Claudio Bernardi
and Giulia Innocenti Malini

(edited by)

# PERFORMING THE SOCIAL

## Education, Care and Social Inclusion through Theatre

**LO SPETTACOLO DAL VIVO**
**PER UNA CULTURA DELL'INNOVAZIONE**

PERFORMING ARTS.
For a Culture of Innovation

Series curated by Mimma Gallina (Associazione Culturale Ateatro), Oliviero Ponte di Pino (Associazione Culturale Ateatro).

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# THE SOCIAL
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LO SPETTACOLO
DAL VIVO
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DELL'INNOVAZIONE

FRANCOANGELI

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# Notes on Translations

By way of introduction, it seems useful to clarify here the meaning of certain terms used throughout the following volume. The terms *Animazione teatrale* (theatre animation), *Nuovo teatro* (new theatre), *Teatro sociale d'arte* (artistic social theatre) and *Teatro sociale di comunità* (social community theatre) are quoted in Italian because they indicate experiences and definitions used in Italy and which do not have an exact equivalent in English.

*Animazione teatrale* is a cultural movement developed in Italy in the 1960s and 1970s. Through play, theatre, feasts and every form of art, it aimed to promote a free, creative, social and political pedagogy at school, in the neighbourhoods and in every sphere of the life of children and young people.

*Nuovo teatro* indicates all the artistic experiences which, since the second half of the 20th century, have revolutionised the forms of expression and the professional and organisational practices of the theatre, breaking with the past and affirming the intrinsic value of what is new.

*Teatro sociale d'arte* refers to professional groups formed by or including people with disabilities, their experiences and innovative aesthetics.

*Teatro sociale di comunità* is the specific term used by the Social and Community Theatre of Turin to indicate a community theatre that applies social theatre methodologies.

Finally, unless otherwise indicated, the translations of works cited have been produced for this volume, endeavouring to use unbiased language whenever possible. When this has been difficult to achieve, in the interest of clarity and readability, genders have been used in their inclusive form.

# Foreword

*Mimma Gallina and Oliviero Ponte di Pino*

During the past twenty years, since *ateatro.it* went online on 14 January 2001, we have been questioning ourselves, and our authors and readers, about the place of theatre in contemporary society. We did not have an answer, but many questions. Some of them had to do with the role of art in the *polis*, others with the use of artistic practices in the growth of individuals and groups (a long time ago, our own lives had been transformed by theatre!). In our search for a necessary theatre, we kept an eye on what happened in the mainstream, but we also became more and more interested in what was widening the borders of this ancient art. Or, perhaps more accurately, in what was taking it back to its origins.

As theatregoers, we found ourselves more and more often visiting prisons, hospitals, schools, deprived neighbourhoods, shelters for immigrants and refugee camps... There, we met people who felt that theatre had become for them a means for achieving personal and collective awareness and inner growth, and a tool to express their identity in a democratic society. In their works, where we often saw on stage people who were in one way or another affected by disadvantage, we saw beauty at work. The differences that were the focus of our attention unexpectedly shed a new light on the human condition, on our personal condition.

We felt that something was changing in the ancient art of the theatre. During the theatrical revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, the emphasis was mainly on content: theatre could be political, feminist, queer, post-colonial, physical, but we also loved the theatre of images... Alternatively, the focus was on opposing tradition: in this case, the labels were avant-garde, research or laboratory, post-dramatic, New or Third Theatre, and so on.

At a certain moment, the emphasis began to shift towards the relationship between theatrical practices and their audience, or their users. The focus turned to the people, who felt that theatre was not an art, or a job, or an antiquate form of entertainment: it was something that could change their lives. That could force them to imagine that they could be different people. These people believed that they could experience life-changing events with their bodies, in relationship with other bodies, on the stage and in the audience.

Of course, in this path one could encounter many obstacles. It is always difficult to find the balance between the artistic and the social or therapeutic targets of a project. And, of course, the relationship with the patrons is not always easy: it is often a public institution wanting to re-activate its guests... but not too much! Bureaucracies have one goal: to preserve themselves, changing as little as possible. The relationship with the audience also presents its problems: non-professional actors might arouse a morbid curiosity in their spectators, or on the contrary elicit a paternalistic indulgence and be considered "children of a lesser God".

But the aesthetic strength and the social impact of many of these projects were illuminating. More and more people felt that the theatre could be useful in many different situations. And they began using it.

This led to other opportunities, and therefore other problems. The first artists to work in this field could use some of their previous experience in theatrical training, such as the theories and practices of Jacob Moreno, Augusto Boal, or Giuliano Scabia, or perhaps Jerzy Grotowski. But, in the end, it was mainly a "learning by doing" exercise. In recent years, several universities have been offering a more structured approach, trying to convey the different skills that are necessary to fulfil such a delicate task. Which can be the right way to train the professionals in a new field, that is at the same time so specific, related to very special situations, and so universal, dealing with human beings in their entirety and complexity?

Over the years Ateatro tried to monitor the growing galaxy of experiences that converge in what we call "social and community theatre" (but even this definition has been questioned, as you will see).

We tried to understand what was happening, sometimes at a very high speed, and to follow its evolution with writing, research, meetings and sometimes training opportunities.

Several of the "good practices" submitted in the different editions of *Le Buone Pratiche del Teatro* (from 2004 onwards) were put into practice in this area (Gallina and Ponte di Pino, 2014). Among other projects, Ateatro also organised the meetings *Teatro, performance e arti partecipative: un nuovo crocevia disciplinare e professionale* (3 March 2018), *Teatro Sociale e di Comunità: la formazione degli operatori. Scuole e idee a confronto* (5 November 2016, see Fiaschini, 2018b), and the workshop *Il teatro detenuto insegnato dalle detenute: perché formarsi da chi si forma*, held in the Vigevano prison and taught by Mimmo Sorrentino with the inmates Micaela, Margherita, Teresa and Rosaria (3-4 November 2016)[1].

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[1] Some images of the workshop appear in the documentary *Cattività*, directed by Bruno Oliviero (2020), documenting Mimmo Sorrentino's experience in the Vigevano prison.

When we were asked to take part in the International Conference *Performing the Social. Education, Care and Social Inclusion though Theatre*, we were honoured and happy. We had often worked with Claudio Bernardi, Giulia Innocenti Malini and many of the discussants in the past, and we always felt there was a common ground connecting us. We are therefore very pleased to publish this book in the series *Lo spettacolo dal vivo. Per una cultura dell'innovazione*.

These essays can help us to understand the evolution of this extraordinary phenomenon from a historical point of view, and the opportunities and difficulties presented by these practices. Most of all, this book tells us that to be human means, among other things, to be able to take care of other human beings with our bodies, with our language, with our emotions, with our reason. With our flesh. The theatrical practices that are the subject of this book are reminding us that we remain humans, and theatrical humans, even in the digital age.

# Prologue

*Claudio Bernardi*

Just as music is the art of sounds, theatre is the art of bodies. Individual and social. Music and theatre are part of the great family of the performing arts. They are used to create artistic products and for the self-creation of people, groups, communities. This last aspect is discussed in this volume.

It gathers two types of contributions. One comes from the interventions of some of the speakers at the International Conference *Performing the Social. Education, Care and Social Inclusion through Theatre*, held in Milan on 20-21 September 2019. The second part brings together the reflections of some of the researchers of the PRIN (Research Project of National Relevance) with the same title. The project, which lasted three years from 2017 to 2019, involved five Italian universities: La Sapienza of Rome, the Universities of Genoa, Pavia, Turin, and the Università Cattolica of Milan. Its results are being published by Bulzoni Editore between 2021 and 2022[2].

The focus of the project was the application of social theatre to the fields of education, training, health and inclusion. Social theatre belongs to the large family of applied theatre, an umbrella term that includes different performing arts and practices. Their common denominator is the direct participation of people, groups and communities in the improvement of their life-worlds. The phenomenon of people and communities carrying out theatrical, playful, festive, performative activities is spreading all over the world. This volume, divided theatrically into five acts with a prologue and an epilogue, questions why and how this is happening, especially in Italy.

In a theatrical prologue, a brief account is given of the antecedent that introduces the scenic action. Authors take the opportunity to explain or discuss their work. The antecedent of this text is social theatre and I am the author of the definition of social theatre. Together with my colleagues, I have spent

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[2] The following books will be published: Cavaglieri L. and Gandolfi R., eds., *I teatri universitari nei territori del sociale: storie, azioni, progetti*; Di Palma G. and Scaturro I., eds., *La pedagogia nel teatro sociale*; Fiaschini F. and Gandolfi R., eds., *Estetica e pratiche della performance nello spazio sociale*; Pontremoli A. and Rossi Ghiglione A., eds., *Performing arts, well-being e salute di comunità*; Bino C. and Locatelli S., eds., *I teatri della comunità. Feste, eventi, performances*.

my life in the research and application of social theatre. Why social? Not because it deals with social problems, but because the main concern of humanity is the good, or bad, relationship with oneself, with others, with the world. For human life it is fundamental to be partners, to associate freely. The stronger this alliance, freer and more egalitarian, the more positively one can create one's own life, family, group, community, society, and can overcome adversity and solve problems. To form, to strengthen, to create and to belong to any human gathering requires an empty space, a disinterested activity, a dedicated time, right for knowledge, reflection, invention, planning, problem solving, vision and mission.

The definition of social theatre came to me from the name given to many theatre buildings in Italy, called *Teatro Sociale*, literally "social theatre", and dating as far back as the 18th century. For its construction, the aristocratic and bourgeois classes of a city formed a society, whose members paid the social dues to build and then to run their theatre. They decided everything that had to do with it: activities, shows, expenses, receipts, entertainment, and so on. In that theatre the show – predominantly melodrama – was almost a minor activity. People would go there to play, eat, party, perform, have love affairs, do business, play political games...

The social theatre of the 20th and 21st century is very different. It is a theatre born for the classes and people who are oppressed and experience difficult situations. At first it may look like a consolatory and compassionate theatre for the disadvantaged. But it is not. Social theatre in Italy understood from early on that the time spent at the theatre is not effective if everything good that happens in a theatre workshop or in a performance remains an exception and does not become the rule. The art of everyday life. The people, actors and authors of the artistic performance, must become actors and authors of their own life. The human circle of the artistic space must necessarily widen to include the families, the community, the institutions, the world. Social theatre is this: creating members, who feel they belong to associations, through beautiful actions, beautiful performances, beautiful relationships. Imagining beautiful people, beautiful communities, beautiful societies. And a beautiful Earth.

In the first act, social theatre is approached from three points of view: anthropological, sociological, theatrical. David Le Breton explores the theatricality of our daily life in the great theatre of the world. Emmanuel Wallon focuses on the political function of theatre and wonders how and how much social theatre is an instrument of the system, when it loses its function of critique and contestation of power. Marco De Marinis does not believe any longer in the aesthetics of representation, but he believes in the aesthetics of

action, and points to the maximum performative participation of people in the burning issues of society as the new path for the theatre of political and civil engagement.

The second act examines the social, political and community functions of the performing arts and in particular of the theatre. Giulia Innocenti Malini sketches a brief history of social theatre in Italy. She reveals, on the one hand, its differences and specificity compared to the large family of applied theatre, and outlines, on the other hand, its collaborative and participatory, rather than antagonistic, spirit, when employed as a socio-political practice. Isabel Bezelga accounts for another context, that of Brazil and Portugal, in which theatre is seen as a bottom-up, participatory process that strengthens and builds the community. In a more international, political context, Diana Taylor finds that the archiving, documentation and diffusion of artistic performances is a new and powerful form of performance, spreading ideas, forms, cultures, actions of protest and of resilience of individuals, communities and peoples devastated by the ignominy of power.

The final three acts move into the specific areas of the PRIN research *Performing the Social*: education, care and inclusion. The third act opens with Pier Cesare Rivoltella's contribution on the need for radical changes in the pedagogical paradigm. The ancient recipe for a unique, passive and abstract programme of knowledge and skills acquisition must give way to personalised, pragmatic, active and interactive paths in which the application of the practices and processes of the performing arts plays a decisive role. Guido Di Palma and Roberta Carpani take this process a step further. Di Palma questions the best pedagogy to train theatre professionals who not only work on stage, but also train people, groups, communities. Carpani, starting from the wide diffusion of theatre in Italian schools, highlights how it is becoming less and less relevant as an art and more and more valuable as a didactic dramaturgy and a test field for life skills. The theatre disciplines were among the last to be included in the curriculum of Italian universities but among the first to promote the political and social application of what was being studied and theorised. Livia Cavaglieri provides a picture of the most important university theatre centres in the country, while Alberto Pagliarino reconstructs the birth and the theoretical, practical and educational development of social theatre in Italian universities.

The fourth act, dedicated to care, is introduced by Alessandro Pontremoli who homes in on health promotion through the performing arts, seen as a model of rehabilitation practice, an inseparable unit of bio, psycho and social components. The theme is further developed by Alessandra Rossi Ghiglione who concentrates on theatre as a collective "healing practice" and "medicine" since its foundation in ancient Greece. James Thompson's testimony

closes the act. In full lockdown for COVID-19 he observes the benefits of everyday aesthetics and the true sense of the healing theatre, that is treating people, caring for them, reviving their spirit.

