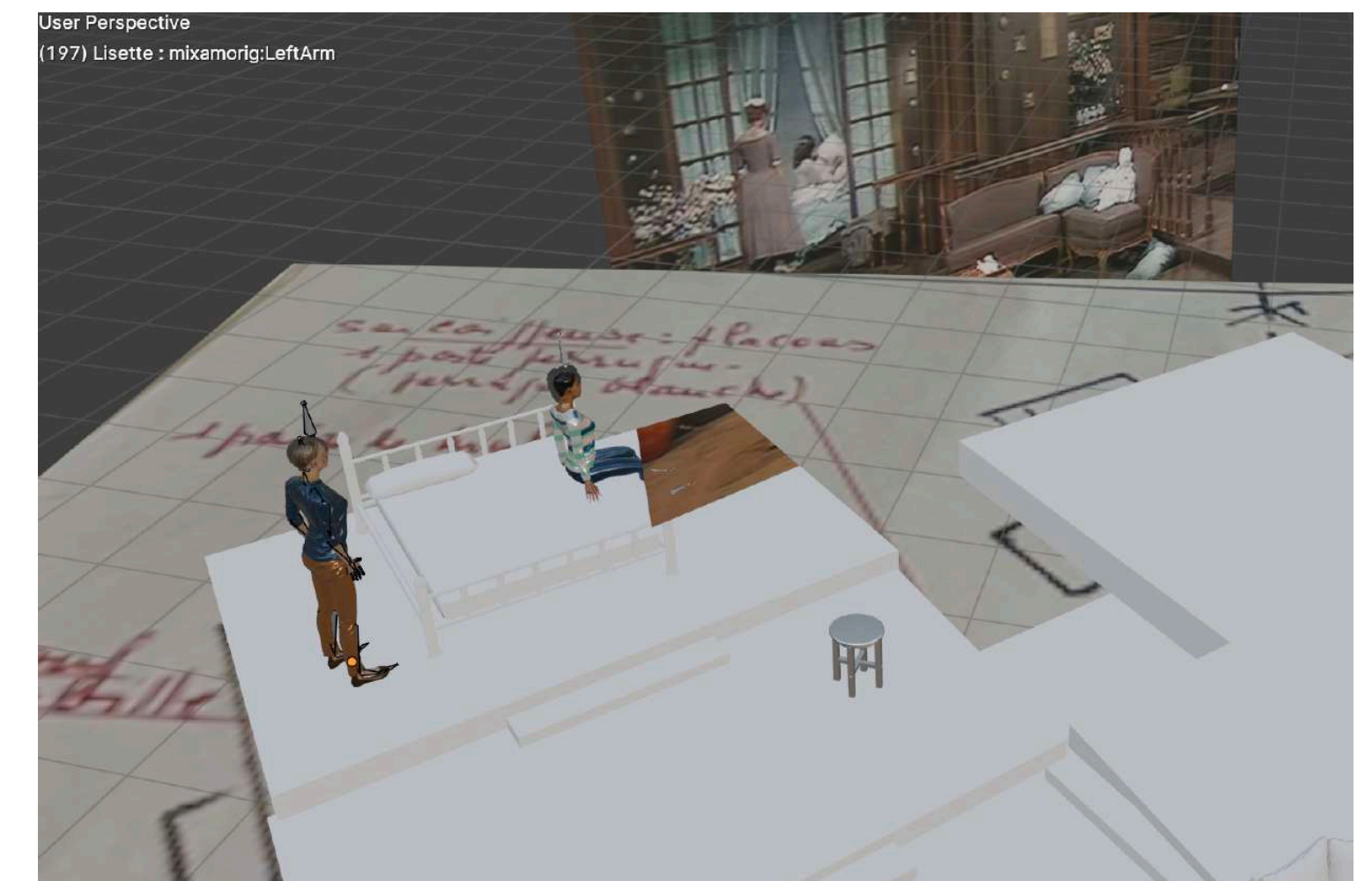
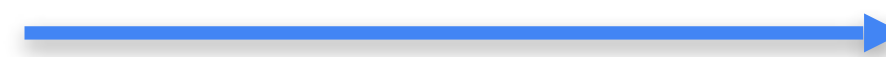
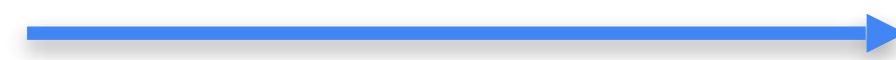
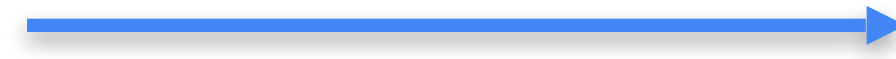


# From archive to virtual reconstruction

Silvia is lying on the right side of the bed. Lisette standing on the left side.