The last act addresses the very broad topic of social inclusion. Central to it is the political question of communal well-being, a goal constantly neglected by the perverse powers who pursue their own interests, oppressing individuals, peoples and nations. This is the cause of a social malaise that a good show, workshop or performance is not enough to overcome. The choice is unequivocal: universal well-being is not possible without universal freedom, equality and brotherhood. These are goods that do not fall from the sky, but are conquered thanks to everyone's contribution, because everyone is the author and actor of his or her own existence. Tim Prentki's essay is dedicated to aesthetics as an ethical commitment in the great theatre of life. This is followed by the narration of the Italian case. Fabrizio Fiaschini describes the multifaceted attempt of theatre and performance to influence the contemporary social scene. Roberta Gandolfi dwells on the Italian results of the female revolution. Carla Bino and Stefano Locatelli retrace the debates and history of theatre as a form of political and social engagement in Italy, starting with the foundation of the first public theatre in 1947, the Piccolo Teatro di Milano. The heart of the problem was, and still is: what is there before, during and after the performance? An indistinct audience? An anonymous crowd? Or a community? But which community? Active, committed, responsible, open to the future. A choir fighting for freedom.

This is the epilogue. Without words. Only a bibliographical closure that in truth opens the door on the immense wealth of studies and performing arts and practices of people, groups, communities who deal with fragility, distress, oppression, hardship, and work to create, little by little, a better world.

**First Act**
**Theatre and Society**

# 1. From the Theatre Scene to the World Scene: the Multiplicity of the Bodies. The Theatre Changes Lives

*David Le Breton*

Emotional culture is not something like a lead blanket that weighs on individuals, it is not imposed like a mechanical fatality; it is more like an instruction booklet that is made available to them, a suggestion on how to respond to specific circumstances, and leaves space for advantageous strategies, for dissimulations. Individuals can "play" with the expression of their emotional states, feeling for example too far removed from those who appear to be socially adequate. If a friend's words disappoint them, they remain calm and quiet on the surface; they feel no pain at the death of a loved one, but try to look sad; they wish to draw compassion on their condition and display a tearful attitude; they try to seduce and adopt the finery of passion. Social situations are full of discrepancies between the inner feeling and what is shown on the outside. Individual sociological competencies include, naturally, a relative control of our emotions according to what one wants to show to others. If one falls short of the expectations of others, and gives importance to them, he can make up with some personal manoeuvre to the expression of his affectivity. The control of the image he wants to give to others enables him to manage or manipulate them, such as by preserving their esteem etc. By appearing to be feeling one emotion which he does not really feel, or by skilfully hiding his inner state, the individual builds his own character, thus meeting the expectations of his audience or he shows the identity he wishes to display. The expression of feelings is a show, a display, which changes according to different audiences and to what is at stake (Le Breton, 2016).

For the anthropology of the actor, the theatre scene is a workshop where ordinary passions show themselves as a score of physical signs which are easily understood by the public as making sense. The actor dissipates his own identity into his character, even if the critics do not stop comparing different interpretations and evaluating the different performances they see of the same role in a repertoire. But the actor does not blend in with his character, he interprets it and supplies the audience with the signs necessary to make his role understood. He plays; that means that he puts some ludic distance between the passions aroused by his role and his own. He works like a craftsman on his own body to suppress his own individual emotional life and give

an opportunity to his character's emotions on the stage. He builds the credibility of his role in front of his public thanks to the work of interpretation carried out with the director's help. The transmutation is possible only because passions are a product of a social and cultural construction, and they are expressed through a game of signs which are readily available to every individual, even if he does not feel them.

His composition is a work on himself, a subtle chiselling of his affectivity, gestures, movements and voice, producing the physical and moral rigour of the role. The feeling of the theatre is different from that of real life. The paradox of the actor consists in the art of employing his body and his voice in order to deploy at a set time a throaty hilarity for a line heard a thousand times or the agony of sorrow, or of jealousy. He can play with the same ease joy, pain, melancholy, simply by drawing from a social and cultural repertoire. He can be afflicted personally by bereavement or stricken by grief, but when he treads the boards, he merges with the rules of conduct of his character, and makes its psychology credible by turning into a sociologist who pays attention to his own bodily and oral expressions (Le Breton, 2016). On stage he can declare his passion to a colleague he detests, because he has to be like a goldsmith in the art of displaying feelings he does not feel and manufactures provisionally according to the needs of his role.

Today, given the resources at their disposal and the scale of their task, it is becoming difficult for teachers to invent new ways of freeing children from the routines of their suffering as much as from the pitfalls of their peer culture fed by marketing and conformism. The transmission is not only an instruction, but a way to impress a direction, and it requires some tools: dance, theatre, writing, travel, etc. These steps must engage the pupils, value their individuality, trust them, while the people in charge of the project must never duck the responsibility assumed towards a group or a student. The theatre is a detour to hold oneself in a different context, in front of a public who is not the same as in daily life, which requires pre-fixed roles; it is a different scene where one can reinvent oneself, can dismantle old references and discover the ease of becoming someone else. As it duplicates the individual, it frees him of the constraints of ordinary life, theatre is a tool for self-awareness, an opportunity to stand back from difficult situations, it makes it possible to face, on a different scene, confusing situations that might otherwise appear insoluble. If one plays a role on stage, if one can change roles, if a director asks an actor to play a character in a different way, that means that even in real life one can transform oneself, one can no longer be a prisoner of one's own roles. The theatre is a game played with the stuff of which the social bonds are made, a way to undo them and make them up again differently. The border dividing the scene and the audience in the

theatre is symbolic. There are invisible but powerful to-ings and fro-ings. There are multiple resonances between actor and spectator. The relationship is not one-way. The spectator is touched as well, and even changed by the representation, although I am not going to speak of this any further on this occasion.

In a conversation with the philosopher George Steiner, Cécile Ladjali mentions her work with the pupils of a high school in the suburbs of Paris. She asks them to write poetry, which will be later published, and to write a theatre play partly inspired by Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*. *Tohu-Bohuis* is precisely a work revolving around the myth of Babel, an indirect way to question them about their cultural and linguistic diversity. The fact that the first hurdle to conquer is their resistance to poetry, which for them, especially the boys, rhymes with "shame", and is a "girly" and despicable activity, is extremely symbolic. However, in due time, she conquers their resistance and the texts are written and read, the play staged:

> they were astonished by the beauty of their text. […] They were almost ashamed to present their text in the library at the end of the year, but afterwards they became very proud. They made progress, they aged three years in the space of two hours. They matured very quickly (Steiner and Ladjali, 2003, p. 63 and p. 78).

Beyond the stereotypes, some pedagogical experiences are opportunities for revelations, for an initiation journey.

In the movie *L'esquive* (2003, English version *Games of Love and Chance*), by Abdellatif Kechiche, a teacher of French helps her students from a suburban area of Lille to stage Marivaux's play *Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard*. They speak at full speed without ever listening to each other. Their words are tirelessly stuffed with swearing like «son of a *» or «mother*», even girls cannot escape it. However, when they start using Marivaux's language, they start listening to each other, they speak slowly and savour the words with pleasure. During rehearsals, they repeat the lines with respect for each other. The theatre is a symbolic place where putting oneself to the test under the eyes of the others is a way to become detached from oneself and reflect on language and the relationship with others and with time. On stage, one can redeem oneself. A theatre workshop inspired by these principles offers to young people, for example, the opportunity to experiment with different characters, a thing typical of adolescence, but conducted here far from any identification with consumer goods and with social network identities. Here there are characters loaded with meaning and moved by a common project, in a clean break with the rituals of the city. The youngsters show unexpected facets, they are shaken from their ties, they break out of

their routine of language and behaviour and they discover with wonder that other relationships are possible in their world, infinitely calmer, happier, at the heart of a sociability that no longer involves continuous blustering and aggressiveness. The theatre reveals to them that one is never a prisoner of oneself, nor of social roles that seem to stick to the skin. Playing these characters, they feel good and safe from the roles taken on forcibly to safeguard their reputation in the streets. They change their framework, redefine their relationships with others and experience a true renaissance.

Dance can also play a similar role as shown by the atelier opened by Pina Bausch in Wuppertal with high school students; forty-six pupils aged between fourteen and seventeen from fifteen different local schools, with different social and cultural origins. For nearly a year, two dancers from the Tanztheater troupe lead the work of the pupils on one of Bausch's choreographies, *Kontakthof* (2000). Bausch herself regularly supervises the project. Thanks to two hours of work every Saturday for everyone, with five to eight hours for the leading roles, the students get into the part and are deeply transformed. The first sequences are moving, notably when touching the bodies of others is required: laughing out loud, being shy, or incapable of performing a task… The movements are incongruous, clumsy, carried out with a faint smile to show that they are not fools. Little by little a taming takes place, and it feeds the ease of the interaction with the others on the stage. Those who had problems with their bodies and found it difficult to interact with members of the other sex, are freed of their preconceptions. A space of trust is created under the eyes of the dancers, where the emotions can circulate, and self-confidence and reciprocal confidence are established. At the end of the show, they all agree that the experience has freed them and opened them to others. Several of the adolescents with difficult backgrounds have been able to find renewed self-confidence and a power of expression that they did not have before. A girl explains that her family is struggling since her father was killed two years previously in the explosion of a gas bottle. She thinks often of him and believes he would have been proud of seeing her dancing like that.

In a work written in the first person, the American writer David Vann reconstructs the development of Steve Kazmierczak, who killed five pupils and wounded eighteen before committing suicide at the North Carolina University on St. Valentine's day 2008. The writer, who did not have a happy childhood, has a profile similar to Kazmierczak's, and asks himself why he did not turn into a killer. «Why had I not ended up hurting anyone? How had I escaped, and why hadn't he?» (Vann, 2011, p. 3). Vann remembers when as an adolescent he used to stay awake and hide in the grass with a Magnum 300 which he had received from his father and aim at the faces of passers-by

through the rifle scope. Despite the sensation of power he could feel in those moments, he was able to resist the temptation and he just shot the street-lights to unload the anger which was devouring him. He was harassed by the other pupils because of his appearance, his clumsiness with girls, and his refusal to drink. The fact that he was good at school was also a cause for resentment from the others. His father's suicide affected him deeply. He remembers every day of his childhood as humiliating: he felt threatened at every break when the class gathered and sought safety in isolation until one day a friend took him to the after-school drama workshop. During the trial, when he was asked to speak about himself, for the first time, instead of saying that his father had died of cancer as he usually did, he mastered his emotions and spoke about his father's suicide. He was surprised to be accepted unreservedly by the group.

> What it meant for the shape of my life was that instead of continuing to spiral down into a double life, things began to improve for me, and this is what never happened for Steve in high school. His life spiraled into drugs, medications, suicide attempts, sexual shame, bitter fights with his mother, threats of violence (ibid., p. 21).

The theatre was for Vann a great escape from a position of victim, a way to remain the actor of his existence.

The workshop session and the moment of the performance are matrices of expression, a way to experiment with the alterity within oneself and to feel that one is not a prisoner of one's own roles in life, and that it is therefore possible to transform oneself beyond the pleasure of playing and of receiving the public's applause. For people who often find themselves in an awkward position with social relationships and whose life is often subjected to the direction and appreciation of others, these are moments of triumph. For once, they are listened to, and even glorified by public applause. The workshop is where this work is carried out, the performance is sometimes uncertain from the spectator's point of view, each population requires a different support system, the theatre with young psychotics is not the same as that with young people affected by Down syndrome, with elderly people with personality disorders, or with young people in distress or immersed in delinquency.

For the person on stage, whether a pupil in a school, a young person or adult in distress or having behavioural problems, labelled as mentally ill or mentally handicapped, or suffering from Down syndrome, theatre is a temporary way out of oneself, surrounded by partners and an audience who enhance the resources for change induced by the situation. The theatre, in all its manifestations, is an experience of the space in a specific time with elements of the social bond as raw material. It enables the actor, regardless

of who he or she is, to disappear from his or her specific identity, from his or her individual, social and cultural responsibilities. He gets rid of himself and gets into a game between the character he is impersonating on stage and the person he is in real life. He takes a temporary holiday from himself, but without losing himself (Le Breton, 2015). He is in a position of reflection, in the figurative and literal sense. He feels himself, he puts himself to the test, he discovers he is in connection with others on the stage. He sheds his character from real life, without forgetting it, but putting it into imaginary brackets in order to explore universes different from the familiar one. The public is not there to correct him, or to put him back into his place, or give him lessons. During the time of the play, the actor is in the transparency of his role, immunised from the judgement of others. He finds himself in what Winnicott calls the «intermediate area of experience» without having the sanction of reality, he escapes outside social conventions and any judgement towards him. He can be transformed by this experience. This is why it is used in psychodrama, sociodrama, role play, theatre forums, etc. The theatre ritual protects and gives authority to perform gestures, words and actions that would be out of place in real life. The role is like an envelope of sense which protects and authorises the demise of one's system of defence. Actors become different from who they are ordinarily.

Whether these forms of theatre aim to transmit something, to care for someone, to give pleasure, to encourage reflection, they provide an opportunity for expression, pleasure and recognition. The scene induces effects of metamorphosis on the populations who are seeking something other in their existence, the scene pulls them out of their fragility zone.

# 2. Putting Public Space into Perspective in the Performing Arts and Street Arts

*Emmanuel Wallon*

According to its champions, theatre is political in essence, because it is intrinsically linked to public affairs, and it is social by birth because it is related to the city and it willingly engages its audiences by challenging the authorities. Is that so? Methodically discussed (Hamidi-Kim, 2013) or vigorously denounced (Neveux, 2019), these stereotypes deserve to be examined. Before celebrating its civic virtues, let us measure the place that theatre actually occupies in the city in three dimensions (or even four if we take into account the variable of time), or at least consider the vision it proposes of public space. We understand public space as the place of deliberation, but also as the space of conflict, in its almost unlimited urban development (Paquot, 2006), but also in the functioning of a communication which claims to be based on a pragmatic reason (Habermas, 1981).

The legend of a fundamentally civic art starts from a false analogy between the theatre and the agora, which is said to be the foundation of Athenian democracy. However, Clisthenes's reforms, begun in 508 BC and reputed to have favoured the establishment of the rule of equality before the law (*isonomia*), delimited the districts of Athens with the primary aim of redefining citizenship on territorial rather than tribal bases; by doing so they also led to a functional and symbolic division of the urban plan, between the space for the representation of the world (mimesis) and the cathartic circulation of emotions on the one hand, and the space for political participation (*politeia*) on the other. The agora was located in a secular setting, below the sacred hill of the Acropolis, on the side of which the Theatre of Dionysus was situated. The confusion between these two «species of spaces», as Georges Perec would say, was nevertheless destined for long posterity. A retrospective and undoubtedly anachronistic conception of the Western Middle Ages supposed that the agora was created in the forecourt of cathedrals where the wagons of the mystery plays were set up, in the market squares where scaffolds were erected for public executions, if not within the framework of the fair where trestles were assembled for the farces. In the 19th century, ruling classes voted for by progressively wider electoral bases consciously played on the similarities between the parliamentary hemicycle and the so-called "Italian-

style" hall, as if political representation had to adopt the codes of theatrical representation in order to convince and seduce. In the following century, trade unions and parties who challenged the hegemony of the ruling classes and learned professions over the conduct of public affairs, set up the platforms for their meetings like open-air stages. Lastly, through a reversal of the direction of the transfer between models, which reveals the marginalisation of the dramatic rite in the society of instant communication, the theatre of the 21st century sometimes borrows from the television studio, if not from digital networks, certain models of interaction with its assembly. The conviction to address the entire city through the tens or hundreds of spectators in front of whom the actors perform is therefore at the same time inspired by the history of the dramatic genre, encouraged by the parallelism of forms between the space of artistic representation and the space of political representation, reinforced by the centrality of the theatre building in the urban plan from the 16th to the 19th century, suggested by the symbolic transfers from one universe to another, and finally attested by the metaphorical use of the vocabulary of the spectacle in the electoral lexicon: public stage, *coup de théâtre*, spotlight, backstage...

If the discourse of the defenders of public theatre – an expression which, in the literal sense, is rather a pleonasm – readily refers to the Athenian origins of democracy, its genealogy weaves together several threads that do not stem from ancient Greece, but go back to the medieval mysteries, the farces played in fairground booths, the dramas and comedies of the court theatre, the inventions of the 18th century *théâtres de société*, the entertainment of the boulevard theatres, the audacity of the art theatre and the principles of the so-called popular theatre. Along the way, the pioneers of the latter also mixed with the supporters of militant theatre, be it associative or trade-unionist, secular or confessional, socialist, communist or anarchist. The formulas of this combination varied from one country to another, but the phenomenon spread throughout Europe.

## 1.  From the Fourth to the Fifth Wall

In the subsidised sector as it gradually emerged from the rubble of World War II, the space offered for the consideration of spectators included three inseparable components of the theatrical ceremony: the stage, area devoted to fiction, reserved for the actors; the stalls/auditorium, dedicated to the perception of the show offered on the stage, but also to self-perception; and finally the hall and its annexes (porch/steps, entrance, counters, stairs, galleries, foyer, bar, cloakroom, toilets), all forming together a forum open to social life. This theatre declared itself a public service (Vilar, 1975). As vibrant as Jean Vilar's words were, as resolute as his action and the initiatives

of his companions in "dramatic decentralisation" were, in France as else-where, the ideal of a theatre that was both national and popular came up, nevertheless, against the barriers that hindered attendance by the less fortu-nate and, above all, less educated classes. In three stages and three move-ments – the Odéon in May, Villeurbanne in June, Avignon in July (Rauch, 2008; Guénoun, 2012) – the year 1968 heralded the end of the republican illusion of equality achieved in communion with the masterpieces of the repertoire.

In order to elevate the spectators present (privileged minority) to the dignity of emissaries of the absent people (hidden majority), in other words to make the public the agent and witness of the "non-public" (Jeanson, 1968; Saez, 2015), methods fluctuate from one decade to the next, from one institution to another. While the animators or mediators try to broaden, rejuvenate and diversify the audience through cultural actions, with a view to democratisa-tion, the directors try out different forms of address to the spectators in order to draw them out of their supposed comfort: verbal or physical confrontation, questioning from balconies, inviting participation, attempts at inclusion.

The breaking of the fourth wall, if it ever existed, in other words the trans-gression of the semiotic separation between the stage and the auditorium, between the place of the virtual and the place of the real, considered harmful to the elevation of thought by certain media theorists (Debray, 2005; Bougnoux, 2006), is severely judged by art historians and critics. Thus Michael Fried, speaking of minimalist painting in a 1967 essay, felt that a certain theatricality brings the inherent properties of the authentic modern work of art down to everyone's viewing experience (Fried, 1998). It is, however, a leitmotif of the saga of European staging in the 20th century, from Adolphe Appia, Edward Gordon Craig, Jacques Copeau and Vsevolod Meyerhold, down to Giorgio Strehler, Antoine Vitez, Luca Ronconi, Ariane Mnouchkine, Klaus Michael Grüber, Patrice Chéreau or Romeo Castellucci. Even in the absence of direct spectators' involvement, the inclusion of the spectator in the performance apparatus constitutes in itself a petition of principle on the part of playwrights who, according to Armand Gatti, are in breach of the conventions of the established social order. This is for example what he said of Erwin Piscator and Bertolt Brecht, and more generally of German and Russian theatres of the inter-war period, paying tribute to the apology of Athens at the same time («normal theatre, as the Greeks did!») during a course on Street Theatre/Committed Theatre, given in 1972 at the Freie Universität Berlin:

> All those who were in the hall in those years had personally experienced the era of the revolution evoked by the shows, and it was their

destiny that they saw before them. The theatre had become a reality for them, it ceased to be like the theatre we were fighting against, that is to say, the stage against the auditorium, and it became a single meeting room, a single large battlefield, a single large event (Hocquard and Tanon, 2014, p. 59).

And Gatti took action in Berlin, occupying the street one evening with fireworks, climbing on the roof of a prison, working in the mining and industrial cities of Walloon Brabant, the suburbs of Lyon and a hundred other places until the age of ninety.

> Around 1968, the theatrical convention wavered under the impetus of two combined but uncoordinated movements, one coming from within, the other from outside the dramatic institution (Wallon, 2018, p. 135-136).

Experiences of «emancipated performances», in other words, freed from submission to the dramatic text (Dort, 1988), but also freed from the shackles of frontality, are carried out within the institution without upsetting it. Others escape from it without necessarily opposing it. Some of the most beautiful theatrical adventures thus sparkled in the fringes at the beginning of the 1970s. The desire to get out of the palaces of traditional culture and go directly to meet the people where they lived, became stronger. North American companies have sown the seeds of this peaceful rebellion on European soil: the Teatro Campesino by Luis Valdez, the Bread and Puppet Theater by Peter Schumann, the Living Theater by Julian Beck and Judith Malina. In the same period, Dario Fo and Franca Rame roamed Italy from abandoned warehouses to school playgrounds, from occupied factories to private homes, with the Nuova Scena collective, and then without it. Augusto Boal, forced into exile by the Brazilian dictatorship in 1971, brought the theory and practice of Theatre of the Oppressed to the Old Continent (Boal, 1974).
Once the fourth wall that protected the representation had been knocked down (metaphorically), in Italy, France, Germany and Belgium, performers of all kinds began to break through the fifth, this invisible wall that was supposed to isolate fiction from the reality to which it referred and separate the theatre from the city. The development of so-called "street theatre" had only just begun. Since then, it has continued to explore the perspectives and blind spots of urban space.
This undeclared international movement, which is even less structured, but which has retained some of the maxims of the Lettrists and Situationists, treats «the street as the topos or commonplace of urbanity», as «the synecdoche of the entire city and as the metonymy of the people» (Wallon, 2018). *Scende in piazza*, it takes to the streets: it treads the pavement,

certainly not to throw stones at the forces of law and order, or even to challenge the elected authorities, but to make fun of their rituals, to mobilise the laughter of the crowds against conventions and clichés. In doing so, it revives an imagery of the rebellious street that had been particularly popular in France since the Revolution, through the writings of Honoré de Balzac, Alexandre Dumas, Victor Hugo, Jules Vallès, Émile Zola, Hector Malot, Eugène Sue and many others. The street arts do not in any way raise the barricades that are so numerous in the history of the Parisian revolts, from 1789 to 1944, and from May 1968 to November 2018, when the *gilets jaunes* ploughed the Champs-Élysées. Nonetheless, they contribute to the preservation of a concept of public space that is deeply rooted in the collective memory, that of a sphere of direct expression.

## 2. 360 Degrees View

In this sense, the city is a 360-degree theatre, in the words of Pino Simonelli (1948-1986), theatre critic and cultural animator in Casoria, taken up by one of his spokespersons in France, Michel Crespin (1940-2014), the founder in 1982 of Lieux Publics (Centre National de Création pour les Arts de la Rue, the national creation centre for street arts, now in Marseille) and of the Festival International des Arts de la Rue d'Aurillac in 1986. In his brilliant *Portrait de l'artiste en saltimbanque* (1970), Jean Starobinski, historian of literature and medicine, analysed the reasons why the figures of the acrobat, the horsewoman, the tightrope walker and the clown, symbols of the artist exposed to the peril of reality, haunted painting from Romanticism to Cubism, just as they lurked in the literature of the Belle Époque, before World War I. It remains to be explained how and why the «*cogne-trottoirs*[3]» of street theatre – Michel Crespin's formula to indicate urban performers – have inspired over the last forty years the outdoor productions of artists from all disciplines (circus artists, dancers, puppeteers, musicians, visual artists, videographers, fireworks experts), while the same artists were borrowing some of the street performers' ways of intervention in urban environments. This permeability between the various artistic fields is one of the characteristics of creation in the public space, as if the institutional and commercial logics that assign to each discipline its own domain, its rank, its shrines, its rituals, its clerics and its followers were diluted in the great flow of the city.

Breaking down the steps that animate this incessant exchange allows us to better grasp its meaning. First of all, it stems from social mobilisations: politicised artists have gone to meet employees in companies on strike,

[3] Translator's note: literally those who hit the pavements.

immigrants in social centres and socio-cultural associations, schoolchildren in their playgrounds, students on their campuses, peasants in remote barns. Other artists animated the seasonal celebrations of left-wing or extreme left-wing newspapers, anti-nuclear or ecological gatherings whose regionalist spirit was often palpable. As has just been pointed out, relocation also stems from a movement of departure from the theatres, incapable, despite their efforts, of attracting members of the dominated classes to them. The show burst into premises that had not been designed for performance: back rooms of cafés, disused train stations, ruined factories, outdoors, supermarket car parks, etc. In these circumstances, theatres have regained a mobility that they had lost throughout their history, whether they went roaming, as companies revisited the tradition of fairground troupes, or wandering, as the show itself hit the streets, taking its audience with it.

This mobility soon contaminated the theatrical work of art as such, and the notion of «well-made play», theorised by Eugène Scribe in the middle of the 19th century (Bara and Yon, 2016), gradually gave way to the onslaught of the work in progress, woven of improvisations, conducive to retouching, adjusting and reworking. The act often prevailed over words, and gesture over text, and they also seized the body of the actor, who in many cases assumed a plurality of roles, from author to stagehand, from set designer to performer.

Cultural policies have amplified this phenomenon since the 1980s. The State has contributed to this by granting its recognition to street arts companies, factories and festivals in the form of grants, commissions, labels, nominations. The local authorities have given them even more vigorous support through decentralisation. Their demand for local performances and festivals to celebrate "living together in the city" has led to an increase in the number of permanent structures and ephemeral events.

But every subsidy has its downside. What was the counterpart of national and local government aid? Gaudibert, former animator, curator and critic of modern art, follower of communist philosopher Louis Althusser, posed the question in these terms in the early 1970s in his book *Action culturelle: intégration et/ou subversion* (Gaudibert, 1972). For him, the function of the state cultural apparatus is to recycle artistic criticism into acceptance of the established order. Indeed, the dilemmas faced by creation in the public space will give food for thought to social theatre practitioners. Leaving the institutions does not automatically mean freeing oneself from power relationships and power logics. Artists, albeit freed from the rules and limits of the sessions between four walls, must arbitrate on a daily basis between their aspiration for political and aesthetic self-determination on the one hand, and the respect of the specifications expressly linked to their contracts, or at

least the codes of conduct tacitly accepted in their area of intervention, on the other. The poetic insurrection they call for may ultimately prove to be nothing more than a mission of cultural mediation or social cure. Depending on the context, the same weapons of the imagination may be used to raise awareness of injustice or to provide harmless entertainment.

The French example seems quite revealing in this respect. In France, the structuring of the profession has undergone a process of legitimation during the 1990s and 2000s. Coming from the margins of the subsidised sector but grouped together in the same association – the Fédération Nationale des Arts de la Rue (national federation of street arts) born in September 1997, colloquially called Fédé, which acts as a think tank, network and union at the same time –, companies whose names resonate like a manifesto (Générik Vapeur, Royal de Luxe, Ilotopie, Oposito, Délices Dada, 26000 Couverts, Kumulus, Komplex Kapharnaüm and many more) have demanded public aid, obtained the creation of a resource centre financed by the Ministry of Culture (Hors Les Murs, whose resources were absorbed in 2016 by the multidisciplinary centre Artcena) and contributed to the cultural development of the territory by establishing their "workshops" in urban peripheries, as well as in rural areas. At the end of a long process of consultation with the supervisory authorities, an important stage of which was the Temps des Arts de la Rue, a three-year programme (2005-2007) to support this branch of the performing arts, several of them were elevated in 2017 by the State, the host municipalities and regions to the dignity of Centres Nationaux des Arts de la Rue et de l'Espace Public (CNAREP, national centres for the street arts and public space), of which there are fourteen today (including Lieux Publics, stakeholder of a vast Cité des Arts de la Rue in Marseille). All that was missing was an official training body to crown these schemes. This is the role of the Formation Avancée Itinérante pour les Arts de la Rue (FAI-AR, peripatetic advanced training for the street arts), also based in Marseille, whose first apprenticeship activities began in 2005.