Silvia throws back the sheet and sits on the edge of the bed with her legs to the right.

SILVIA But, again, what business is it of yours? 1 Why answer for my feelings?





# From archive to virtual reconstruction

Sylvia is lying on the right side of the bed. Lisette standing on the left side.

Sylvia throws back the sheet and sits on the edge of the bed with her legs to the right.

SILVIA But, again, what business is it of yours? Why answer for my feelings?

- LYING(Sylvia, right side of the bed)
- STANDING(Lisette, left side of the bed)
- THROW(Sylvia, sheet)
- SIT(Sylvia, on the edge of the bed with her legs to the right)
- TALK(Sylvia, But again)





# From archive to virtual reconstruction

Silvia

gesture

look

touch

say

move

lay 01

throw

wear shoe

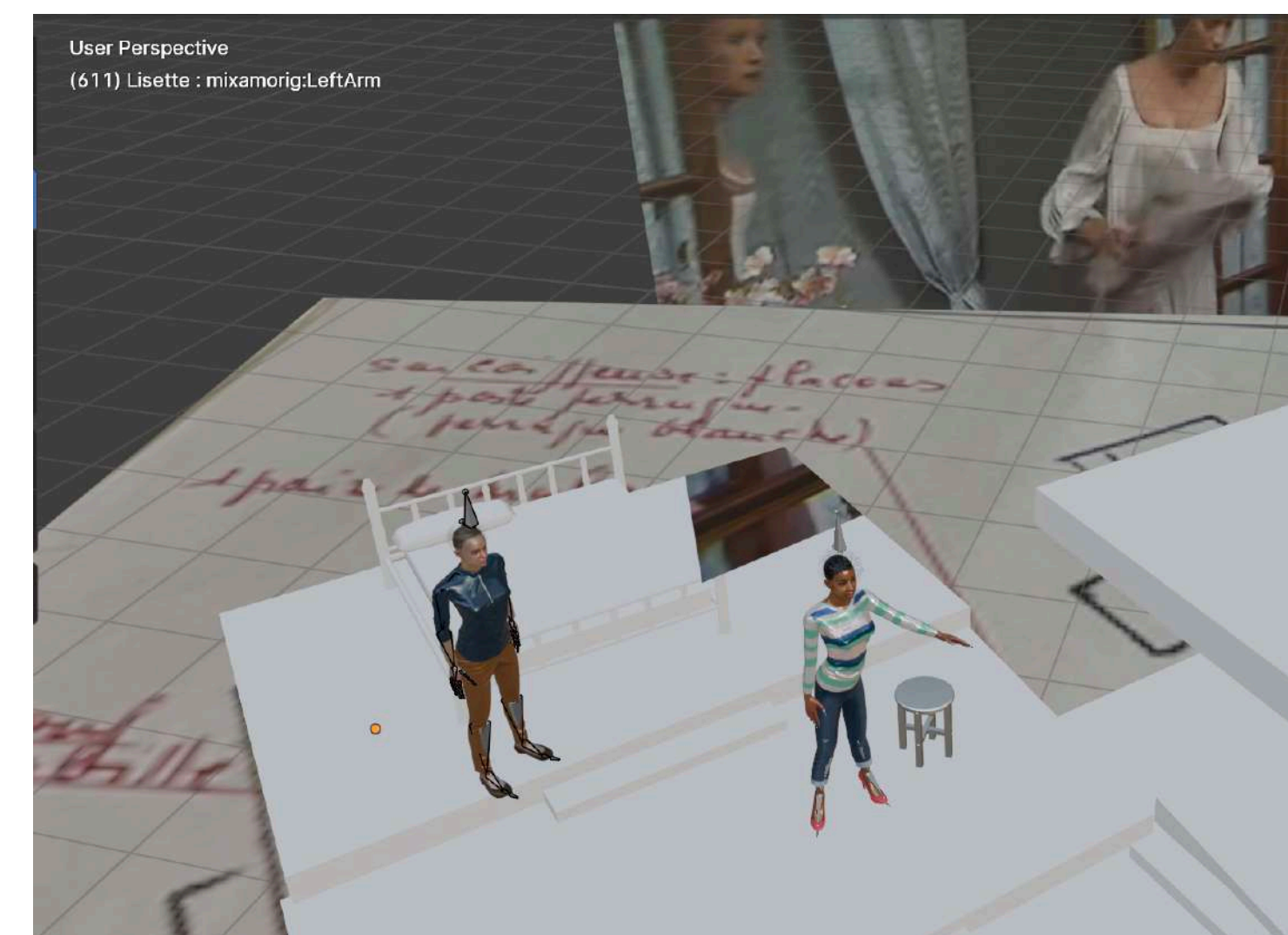
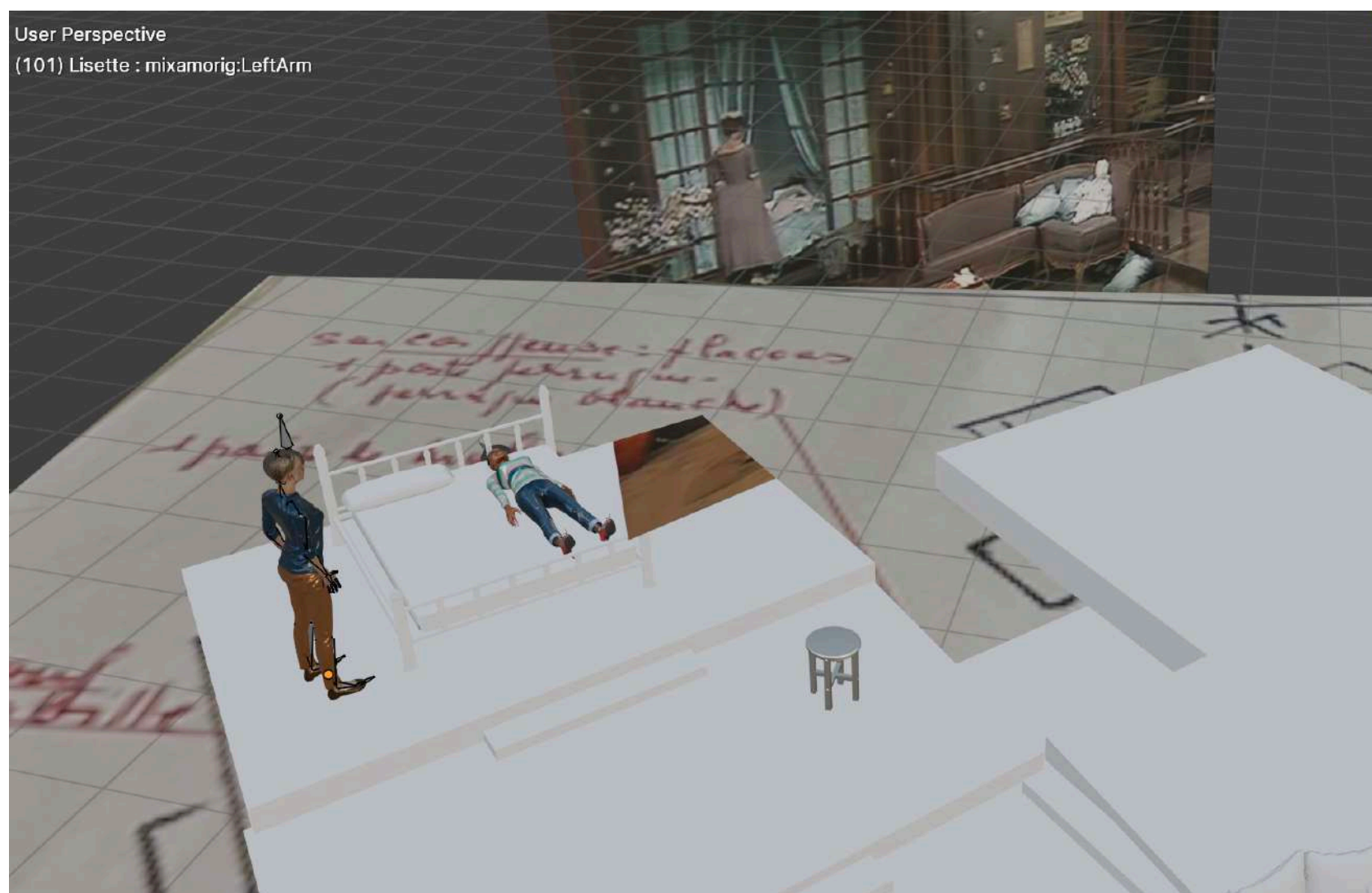
take

talk

talk to

sit on bed 05

s walk to table 10





## Future work : automation

- Recognition and classification of action phrases
- Analysis of prompt book sketches
- Synchronization of stage actions
- Parameterized animation

# From archive to virtual reconstruction

Thank you !