## 3.  The Transformation of Urban Space

In presenting its Rue Libre (free street) programme to promote «freedom in the public space», the Fédé office declared on its website, in 2017, «to favour the festive and convivial agora and the joyful creative chaos against the temptation to withdraw into oneself». In fact, with four hundred members out of nearly a thousand artists and teams listed, relying on a tight network of some forty factories and around 250 festivals mainly or partly devoted to the street arts (including those of Aurillac, Chalon-sur-Saône, Châlons-en-Champagne, Sotteville-lès-Rouen, Cognac and many others) (Wallon, 2016, p. 5), the «professionals of urban disorder», as they call themselves, have

points of view – both literally and figuratively – to put forward on the issues of the urban world. The institutionalisation of this contestation undoubtedly erodes the critical edge of their discourse and the radicality of their works, but their dependence on public funds does not stifle their potential for making demands, nor their ability to probe the evils of the city. The aberrations of an urbanisation voracious for hectares of nature, the conversion of public living areas into commercial surfaces, the place of women in public life, the relegation of migrants to lawless areas, the generalised surveillance of neighbourhoods: these are all themes which their creations use as a pretext and from which they extract their materials.

In addition to trying to put the influence of public partners (ministries, local governments, social landlords, public developers, health authorities, etc.) into perspective, artists in urban spaces must meet the challenges linked to the transformation of their physical, economic and legal working environment, involving in particular the proliferation of safety regulations. The changes in the semiotic landscape are no less confusing for them. In three decades they have observed: the increased appropriation of theatrical techniques by protesters and demonstrators in their public actions and flash mobs; the growing sophistication of the dramaturgy and scenography of official ceremonies, the gesture of power being accompanied by a frantic recourse to storytelling and picture making orchestrated by communication advisers; the systematic aestheticisation of merchandise, through marketing strategies based on events; the dilution of the desire for discovery in the rising tide of performance production; and finally the metamorphosis of public space itself under the pressure of the mass media, programme industries and operators of the so-called "social" networks. This posthumous victory of Guy Debord's theses on the «society of the spectacle» leaves some people bewildered. While some look for remedies in hybrid realisations for fixed, mobile or device-assisted audiences, others focus above all on the participation, inclusion or immersion of the spectator. One example of this is the GK Collective (founded in 2009 by Hungarian Gabriella Cserháti), whose apparatus aims to intensify human relations in order to compete with the attraction of connected screens, in the hope of «creating another legitimacy for theatre in a society overloaded with generators of illusions» (GK Collective – Agence de Rencontre sans Risque, 2019).

How can these attempts to trace new perspectives in the public space, or to propose new perceptions of it, inform theatrical practices immersed in the multiple centres of social life? Drawing lessons applicable to as many diverse configurations as there are communities concerned would require a modicum of caution. However, the experiences projected in the streets have the same relevance as those that take place in enclosed spaces, they belong to the same

time, characterised by an advanced stage of dissemination of the theatre. In search of the public legitimacy and social visibility that their regular audience is no longer able to provide alone, the best equipped and best located cultural establishments themselves deploy a large number of external interventions, amateur workshops, extramural activities: from artistic directors to staff «in charge of relations with the public», from permanent actors to guest companies, they make incursions into municipal buildings, parish halls, social centres, they set up projects with schools, colleges, high schools and universities, but also operate in local hospitals, prisons and retirement homes. Because it is intended to be fruitful, I have called this dispersion «swarming», to borrow the metaphor from Belgian playwright Maurice Maeterlinck's *La vie des abeilles* (Wallon, 2019).

The traditional divide between the inside and outside of the theatre therefore loses its relevance, while the gap between amateurs and professionals tends to narrow a little. Whatever the space in which it is practised, whether it is an enclosed stage, an open square or a living space, the theatre seeks above all to produce an intensification of presence, to stimulate a heightened awareness of the richness of the *hic et nunc*, to deepen the vertigo of a sensitive exchange that cannot be offered by the instant connections of digital communication networks. While yesterday's protest troupes sought to shake up the certainties of bourgeois society and challenge the conventions of its mimetic representation, in the face of the risk of dissociation experienced by communities torn apart by inequalities, many of today's artists, some out of conviction, others out of obligation, seem to take on an educational vocation and even accept a mission of "connection" or "reliance" – two words that in French originate from the 15th century and may well be back in use again – usually assigned to social workers. The «dramaturge» turns then into a «thaumaturge», as I argued in the article quoted.

If this hypothesis is confirmed, the elective shock that major works are reputed to provoke at the heart of the aesthetic experience would quietly give way to the primacy of the contagion of emotions. There would not be reason to rejoice nor to be offended, only to wonder. To what revelations can the circulation of affects lead? Under what conditions does the liberation of sensibility promote the emancipation of subjectivity? The answers to such questions will depend on the level of relevance and coherence of each project, but also on the degree of independence of the artists in relation to the commission (implicit or explicit) given to them, because it is ultimately on these criteria, more than on the context of their action, that their difference with mediators and social agents is marked.

One thing is certain: no strategy aimed at the empowerment of the subject is likely to succeed without the active, conscious, sensitive, critical

involvement of those to whom the invitation to loosen the corset of alienation is addressed.

It is on this point, however, that a convergence is emerging between the approaches of the street arts and social theatre, which are so different in so many ways. On both sides, the spectator cannot be considered as the simple recipient of messages and images. The street arts claim to mobilise «spect-actors», even if it means twisting the meaning Augusto Boal gave to this oxymoron in his forum theatre, because they entrust the audience with the right to interact with the actors, in addition to the responsibility of composing the setting and the moving scenery of the performance through their movements; social theatre encourages the members of the audience to become actors (simply) of their own lives, if only for a short time.

Do these poetic parentheses have a political impact beyond the circle of participants? The question is still pending, but the ancient requirement of theatre remains: to take place in order to allow the embodiment of public life.

# 3. From the Theatre As a Cure to the Politics of Performance, Passing Through Social Theatre

*Marco De Marinis*

## 1. Foreword

The idea that theatre might heal, that it is, or it might be, therapeutic, is as old as the theatre itself. Just think of the theory of catharsis expressed by Aristotle in his *Poetics*, however enigmatic and elusive it may still be for us. In reality, the theatre's therapeutic potential has traditionally been seen as derived from ritual, the original elective place of efficacy, including and above all curative efficacy. This has proven an idea hard to kill, despite the scientific discredit recently attracted by the theories of the ritual origin of the theatre and, more generally, by all ritual-centralism (Pradier).

Some therapeutic uses of theatre with the mentally ill, the insane, or alienated, as they were then called, are accounted for as early as the 18$^{th}$ and 19$^{th}$ centuries; this is recorded in Peter Weiss's 1964 masterpiece, generally known as *Marat-Sade*, and its celebrated staging by Peter Brook and the Royal Shakespeare Company in London, in the same year.

But it is undoubtedly in the 20$^{th}$ century that the idea of a healing power of the theatre gathers momentum, within the more general drive towards an effective theatre, able to satisfy requirements and needs different and much more complex than those gratified by traditional pastimes: firstly, educational needs, as seen from the age of the Enlightenment onwards, but also cognitive, social, political, therapeutic. Concerning the latter, Jacob Moreno's psychodrama and sociodrama may be the most widely known examples, but they are not the only ones, with concepts such as "drama therapy", and more recently "dance therapy", gradually appearing (Landy, 1986). This is not surprising, as the body, and more generally physical action, are central to the theatre, dance and mime of the 20$^{th}$ century. Within the theatre and around it flourished several different methods which could be defined as bodily education and re-education, all more or less explicitly therapeutical, such as those practised by Feldenkrais, Alexander, Gurdijeff and Rolf.

Such extra-theatrical methods often reveal a strong resemblance with similar proposals born within the theatre, among others Stanislavski's. Despite being based on the body, they go beyond the mere physical rehabilitation, and have

the ambition to supply the tools, or the "way", according to the etymology of the word method, for a more general growth of the individual and of their awareness, based on bodily education and re-education. This is the case with Steiner, Feldenkrais, and especially Gurdijeff and his Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man in Paris.

In this context, there is a landslide, a semantic torsion which illustrates the therapeutic function of theatre: from the theatre that cures to a theatre of self-care, based on the notion and the practice of the work of the individual on themselves. And it becomes clear, as we will see further on, that the relation with the other, with alterity, beginning with our own alterity, the «*alterité intime*» according to Marc Augé, is always of paramount importance within the various practices which form the work on oneself or self-care.

## 2. Theatre and Life, Theatre and Reality, Theatre and Truth

The trend of attributing to the theatre new, educational, sociopolitical, therapeutic functions and roles, which we have seen in the 20$^{th}$ century, can be analysed from yet another angle. It can also be seen as one of the answers of the time to the irresistible urge to reunite theatre and life, theatre and reality, theatre and truth.

Naturalism had already tried to do so, in its own way. The recipe proposed by naturalism, even though it was born of a shared need, was however soon deemed obsolete by the members of the historic Avant-gardes and above all of the new art of directing. The theatre should no longer be *realistic* but *real*, beginning with its creative centre, the actor. The theatre should not so much imitate life but rather be alive, be life. It should not reproduce life and reality but produce it. To put it in more technical terms, the theatre cannot be conceived any longer as mimesis of action, but as action, real action.

It is well-known that this widely shared need has produced different experiences and proposals, putting under scrutiny not only the scene but also everything around it: the historical, social and political reality in which the scene finds itself, like it or not. Do we think we can try to find a formula that summarises all these varied experiences in a unified way?

Swiss director Milo Rau tried to do just so in recent years with his 2018 *Ghent Manifesto*.

## 3. Milo Rau: Ghent Manifesto

It is a set of ten rules, but the most important one by far is undoubtedly the first one: «One: It's not just about portraying the world anymore. It's about changing it. The aim is not to depict the real, but to make the representation itself real» (Rau, 2018).

It is worth noticing, *en passant*, the Marxian opening, which will be the object of a later comment in this paper, which summarises the 20th century utopia of a revolutionary political theatre with its many different declensions (De Marinis, 2020a[4]). But let us focus ourselves for the time being on the change in perspective which is the primary objective declared by Rau's rule: from representing reality to making real the representation itself. Is this reversal of perspective really able to summarise in one formula the most important innovations of the theatre of the 20th century, those that have changed deeply and perhaps forever our way to think about and make theatre?

At first glance, we would have to say yes, especially if we integrate the *Manifesto*'s first commandment with the following four. For example, the decisive move of the masters of the 20th century from a realistic scenic action to a real scenic action can surely been seen within the reversal of perspective proposed by Rau (De Marinis, 2019 and 2020b).

Taking a closer look, however, we come to understand that Rau's proposal does not encompass many of the most disruptive experiences of the last century, the most innovative ones. This is because the first statement of his *Manifesto* is still confined to an *aesthetical* dimension, while it is now clear that the biggest innovations, which are perhaps the only real revolutions of the theatre of the 20th century, were of an *ethical* nature. They were produced by a theatre which, for the first time, took upon itself demands, ambitions, and social, political, educational, therapeutic, cognitive and even spiritual needs, as we have seen before (De Marinis, 2000).

I would propose therefore an addition to Rau's first commandment, in order to add this crucial ethical dimension to it, an element that is nonetheless present in his theatre: the aim is not to represent reality, but to make the representation itself real, and «to put the representation into reality».

What does «to put the representation into reality» really mean, what has it meant during the last century? It has been another way, equally powerful and often even more, to bring theatre and life closer together, to shorten the gap between scene and life, performance and truth. It is the way that has brought the theatrical fact out of the box, has opened it, expanded it beyond the material and symbolic boundaries which had been customary for centuries. This is the case of the theatre that left behind its traditional places and invaded other spaces, urban and not. This is the case of the «theatre in the space of the clashes» which wanted to have a say on the themes, the times and the forms of the sociopolitical struggle (Scabia, 1973). Think about the phenomena of the agit-prop groups in 1920s and 1930s Europe; about the relationship between

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[4] See in particular the chapter *Teatro e rivoluzione. Un'utopia del secolo breve e le sue aporie*, pp. 49-90.

the New Theatre and the Movement in the 1960s in the USA; about Dario Fo's Comune and its direct participation in students' and workers' struggles in 1970s Italy…, all the way to more recent flash-mobs and other collective actions of the last twenty years, involving the Arab world as well, as described by Judith Butler in her *Notes towards a performative theory of assembly* (2015), to the Fridays for Future and to the movement of the Sardines in Italy. This is the case, as well, of the theatre that goes in search of the non-public and the non-actor, often actively involving them at different levels: from *Animazione teatrale*[5] to today's participatory and community theatre.

## 4.    The Non-professional Actor

Let us stop for a minute to consider the non-actors, that is non-professional actors, as this will enable us to come full circle, getting back to that healing theatre from which we departed. Let us reflect on Rau's seventh commandment: «At least two of the actors on stage must not be professional actors» (Rau, 2018[6]).

Non-professional actors have always existed, and actually in the 16th century, before professionalism became commonplace, amateurs were the only actors. Today, unfortunately, this term "amateur" has taken on a negative or vaguely derogatory connotation. This is due to the fact that one wrongly thinks exclusively of volunteer, untrained amateur actors, of recreational or parochial groups. This does not take into account the fact that non-professional actors have built the history of theatre in the last century. Antoine, for example, was an amateur actor, as was Stanislavski at the beginning of his career, and equally were Paul Fort, Lugné-Poe, Fuchs, Strindberg, Decroux and many more (Taviani, 2005[7]).

All the agit-prop theatre, which was an enormous phenomenon involving thousands of groups during the 1920s and 1930s, was amateurish: it was made by workers who were enacting a proletarian revolutionary scene. It was therefore a very different theatre from the one produced by the non-professional middle-class actors, as described by Béla Balázs at the time:

> Who is an amateur? One who does accessorily and inadequately
> something that others do better professionally. But if one does something

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[5] For an explanation of the meaning of *Animazione teatrale* see *Notes on Translations* on p. 7. The expression is used in this sense throughout the paper.
[6] Translator's note: readers should note the slight difference in meaning between the French expression "*peuvent ne pas être*" and the English "must not be" (*Au moins deux des acteurs sur scène peuvent ne pas être des acteurs professionnels*).
[7] Taviani proposes, among other things, the important notion of *filodrammatica d'alternativa* or alternative amateur dramatics (pp. 284ff.).

that no one else can do better, because no one else does it better, since the matter can only achieve expression through him/her, then he/she is not an amateur (Balázs, 1980, p. 102 of It. translation).

It is worth underlining Balázs's clarification, which identifies as amateurs those who do «something that no one else can do better than» them, and are not, therefore, truly amateurs. We will come back to this later.

From the beginning of the 1970s the distinction between professional and non-professional actors becomes blurred, thanks to the appearance of new forms of theatrical professionalism, which *de facto* include quite often many of those who would have previously been considered amateurs: from Grotowski's para-theatre to group theatre to third theatre.
From then on, also thanks to the changes introduced by the revolutionary Sixty-Eight Movement, the figure of the professional actor undergoes a radical revision: from the "old school" professionalism, it moves towards a new professionalism, which is defined not only from a technical-expressive point of view but also, and above all, from a socio-anthropological point of view. In this regard, Grotowski's thoughts, when he decides to leave behind forever the mainstream theatre at the end of 1969, remain to this day among the clearest and deepest (Grotowski, 2002 and 2008).
Neo-professional actors quite often do not make a living from their work and are not therefore professional in the traditional sense of the term even if they perform their job at a high, sometimes very high level of competence and skill, therefore as a true professional craftsman-artist. In terms of today's scene, I am thinking about many representatives of the most recent theatre of the last generations, the so-called Generation 2000 or Third Avant-garde, according to Silvia Mei's definition (Mei, 2015).
If one wants to identify the current example of non-professional actor as described by Rau in his *Manifesto*, one should look in another direction, and reconstruct a different genealogy, tracing its way back to the working class amateurs of the agit-prop or the group of young people working with Jacques Copeau when he was building the mythical School of the Vieux Colombier (1920-1924).

## 5.    Genealogy of the Non-professional Actor

I will choose a few from the many possible examples.

- The young people and adults who worked from 1971 with Giuliano Scabia on his works of *Animazione teatrale*, which he always preferred to label as «participatory theatre». Among such experiences, notable is

the one conducted between 1972 and 1973 in the Trieste psychiatric hospital directed by Franco Basaglia, beautifully narrated by Scabia himself in his book *Marco Cavallo* (1976).

- The two young artists affected by severe disabilities, Raymond Andrews and Christopher Knowles, with whom Robert Wilson worked during the 1960s and 1970s in the United States, producing extraordinary experiments of visual and sound theatre which were later to become the basis for some of his celebrated performances.
- The spectators who were involved by the Living Theatre in its events, sometimes called "free theatre", based on improvisation and participation. It is worth mentioning that Judith Malina e Julian Beck where among the first, together with Scabia, to take the theatre everywhere, including psychiatric hospitals and prisons.
- The participants of the Theatre of the Oppressed of Brazilian director Augusto Boal, one of the pioneers of the current participatory theatre, from the 1960s.
- Leo & Perla's "geo-political" actors in Marigliano (Naples), between 1970 and 1978: local factory workers and proletarian, jobless, who had a predisposition to the theatre, according to Leo de Berardinis, due to their Neapolitan roots, their social location and their political activism.

More recently, in my opinion, the phenomenology of the non-professional actor presents two fundamental types: the social actor or the actor of diversity and the testimonial actor.

*The social actor, or actor of diversity.* I so define people who are disadvantaged, marginalised, physically and/or psychically disabled, imprisoned, or migrant, when they are involved and brought on stage in some theatre projects that have been working for a long time in the field of diversity such as:

- the actors of the Compagnia Pippo Delbono, since 1996, including the iconic Bobò (born Vincenzo Cannavacciuolo), who died aged 82 in February 2019;
- the detainees of the Volterra prison who act in the Compagnia della Fortezza, founded and directed by Armando Punzo over thirty years ago;
- Barbara Voghera, who has Down syndrome, and is the leading actress of the Lenz Theatre in Parma, recently admired in a solo *Hamlet*;
- the actors with psychic disabilities with whom Antonio Viganò has been creating for years shows of moving truth and beauty (most recently, *Otello Circus*, 2019).

*The actor testimonial*. These are non-professional actors who interpret themselves on stage, normally mixing with professional actors, and often tell first-hand stories, big or small, almost always featuring episodes of violence, oppression and injustice, of which they were protagonists, victims or witnesses:

- Milo Rau's non-actors, who in his shows creatively "reactivate" episodes of recent European or world history such as the massacres in Rwanda or Congo, the Moscow trial against the Pussy Riot activists, the farcical trial against the Ceausescus in Romania.
- Lola Arias's non-actors: the Argentinian actor-director, who has worked extensively in Europe and is the undisputed leader of the artistic operation called «re-enacting life» (Arias, 2019), in her *Atlas des Kommunismus* (2016) has reconstructed the history of the GDR from the post-war period to the present day, bringing on stage women from different generations who have experienced it in different times, roles and at different levels[8].
- The non-actors of the German group Rimini Protokoll and their director Stefan Kaegi, who in *Granma* (seen at the Bologna Arena del Sole in April 2019) recounted the Cuban revolution, and its "betrayal", with the voices and bodies of people of different generations (but belonging to few family groups) who fought it, defended it, suffered it, criticised it, and overcome it.
- Among the most recent Italian examples, it is worth mentioning *Mario e Saleh* (2019), by Saverio La Ruina from Scena Verticale (Castrovillari), based on his own dramaturgy: the role of a North African immigrant forced to share a tent with a man from Calabria after an earthquake, is played by Chadli Aloui, a migrant from Maghreb, who transfers his painful and difficult personal story into the fictional one, giving it a more problematic authenticity. The beautiful *Gospel* by Pippo Delbono (2016), later made into a movie, featured migrants both on stage and in video, and attracted a growing number of migrant spectators in the following runs, building up a significant presence in the audience. The works of a young director from Bologna, Nicola Borghesi, leader of the Kepler 452 group, which often use non-actors taken from real life, to make them the protagonists of investigations (on love, for example), or to drop them into dramatic fiction, as in the case of a recent *The Cherry Orchard* (2018), where instead of Ljuba and Gaiev there was a couple of disadvantaged

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[8] In another very important work of the same year, *Minefields*, Arias brought together six veterans of the Falkland/Malvinas war (1982), three British and three Argentineans, to recount that forgotten conflict, which nevertheless represents an open wound in the collective memory of the South American country.

old people from Bologna who had recently been evicted from their home of thirty years and had been reduced to an even more precarious existence as homeless[9].

## 6.    Conclusions: From the Theatre as Art to Theatre As Social Practice

What I tried to draw broadly and with some examples is a rich and diversified phenomenology of theatrical experiences which, by several means among which the use of non-professional actors, try to take Rau's proposal to make real the representation one step further, inputting the representation into reality. As I have mentioned earlier, one has to bear in mind that even if Rau does not explicitly express this intention, it is not absent from his theatre work and his *Manifesto*. It is not a coincidence that his ninth commandment prescribes that: «At least one production per season must be rehearsed or performed in a conflict or war zone, without any cultural infrastructure» (Rau, 2018).

This is perhaps the only way in which today, after the decline of the revolutionary utopias of the 20th century, one can realistically articulate the Marxian imperative (in reality the Marx-Engels imperative) with which Rau, as we have seen in the beginning, opens his *Manifesto*.

Today, changing the world through the theatre can mean this, modestly but concretely: to bring to life actions that, however small and intermittent, use the tools of the theatre in its widest meaning, as an antidote to fight (cure, once again) the great anthropological problem of modern humanity: the fear of the other, of the different, of the foreigner, as this has become recently the object of unscrupulous political speculation, relentlessly manoeuvring to transform this fear into anger and hatred. The latter is a political strategy which philosopher Donatella Di Cesare recently named "phobocracy" (Di Cesare, 2020).

It is quite evident that this fear and consequent hatred are linked to the current, impetuous resurgence of racism and fascism throughout the world, taking the form of nationalist populism. Needless to name names, we all know them. With all its limits, the theatre can do a lot in practice to fight these fears and phobocracy. A small example that I have been lucky enough to witness personally, just a few weeks before the pandemic broke out, is Pietro Floridia and his Cantieri Meticci's theatre project, conducted in

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[9] The subtitle was *Trent'anni di felicità in comodato d'uso* (thirty years of borrowed happiness). In his last work *Perdere le cose* (losing things, 2019), the painful story of an illegal immigrant constantly waiting for a residence permit, told by two actors, culminates with its (awaited) final epiphany, painstakingly negotiated time after time, apparently, with the local police headquarters.

Bologna in 2019 with young Italians and African immigrants, based on Conrad's strong and ambiguous short story *The Nigger of the Narcissus*.

In my most recent book (De Marinis, 2020a), I talk about experiences like these in terms of a politics of performance which fights the current performance of politics, that is phobocracy, with the specific weapons of theatre, of a theatre that not only makes real the representation as recommended by Rau, but more and above all tries to input representation into reality.

But which is the theatre suitable for a politics of performance? I have mentioned more than once the need to conceive and practice the theatre in its widest sense, according to the rich legacy of the last century, in short, a very broad spectrum theatre, we could say, paraphrasing Richard Schechner's well-known definition of performance. By way of conclusion, it is necessary to add some further, decisive clarification, in view of the theatre of tomorrow.

Going forward, the contribution that theatre as art could give to a politics of performance will be more and more reduced in my opinion. And this is so regardless of the quality of the works that it will produce. After all, for a long time theatre as art has been a prisoner of an increasingly restricted, closed, self-referential horizon of fruition, something that among other things makes it less and less appealing for public and private financing in terms of political gain or publicity.

In reality the theatre as we have predominantly known it until now, that is as a specific, highly specialised, artistic practice, could be doomed or have a very precarious future, in which only the most commercial forms will survive. Personally, I do not see any reason to be happy, quite the opposite. However, in the face of such momentous tendencies, there is little to do but to try to save what can be saved.

On the other hand, at the same time, I am equally convinced that there will be more and more need in the future of the theatre as a widespread yet rigorous social practice, deeply (biologically?) rooted in the nature of the human being (social animal or *zoon politikon*). Even if art will not be the theatre's primary aim any longer, it will not be able to do without the rigour, creativity and professionalism of the best art theatre. Therefore, as far as I am concerned, no cheap amateurism or spontaneity. In fact, the most qualifying experiences in the field of social theatre, or of the theatre of social interactions (Meldolesi), experiences that in my opinion are becoming one of the forerunners of a politics of performance, have been demonstrating for quite some time that social efficacy and aesthetic efficacy go hand-in-hand, so one cannot exist without the other (Porcheddu, 2017; Porcheddu and Carponi, 2020).

I would quite like to finish, hoping you will forgive me for this self-quotation, with the concluding lines of my most recent pamphlet on performance policy:

> the theatre as a widespread but rigorous social practice, rather than as art, will be very important, maybe even essential, to the life of future communities (De Marinis, 2020a, p. 132).

# Second Act
# Social and Political Performing Arts

# 4. Social Theatre. Brief Phenomenology of a Plural, Polycentric and Participatory Performativity

*Giulia Innocenti Malini*

## 1. In the Beginning

"Social theatre" might sound like a tautology, since all "theatre" is "social" insofar as it is the art of bodies entering into a space-time relationship. The fact that the expression social theatre has been present in Italy since the end of the 1990s and been given a new meaning (Bernardi, 1998) shows that the word theatre alone was perceived as insufficient to identify that set of participatory performance experiences, which, since the 1970s, had become increasingly widespread not only in practice, but also in national and international studies and awards, fully inscribing social theatre within the broader framework of applied performance (Thompson and Schechner, 2004; Jackson, 2007).

Social theatre is a phenomenon with many roots and different legacies. It is no doubt the child of the cultural revolution, the political and social movements, the artistic and theatrical avant-garde movements that flourished in the 1960s and 1970s (Bernardi, 2004; Schininà, 2004; Valenti, 2004; Garavaglia, 2014). Among the innovations that most impacted on its formulation, there are most certainly social animation, *Animazione teatrale*[10] and the Grotowskian experience of the workshop. It is in this environment that a number of experiences took shape in the early 1980s, representing the "karst" phase of social theatre, during a period of theatrical restoration which saw the failure of a large number of those revolutionary drives. The ensuing triumph of neoliberalism and advent of globalisation led to the dissociation between art and society. Social issues became social services, political parties and movements collapsed taking with them the participation of citizens in the construction of the public good and in the fight against inequality.

It was precisely from the social problems of marginalisation, emigration, addiction, exclusion, illness and discomfort that in the 1990s the demand to put art once again at the core of society emerged, as people began to take responsibility for their own progress, their own realisation and their own care.

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[10] For an explanation of the meaning of *Animazione teatrale* see the *Notes on Translations* on p. 7. The expression is used in this sense throughout the paper.

## 2.  Areas of Application

There are few records of the first experiences of social theatre in the 1970s and 1980s. The documentary situation improved between the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the new century with the publication of censuses and overviews (*In Compagnia*, 1999; Pozzi and Minoia, 1999; Conte et al., 2003) which heralded the incredible expansion of social theatre in Italy.

There are several areas in which social theatre was applied. In the first few years it was specifically used in psychiatric, prison and school contexts (Bernardi, Cuminetti and Dalla Palma, 2000; Pontremoli, 2005; Taormina and Valenti, 2013). This was followed, at the end of the 1980s, by experiences with the elderly (Innocenti Malini, 2020a), with people with disabilities (Badolato et al., 2000) and with children and young people both in local government agencies and in projects carried out by private social services. In the 1990s social theatre started being applied in situations where there were migrants (Dragone, 2000 and 2001; Balma Tivola, 2014), business people (Zanlonghi, 2005), educational and care professionals, and particularly in emergency and conflict contexts, where it gave rise to several international cooperation projects (Bernardi, Dragone and Schininà, 2002). The same years also saw the launch of training courses for social theatre operators. From the year 2000 onwards, there were several developments in different fields: in health promotion, with reference to community social theatre (Pontremoli, 2005 and 2015; Rossi Ghiglione, 2017); in artistic contexts, with the advent of the *Teatro sociale d'arte*[11] (Porcheddu, 2017); in professional training applied to performing arts, events management, tourism; and in life skills learning in schools and in other professional settings (Bernardi and Colombo, eds., 2011[12]).

The area of community development should be considered separately. It can be broadly divided into two cases, depending on whether the performance experiences are promoted by civil society and associations or by specific patrons with the involvement of social theatre professionals. Among the former are all the rituals, practices and performing arts which are carried out by groups of people or entire communities and which, while responding to motivations such as worship, religious or civil celebration, entertainment, personal satisfaction, political consensus, and so on, produce social capital.

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[11] For an explanation of the meaning of *Teatro sociale d'arte* see the *Notes on Translations* on p. 7. The expression is used in this sense throughout the paper.

[12] A map of social theatre in Italy is offered by the magazine *Catarsi. Teatri delle diversità* (later to become *Teatri delle diversità. Rivista europea*) directed by Emilio Pozzi and then by Vito Minoia, for the Edizioni Nuove Catarsi di Cartoceto, which has published 80 issues from 1996 to the present day.

These include amateur theatre, village and neighbourhood festivals and fairs, open-air games, sacred plays, civil and folklore performances, parades, *palii*[13] (Dalla Palma, 2001a and 2001b; Collins, 2004). On the other hand, these same experiences can sometimes be intentionally reactivated by local patrons with the help of social theatre operators and of their specific methods of intervention and with the objective of achieving specific community development objectives and strengthening social ties (Bernardi, 2015; Ferrari, 2019). In this case they are part of the second case in point and, therefore, fully entitled to feature in the field of social theatre, representing one of its widest applications, often carried out starting from projects arising in specific areas and then involving the whole community (Innocenti Malini, 2020b).

## 3.    Methodological Aspects

In order to reflect on the methodological elements that so many different experiences of social theatre have in common, albeit transversally, let us analyse a primitive, emblematic case.

Bano Ferrari, a clown from the school of the Colombaioni, founded the Barabba's Clowns company in 1979 at the Salesian Centre in Arese (Milan), which at the time was what would now be called a juvenile penitentiary institute. Ferrari had been invited by its director, Luigi Melesi, to work with the young people staying at the Centre. Their collaboration led to the creation of numerous training courses on clowning techniques and shows interpreted by the Centre's students and educators (Melesi and Ferrari, 1989; Giuggioli, 2001).

As it is often the case in social theatre, the experience was born from a request for positive activation of people or groups in a problematic situation. The opportunity was provided, in this case, by the director of a penal institution. Other times it can be teachers, headmasters, operators, educators, local councillors, psychologists, doctors, who understand the resources that the theatre has to offer as a tool to improve the life context in which they work. This demand brings to the theatre unexpected economic resources, new participants, new spaces and new circumstances. In the theatre of representation, social issues are presented, if they are at all, as mere contents to be staged, while in social theatre these issues are addressed at the process level, both relational and creative, as it was the case in Barabba's work. The issues are not abstract, but concrete. They belong to the daily life of the participants. So, although the clowning gags remain the same as always, it is the process through which they are prepared that becomes an educational opportunity, initiating new relationships between the participants, based on collaboration, commitment and assumption of responsibility towards the

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[13] Traditional horse race.

group. The youngsters play with their bodies, make fun of each other, play rough and tumble in a protected and creative space with clear and defined boundaries, that allows them to explore new relational behaviours and face the problems they encounter every day in a functional way.

The way in which the process is conducted reveals a clear willingness to make theatre for the well-being and growth of the participants who are active players in the process. This is achieved through first-person theatricality. The performative action in its deepest sense of physical, relational and symbolic action becomes the way in which all subjects become *socii*[14], participating in the whole process of building or rebuilding the individual and the community. This task is no longer delegated only to the figures institutionally in charge, but shared and co-constructed by everyone according to their different roles.

Arese's experience shows a process of systemic change born and developed within the framework of an institution thanks to the mediation of social theatre practices. For the order of the Salesians it is customary to use theatre as an educational practice (Chiari and Ragazzi ed Educatori di Arese, 1995). The theatrical language used – clowning – is also traditional. Given this picture, what is the generative component that makes the Barabba's experience a situation of social development? First of all, there is the proposal of a theatrical language centred on the body, on simple physical contact, on the irreverence of characters who are halfway between circus and street acrobatics, on the almost total absence of verbalisation and, in particular, of any erudite verbal element. There is a working method that activates the direct participation of the youngsters, their taking of the floor and their assumption of responsibility. There is a process of theatrical facilitation that puts the subjects before everything else and their relationships as the foundation of the creation. In this way a type of theatricality comes to the fore that is completely new for that context, in which the process of working to learn the gags becomes the mediator and the background of the co-educative action, revealing itself in full harmony with the life experience of the young participants and a source of pleasure and satisfaction. The choice and articulation of this process is not preliminary to the intervention, but owes its transformative value to a work of co-planning that mediates between the resources and needs of all participants, be they institutional representatives, the young people attending the Centre or the social theatre operator. A mediation that, in this case, proved to be generative at the systemic level.

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[14] From the same Latin and Italian word that features in social theatre, meaning partners, members.

## 4. Developments

The field of psychiatry, on the other hand, offers the opportunity to observe the overall development of social theatre, not only because it was one of the first areas in which it was applied, but also because it presents several variations of social theatre employed in a number of complex and articulated experiences.

The use of theatrical practices for psychotherapeutic purposes has been commonplace in Italy since the 1960s. These activities, although carried out mainly in psychotherapeutic contexts, favoured the spread of a certain awareness of the healing resources of theatricality. They coincided, among other things, with the translation of some of Moreno's texts on psychodrama (Moreno, 1947 and 1953; Bour, 1968) and later with the edition of the works of the Lemoines (Lemoine G. and Lemoine P., 1972) and Schützenberger (Schützenberger, 1972 and 1975) which received the full endorsement of the Italian Society of Psychoanalysis.

In the same years, Franco Basaglia, psychiatrist and director of the Trieste psychiatric hospital, invited playwright and *animatore teatrale* Giuliano Scabia to set up a workshop with the patients and health workers (De Marinis, 1983). In the performative meaning that it took in this workshop and in the light of the *Animazione teatrale* principles, the theatre became a vehicle for relations and for a new idea of care that foresaw the reform of the health system based on the promotion of mental health, rather than on the containment of illness (Scabia, 1976; Pozzar, 2011). This experience is at the crossroads between *Animazione teatrale* and social theatre: of the former, it maintains both the political instances and the focus on the group and the assembly practices, and of the latter it possesses the dynamics of the institutional alliance and the expert and pedagogical use of artistic languages. Following these initial experiences and the enactment of the so-called Basaglia Law – no. 180 of May 1978, which made Italy the first country in the world to abolish psychiatric hospitals in favour of local health care, community services and psychotherapy –, new experiences of social theatre were initiated with the effect of supporting the reform itself. In 1983 Claudio Misculin, one of the patients-actors of the Trieste hospital, founded the Velemir Theatre, from which in 1992 the *Accademia della follia* (academy of madness), which continues to this day its collaboration with the mental health services of various Italian cities, was later born. In the same years Gabriele Boccaccini and the Stalker Teatro began to work at the Collegno hospital in Turin where they proposed experiences combining theatre with visual arts in order to assist former psychiatric patients on their path to social reintegration. These were years characterised by experimentation, as

exemplified by the intervention carried out in 1985 by Bonardi, Bedoni and Fontanella at the Centro Socio Educativo di Melegnano (Milan) using *Animazione teatrale* techniques within the framework of psychodrama. Also emblematic was the series *Follia e teatro* (madness and theatre), held at the Juvarra Theatre in Turin in 1989, consisting of shows about madness run by professional companies and shows resulting from workshops carried out in mental health services where people suffering from mental health problems were both actors and authors. From the 1980s onwards, social theatre was also influenced by drama therapy, a discipline born in the Anglo-Saxon area at the end of the 1960s, devoid of a unified theorisation and characterised by different methods and practices. Drama therapy became widespread in Italy thanks to the work of a number of drama therapists including Maria Grazia Silvi Antonini and Fay Prendergast, who founded the Teatro Reginald in Turin in 1989, and Michele Cavallo, who had been conducting experiments on the applications of theatre with social and therapeutic objectives in Rome since the mid-1990s. And finally Salvo Pitruzzella, a drama therapist active in Palermo, founder in 1998 of the Scuola di Drammaterapia for the training of Italian drama therapists and the recognition of the professional title. Dating back from the late 1980s and early 1990s, is the beginning of Giulio Nava's research on the interconnections between theatre and group psychoanalysis, developed in collaboration with the study group on the social functions of theatre started by Sisto Dalla Palma at the Università Cattolica in Milan. In the meantime, at the DAMS (Drama, Art and Music Studies faculty) of the University of Bologna, Claudio Meldolesi was studying the boundary-crossings of the theatre in other disciplinary areas, such as sociology and psychology, on which he based his subsequent reflection on the theatre of social interaction (Meldolesi, 1993). The relationship between theatre and psychoanalysis, according to Meldolesi, is discontinuous but well-founded, since together they can build the world if they succeed in displacing the mechanisms of constraint that degrade the stage and the psyche to simple machines of reproduction.

The structure of the territorial services for mental health resulting from the 1978 reform generated a radical transformation of the care processes, which put great care in preventing the reintroduction of the cruelty that was once commonplace in mental institutions. For this reason the services invested heavily in creating network relations and territorial collaborations. The approach proved all the more convincing with the new century, when a clear orientation towards community psychiatry and recovery became widespread. Within this overall scenario, there are many experiences of social theatre produced in collaboration with mental health departments grouping together the hospital and territorial services dealing with mental health. These

experiences differ in a variety of ways: in terms of objectives, methods of intervention, professionals involved, regional guidelines, local problems and actors present in the region. Taking a closer look at the situation in Lombardy, for example, there are several different models that can nonetheless be traced back, broadly speaking, to social theatre:

- psychodrama and dramatherapy groups conducted by specialised healthcare professionals for patients, funded by the different services of mental health departments;
- theatre workshops conducted by professionals external to the hospital structures (actors, drama therapists and social theatre operators) in collaboration with internal socio-sanitary operators for patients only or for mixed groups of patients and social and healthcare personnel;
- theatre workshops with groups of citizens (with and without mental health problems) proposed by theatre companies in collaboration with mental health departments, but carried out in community spaces;
- theatre activities and performance events proposed to citizens to raise their awareness of the issues of social stigma and the fight against exclusion.

There are many important experiences that testify a rich diversity. For example, the former Paolo Pini Psychiatric Hospital near Milan has been transformed into a social, cultural and artistic regional structure, thanks to the collaboration between several public and private entities. On the artistic front, Pini hosts the activities carried out by the social cooperative Olinda, in particular the festival *Da vicino nessuno è normale* (up close nobody is normal), in 2020 in its 24th edition, presenting performances of new Italian groups, films, cultural meetings, events and parties, theatre workshops for children and young people. The members of the cooperative, many of whom have mental health issues, run a bar, a restaurant, a hostel, the TeatroCucina and a fresh pasta production workshop at Pini, creating a genuine recovery process[15]. In the same location, the mental health department of the Niguarda Hospital and the ARCA Onlus have activated the Museo d'Arte Paolo Pini, which offers art workshops conducted by professional artists in teams of psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses and art therapists with the aim of enhancing the skills of the participants[16]. In Magenta (province of Milan), the psychiatry operative unit, belonging to the Legnano mental health department, has started in 2002 a project called *Il teatro come ponte per la comunità* (that is, the theatre as a bridge for the community) to support the regional integration. It consists of two theatre workshops conducted by social

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[15] https://www.olinda.org/
[16] http://www.mapp-arca.it/

theatre operators of the local Ciridì Company, assisted by health personnel: the first attended by users of mental health services and local citizens; and a second, therapeutic one, carried out only with residents of mental health structures affected by more severe mental health issues. The activities take place in community spaces, are supported by the Municipality of Magenta and other private social patrons, and belong to the wider city project *Teatrando*[17] (Innocenti Malini and Repossi, 2011).

In 2011, psychiatrist Fabio Lucchi, then director of the mental health department of the Spedali Civili di Brescia Hospital, where he applied the guidelines of recovery, introduced the theatre as one of the main therapeutic practices calling the group Teatro 19[18] to lead the activity. Teatro 19's experience resulted from a collaboration started in 1993 with Alessandro Garzella who, with the help of a psychiatric team, had for some time been leading theatre workshops with people with mental health problems in Cascina, Tuscany, applying and developing his own approach of the game of the symptom. *The Metamorfosi* project was thus born, combining the artistic and cultural sphere with the social one, creating synergies between the work with fragile individuals and community development.

These are four experiences, four directions and working practices that all fit fully into the phenomenologies of social theatre. The first focuses on events, work integration and the valorisation of spaces in the perspective of a cultural transformation. The second on the discovery of artistic languages and the enhancement of personal resources. The third is strongly characterised by the alliance with the local services and community and by the desire to integrate theatrical practices with psychiatric and psychotherapeutic skills. The fourth, being a recovery tool, reinvents in the perspective of social art theatre, the relationship between care, aesthetic processes and community development. The experiential plurality of social theatre is confirmed by a comparison between Lombardy (as seen so far) and another Italian Region, Emilia-Romagna. In the latter, there is more cohesion between the activities because they are strongly supported at institutional level thanks to the *Theatre and Mental Health* project launched by the Region in 2008, involving the regional mental health department. In the period 2011-2016, according to data collected by the Region, 852 patients were involved in the activities. Between 2014 and 2015, twenty-four performances were produced with 135 replicas, with an average of 106 hours for each preparatory workshop and with the engagement of twenty-three regional theatre companies. The performances were attended by more than 4,000 students from schools

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[17] https://www.facebook.com/Il-Teatro-Come-Ponte-Per-La-Comunità-1053013261394969/
[18] http://www.teatro19.com/progetto-metamorfosi/

throughout the region. In 2016, a memorandum of understanding concerning the implementation of the Region's theatrical activities for mental health launched a technical research group with the participation of the Regional Councillors for Health Policies and Culture with some local and regional entities[19]. The research group deals with the enhancement of the current activities with a view of reaching different audiences; and with the training, research, evaluation and fundraising to support the experiences. The processes of collaboration between the theatres and companies in the area which the *Theatre and Mental Health* project has set in motion have promoted the involvement of various artists, an element considered to have fundamental therapeutic effects and to mediate between services and civil society, with a view to overcoming the stigma associated with intellectual disability[20]. The survey carried out by the Regional Coordination of Theatre and Mental Health[21] has mapped forty-eight groups promoting mental health through laboratory and performance activities. There are also several territorial networks that endorse these experiences, creating synergies and collaborations (Valli, 2018).

## 5.    One, None, and One Hundred-Thousand Social Theatres

The examples we have illustrated show the variety of possible applications of social theatre. This characteristic makes it impossible to refer to a single model of intervention. Rather, we are faced with the recurrence of a range of methodologies that have, over time, proven to have a social impact at various levels, promoting the well-being of individual and collective subjects (Matricoti, 2010; Giordano et al., 2017; Rossi Ghiglione, 2017; Zappi, 2018; Giordano, Perrini and Langer, 2019; Rossi Ghiglione, Fabris and Pagliarino, 2019). The methodological and practical plurality is based on the search for performative processes that respond in a developmental and generative way to concrete, local and multiple social needs felt by different subjects in any one context. This translates into an operational flexibility which favours (and is in turn favoured by) the active participation of the co-creators of the experience and into a personal and social generativity that produces the symbolic-performative nourishment. Social theatre practices also seem to function as cultural and political mediators, particularly in relations between institutions and individuals and small groups, with specific reference to

[19] Representatives of the Gian Franco Minguzzi Institution and the Art and Health Association, the Regional Health and Social Agency, the Bologna Volunteer Services Centre, the Universities of Bologna and Ferrara.
[20] http://www.teatralmente.it/
[21] Which includes theatre companies operating in the social-health field, third sector associations and local authorities using theatre to increase physical and mental well-being.

marginal and fragile subjects. A function that produces social capital and reduces distance and possible conflict by generating opportunities for contact and agreement between different parties (Bernardi, 2017; Innocenti Malini, 2019).

In social theatre new forms of collaboration are being developed, largely unknown to professional theatre. They involve the different subjects of the contexts in which they operate, activating and renewing roles, tasks and processes. They use and implement intangible resources consisting of relationships and ties, but also of skills, traditions, stories, imaginaries, awareness and resistance. Finally, they enhance the value of extra-theatrical spaces often re-qualifying their meanings and bringing to the fore elements of beauty, aesthetics and ethics of everyday life. In short, social theatre presents itself as a polycentric practice, a network of reciprocal activations with different propulsion centres.

The facilitator/operator of Social theatre, of *Teatro sociale d'arte*, of *Teatro sociale di comunità*[22], of Theatre of social interaction or whatever one wants to call it, has therefore the creative task of facilitating these processes by supporting the participants in their performative and social agency.

[22] For an explanation of the meaning of *Teatro sociale di comunità* see the *Notes on Translations* on p. 7. The expression is used in this sense throughout the paper.

# 5. Community Theatre Diversity: Connections Between Portugal and Brazil

*Isabel Bezelga*
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The desire to transform the scene into an interface of cultural inscriptions, of specific sounds, of loose impulses and of pluralistic corporalities has transformed theatre into a permanent research. Thus, participating in creative processes in community-based collectives becomes a powerful instrument of social mobilisation and political activism.

By pursuing the path of art desacralisation and the claim of its accessibility for all, the power of community theatre is the possibility of each man and woman to feel the unspeakable, through a collective experience that transcends one's lived experience.

Analysing academic production in the discipline, and despite the heterogeneity of meanings and the diversity of designations adopted (community-based performance, action theatre, social theatre, the theatre of the Other, etc.), the social and transformative function of the theatre is evidently present.

> Social theatre is the art of the bodies that promotes the welfare of people, groups, communities. It strives to combine the care and well-being of the person, in which many disciplines such as medicine, psychology, art-therapies excel, and the care and well-being of the collective, in which politics, the entertainment world, social sciences, stand out (Bernardi and Innocenti Malini, 2017, p. 55).

Specialised approaches are introduced, either referring to the specificities of the groups that are the subject of action, or focusing on the political dimension, or placing the emphasis on sustainable development and good practices of human rights defence.

According to Prentki and Selman, theatrical processes:

> deeply involve specific communities in identifying issues of concern, analysing current conditions and causes of a situation, identifying points of change, and analysing how change could happen and/or contributing to the actions implied (2000, p. 8).

Boal (1974) argued that the theatre allows simple people, traditionally voiceless and without rights, to reflect on their condition and thus become collectively aware, a condition for them to become protagonists of change and transformation. Many community theatre groups have in Boal the greatest reference for the development of theatrical processes using the methodologies that he bequeathed to us.

> The Theatre of the Oppressed stimulates and propitiates self-discovery [,] the person realises that his body speaks and that he says more than he would imagine to be able to express (Santos, 2016, p. 362).

By adopting assumptions of Brechtian distancing as a reflexive and critical approach, it makes possible to examine issues of identity. It was grounded in the perspectives of Nogueira (2007) and Prentki (2009). In the specific case of the legacy of Boal, approaches have been reinvented based on the central idea of play and the use of other forms of communication, particularly in the interpellation of the audience through reflexive comicity (Bezelga, 2016).

However, we must consider that this is not a simple cause and effect relationship, nor are theatre and art a panacea for social problems. Due the different natures of art and social demands, the permanent tense relationship between them must be considered (Bishop, 2012).

In recent research, the diverse approaches of community theatre have been analysed from the point of view of the questioning of contemporary theatre about its artistic, ethical and socio-critical assumptions. Some crucial aspects should merit our attention for further analysis (Cruz H., Bezelga and Menezes, 2020).

Nowadays, in these practices, local concerns coexist with global, ecological, aesthetic, cultural and political issues with diverse formats. According to van Erven (2019), some kind of demonstrations, as the «neo-parades», are proposals for reconfiguring the public space threatened by fear and terror which point to the existence, despite a global adverse context, of participative and intracultural artistic practices that show how reality can be approached in a questioning, constructive and positive way.

Several studies reflect on the performative presence on collective experience linked to political participation, considering the role of power relations in the processes of identity and difference.

There are reinvention paths where the theatre dialogues with and challenges communities. Prentki (2019) calls community theatre to act in a way that «supports grassroots efforts to take local stories as a journey in the rediscovery of "common humanity"» (ibid., p. 17). If the act of play is

inherent in human life in its individual and collective aspects, then let us use «play as an access to socio-political change» (ibid., p. 22).

The demand for space, the right to its use by citizens, has been proving to be a demand felt all over the world. From the occupation and resignification of spaces in uninhabited halls, in between and on the margins, possible dialogues are proposed with cities/territories marked by contradictions and intercultural relations in constant movement in contemporaneity.

The work on memory is one of the aspects that most contributes to the development of creative processes in community theatre. The personal memory articulates with the collective memory acting on naturalised perceptions. Prieto (2019) refers to «unsettled memories» and claims the powerful effect of documentary theatre in the development of artistic projects with the community. This makes it possible to create common docuperformative spaces, placing us in front of ethical and political dilemmas. Thus, the scenic memory is in itself an act of resistance.

Questioning the historical memory of disruptive collective events and incorporating different life histories and perspectives allow us to create new narratives that oppose institutional visions.

These affirmative forms of the invisible presence of common people guarantee the recognition of diversity in the contemporary world.

Despite all these discussions, we can outline some of the main features of current community theatre practices: the diversity of aesthetic proposals; the integration of elements from local and popular cultures; the fictional chain that ensures the presence of the imaginary despite the recognition of the real; the coexistence of the playful, ritual and festive dimensions; the multi expressive forms; the contribution of individual know-how; the use of craft, rhythm and chorus as group amplification; the use of humour and comicalness; the ethical focus concerning the expression of difference, collaboration and self-reflective co-participation.

The themes are selected by the groups, based on the perceived needs and following a participatory proposal with a focus on change. This approach can allow the emergence of momentary changes, a consequence of the poetic approach, of the power patterns installed in community relations, with the transformation of real roles crystallised in the community (Cruz H., Bezelga and Menezes, 2020).

In these participative processes co-authorship and co-creation are on the agenda. Thus,

> the constitution of the collective is traversed by a productive act which is meaningful for those who make the collective, implying decisions,

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responsibilities and a sense of interdependence (Cruz C. and Midori, 2020, p. 21).

But how are horizontal dialogues established and how is collective autonomy developed in the creative *search of the common*?

## 1.    EIRPAC: The Need to Meet and Reflect Together

The systematic research on community artistic practices is incipient, especially in the Iberoamerican space, where, paradoxically, it seems to gain a relative preponderance (Bezelga, Cruz H., and Aguiar, 2016). It was following intense exchanges between Portugal and Brazil, which extended to other Latin and Latin American latitudes, that we desired and established International Research Meeting on Community Arts Practices (EIRPAC) as a meeting place at Oporto, Portugal, for the first time in 2015.

The EIRPAC is a space for meeting, sharing and debating experiences and academic research around community artistic practices. Since its first occurrence it has been part of the MEXE Festival and takes place every two years. The third event, in September 2019, just preceded the International Conference *Performing the Social. Education, Care and Social Inclusion through Theatre,* held in Milan.

These meetings are an established reference in the field of community art research, through the increasing number of different practices and the diversity of their approaches. The offer of postgraduate training and the research within these themes have also contributed to academic recognition mostly in Portugal and Brazil.

The partners include research centres and universities, artistic, cultural, social and community associations. The individual participation of artists, researchers, teachers and community leaders has contributed to the creation of a wide network of professionals and amateurs from these diverse artistic practices.

The consideration of the urgent need to enlist other artistic areas for reflection has led to a progressive interdisciplinary vision, believing that this search for what is common in the social arts will only be possible in an increasingly powerful transversal conception of participative action-research.

The deepening reflection on the role that such practices play in a world in rapid change is reflected in the most recently chosen themes: *Participatory or collaborative artistic practices?* and *In search of the common: Contributions of artistic practices to other possible futures*. It has been sustained notably by the contributions of Márcia Pompeo Nogueira (BR), Domingo Adame (MX), Claudio Bernardi and Giulia Innocenti Malini (IT)

in 2015, Tim Prentki (GB), Eugene Van Erven (H), António Stambaugh Prieto (MX), Evelyn Furquim Lima (BR), François Matarasso (GB) in 2017 and Jan Cohen-Cruz (USA), Wladimir Safatle (BR) in 2019.

Through the theoretical and methodological contributions of guests, panel participants and community groups, we have been challenged to look and question our own practices through a reciprocal informed dialogue. Sharing strategies through each other's practices has made a significant contribution to the systematisation of this knowledge, involving academia and communities. Several dimensions are highlighted in a transversal way:

- empowerment of participants throughout the artistic process as a key aspect;
- the need to build a consistent network in the field of theatre community practices reliant on the strong relationship between practice and reflection to advance the discussion of models in this area;
- strong affective and relational involvement in the projects by the participants that brings together people from the community, professional artists and researchers;
- creative research methodologies based on oral history, local and global events, memory, documentary or autobiographical statements;
- focus on a bodily voice that speaks and acts individually and collectively, becoming visible;
- works revealing a strong focus on social and political issues, showing a desire for social transformation and change;
- individual and collective reconfigurations as a feature of these practices in the face of the recurring themes of power relations and domination;
- expanded community concept, more connected to today's world, in which attention and dialogue with the Other appears as imperative (Cruz C. et al., 2020).

In a time characterised by sweeping generalisations about the "other", I look for opportunities in the arts to remind us of the possibility of finding common cause amongst people erstwhile distrustful of each other. I am interested in how collaborative artmaking provides ways to shake up our misconceptions about groups of people with different identities than our own through direct and meaningful contact rather than through symbolic means, like representation in dramatic literature. Two other ways that artmaking offers this are by artists facilitating projects with people who are ostensibly "other" but with whom they find commonality, and by bringing together people with significant power disparities (Cohen-Cruz, 2020, p. 16).

## 2. Portugal/Brazil Network

Despite the international character of the EIRPAC, approximately 300 researchers are from the Portuguese-speaking world (Portugal and Brazil). The three publications resulting from these meetings, associated with ongoing research, allow the highlighting of some critical aspects related to theatre and community theatre in Portugal and Brazil.

In Portugal, most community theatre groups have links with professional theatre and academia, particularly with theatre training institutions which offer specialised courses in the area.

Current trends in Portuguese community theatre search for a collaborative space between professional and non-professional artists, where a community can be created, as a team that produces a particular artistic identity. In this context, successful experiments have been developed, supported by participatory models of co-creation (Cruz H., 2015; Bezelga, 2018).

The affirmation of difference (in its multiple spheres), the examination of identity and the connection to the place are a constant. Mainly these creative works «reflect on the local culture, the history of the people, and social transformation» (Cruz H., Bezelga and Menezes, 2020). This aspect seems relevant in the involvement of communities in different artistic processes.

The perspective of a micro gaze is forged in the experience here and now, in a territory permeated by the establishment of a web of complicit relationships between diverse participants. This has been a practice that identifies many of the Portuguese community theatre groups.

Intersubjectivity acts in the individual and collective resignification of actions and events that allow the identification of trouble situations in the personal or community life. Thus it is seen as a motto for the poetic construction that evolves in the desire for change. These are the premises for the development of creative processes that generate the public presentations, mainly in public spaces.

We mention some of the theatre groups with long experience in community theatre: PELE – Porto; Visões úteis – Porto; ASTA – Covilhã; ESTE – Fundão, Beira Interior; Comédias do Minho – Vale do Minho; Teatro Umano – Lisboa and Amadora; Companhia Maior – Lisboa; Teatro do elefante-Setúbal; Baal 17 – Serpa, Baixo Alentejo; O Bando-Palmela, Lavrar o Mar – Aljezur and Teatro de Vizinhos – Faro.

There are challenges still to be overcome. Most of these community theatre productions, besides being performed in the regions where they belong, especially in public spaces, are also performed in Municipal and National Theatres, traditionally reserved for professional theatre. They are funded

from public policies in favour of the arts and culture but have had very little support in the last decade.

The approach of community theatre still faces a problem of affirmation, as the aesthetic judgement of its productions is often – and out of step – based mainly on the standards and norms of appreciation of "professional theatre". In Brazil the picture is as diverse as its enormous territory. The Brazilian deep social and economic asymmetries interfere with the urgencies and desires that drive the community theatre's diverse approaches. We can affirm that, together with the popular performances that mobilise locally all the community, which continue to have a high expression in Brazil, the other artistic initiatives, namely those of community theatre, are the object of various kinds of support.

The Brazilian practice is classified as initiatives proposed by institutions from outside the community, initiatives proposed by artistic, political and social movements, and independent initiatives. The analysis of this mapping delineates the community theatre, in Brazil, as an extensive, diverse and alive practice, that continues to grow, and that is gaining visibility and articulation (Nogueira, 2017, p. 26).

From the research and exchanges with Brazil, we highlight some paradigmatic groups such as Teatro União Olho Vivo (Tuov) from São Paulo and Nós do Morro Vidigal from Rio de Janeiro. Also it is important to understand its enormous diversity revealed by the survey initiated by Márcia Pompeo Nogueira from 2005 onwards, with the community theatre *Database Project*, which through several case studies sought to understand the relation between popular cultures and community theatre practices. We also mention some more recent groups that either participated in the EIRPAC or are constituted as case studies in ongoing research.

Tuov is one of the oldest examples of community theatre in São Paulo, more than fifty years old, defined by an aesthetic composition based on the Brazilian performative traditions, in which the popular is totally included, from the cast choices, to the actor's exercise training, close to the popular ways of doing (Carleto, 2009, p. 49).

Marina Coutinho, who develops community theatre research and knows the groups' reality in the periphery of Rio de Janeiro states that they:

> find in the theatre the means to utter their voice, their body, their stories, from their own narrative that speaks to their localities, their communities, but also outside them (Coutinho, 2019, p. 172).

The group Nós do Morro, with about forty years of activity, was presented to us in 2010, as an exemplary reference of theatre and community, reflecting

the mirroring and more recent examples of repercussion in daily life which, in this particular case, ended up, from the urgent themes lived in the favela, transforming their artistic creation.

The most recent examples are the Coletivo Estopô Balaio from the great São Paulo and the Cia. Marginal in Rio de Janeiro. Both participated and presented their shows in two successive editions of EIRPAC.

> Like Nós, other collectives, like Cia. Marginal (Maré), throw themselves on the walls, creating fissures in the territories most attacked by the processes of neoliberal globalisation (Coutinho, 2019, p. 172).

According to its director, the Cia. Marginal:

> has already transcended the boundaries of the site, regularly moving from the "community" context to ever wider scales of theatrical diffusion. [...] the Cia.'s trajectory has been marked by fundamental moments of transition, in particular, the passage from "social project" to theatre group and from "Maré theatre group" to the city of Rio de Janeiro theatre group and throughout this journey, a confrontation was (and still is) constant, the fight against the idea that the theatre produced from communities is based on welfarism and on an "aesthetics of need" (Penoni, 2019, p. 51).

In the big cities we are witnessing a strong contemporary trend of theatre dialogues with territories. Increasingly, groups from the periphery become visible and bring to the arena their scenic processes, challenging and asserting issues as: gender diversity awareness; black people rights, poverty and inequalities; feminicide, violence and precarity; democracy and freedom.

From what we have researched and observed in relation to the Brazilian groups referred to, the work proposals have some connections: collective work methods made up of professionals and non-professionals; daily lives subjects; use of improvisational theatre techniques to the creative process and the use of public space, which:

> in this field, can be decisive, considering it as a central arena for the exercise of citizenship, accessible to all due to its endogenous characteristics of horizontality, creativity and dialogicity (Cruz H., Bezelga and Menezes, 2020, p. 21).

In Brazil's rural contexts, most of these community theatre approaches find:

> their own way of perpetuating traditional and popular culture, as well as offering new and diverse cultural references and identities in a movement

of cultural transmutation. […] This is a clear action of cultural resistance (Aguiar and Souza, 2020, p. 70).

> Theatre can play an important role in the renewal of local culture, helping to organise and structure the community. […] Performing elements of their past is a way of "reconstructing" a silenced community, bringing strength, and empowering its members. […] Form and content were linked. […] The images also had powerful effects (Nogueira, 2006, p. 231).

Within community theatre with specific groups, one of the most interesting is theatre in prison. The «theatre is now recognised as a real possibility of change for the detainee and the prison environment» (Bernardi and Innocenti Malini, 2017, p. 58) and we can consider that in Portugal and Brazil theatre activities in prisons have been developing and sharing practices for more than a decade.

The experience of theatre in prison in Italy is very widespread and is presented in different forms and ways ranging from therapeutic and educational theatre to professional, classical or research theatre, involving different professionals with different outcomes, some unbalanced in terms of artistic production, others in terms of re-educational treatment (ibid.).

These practices are also widespread in Portugal and Brazil. We highlight those in Brazil inspired by Paul Heritage's pioneering work, in the Academic Extension Programs at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO) and the University of Santa Catarina (UDESC) connected with the University of Michigan (Lucas, Fiche and Concílio, 2020) and in Portugal those promoted by Pele Association through the work of Hugo Cruz (2012), Mota (2017), Sociedade Artística de Pouzos on Opera in Prison (Duro, 2019) and others significant experiences.

Since 2009 the Pele «privileges the development of projects in prison contexts […] to expand the spaces of humanisation, citizenship and freedom within a prison» (Mota, 2017, p. 480). Over the years it has developed several projects in Portuguese prisons through partnerships involving the national authorities responsible for Reinsertion Services (DGRSP) and Social Inclusion European programs. Highlights include the performances *Entrado* and *Unforgettable Emília*, this latest spectacle publicly presented outside prison.

This option is part of a perspective of opening up the prison system to society, not only making it possible for families and communities to enter the prisons and participate in the cultural and artistic events developed there by the inmates, but also opening the doors for these shows to be presented with full dignity in the cultural and artistic spaces of the city.

## 3. Final Notes

The search for the *common* has become increasingly "common". A crowd of invisible people comes on the "scene" and makes their plural voices heard. In the last decades it has spread from the peripheries and has occupied the forums of cultural power.

In spite of this, the tension is in the streets, within families and in communities. We share on a global scale, a world shaped by a neo-liberal vision that accompanies the escalation of various "-isms" (totalitarianism, racism, populism, *machismo*, etc.) personified in rulers who show their contempt for culture. Extreme positions and open wounds. We turn our backs and close the doors to dialogue. And even together we feel alone. More and more, we only discuss with our peers, within the same little permeable circles and not creating space for the contradictory. Perhaps «we need most to seek commonality with those we previously saw as adversaries or, at the very least, *other*» (Cohen-Cruz, 2020, p. 17).

In their healthy diversity, many of the community theatre creations highlight the construction of aesthetic links as a result of contradictory qualities in the groups, welcoming and emphasising difference. «Heterogeneity and multiplicity evoke […] new transverse identities» (Cunha, 2019, p. 489) and more than ever an aesthetics appears that rests on this crossover.

It can be said that:

> This is a restless art, tense by conceptual, methodological and ethical ambiguities. Its best artists understand and value these ambiguities. They are stimulated by the tightrope walk, appreciate the crossing of disciplinary boundaries, have a genuine interest in the people and territories they encounter, and see this democratic way of building meaning as a hopeful path to a better life (Matarasso, 2019, p. 17).

Today we are at a crossroads and new challenges arise, where presence, collaboration and co-creation are carried out incorporating resources from the new digital platforms to which multiplicity will naturally be coupled (in new ways).

Today we are at a crossroads, uncritically incorporating the resources of digital media that allow us to have a sense of normality in a given innocuous performative transfer by the image projected in real time online communication. However, new challenges arise of political order when technological conviviality replaces face-to-face contact. We must be aware this represents an unsuspected interference of the market, in a model of neo-liberal control which takes all kinds of participatory and co-creative initiatives hostage.

I conclude by reiterating the question posed by Prieto:

> What are the strategies of both personal and collective resistance that we can carry out today not only to survive the catastrophe, but to rebuild our society? The answers, it seems to me, depend on the forms of our collective action (2019, p. 462).

The time / space of collective resistance is more necessary than ever.

> I put hope in finding our larger commonality in real issues, but such intersections must be activated so that all will gain, and the leadership must be shared between people with access to resources and those who have traditionally lost out. Because though we share common issues, we do not share common histories, resources, or degree of need to overcome them. I call on artists to reveal our nuanced commonality in such a way that no one loses, and I call on us all to reach across to others to generate ideas about how to bring such experiences to scale (Cohen-Cruz, 2020, p. 18).

# 6. The Political Lives of Performance

*Diana Taylor*

Everything about performance is political – from its definition, to its artistic practice, to its broader intervention into social and communal life as a form of protest or manifestation, to its archiving and study. This essay explores the complexities of the many aspects and lives of performance by focusing on the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics (Hemi) that came into existence to address several challenges facing researchers, artists, and activists committed to social justice in the Americas.

Given the colonial infrastructure still operative in the Americas, the multiple parts of the "periphery" pass through the cultural, financial "center" of empire, like spokes of a wheel, without having direct interactions with each other. Those of us working in various national and regional parts of the hemisphere did not usually know each other. We had few ways of accessing information and the scholarly and artistic materials we needed about the work being created in other parts of the hemisphere. How could we learn, research, teach, and create in any socially relevant manner when we knew so little about what was happening around us? How could we build communities of care, collaboration, and shared practice in support of progressive politics of rights, equality, and inclusion? In 1998 when I founded Hemi in collaboration with colleagues in Brazil and Mexico, the goal was to create new avenues for collaboration and action by researching politically engaged performance and amplifying it through gatherings, courses, publications, and archives. Our fundamental belief was that «artistic practice, performance, and critical reflection can spark lasting cultural change».

But there were many problems we needed to address at the same time.

The Americas are deeply interdependent, sharing brutal and rapacious histories of conquest, colonisation, imperialism, and neoliberalism characterized by genocide, slavery, occupation, annexation, and extractivist politics that continue to threaten any hopes of equality and self-determination into the present. The United States, where Hemi is funded and administered, sits in the heart of empire, in the very belly of the murderous beast. How could we begin to earn the trust that is essential to all collaborative projects without interrogating the dynamics and extensiveness of the power differentials generated by empire?

Secondly, artists, scholars, and activists across the Americas rarely worked together and, more rarely, collaborated across national, linguistic, ethnic, and disciplinary realms. Our methodologies and practices differ, even when we share similar goals – say, for example, claim justice and equal rights? What kinds of gatherings could we imagine in which we all started to get to know each other and build working relations across all these divides?



Image 1 – Credit: Diana Raznovich

Moreover, few people in the Americas agreed on what "performance" meant in the late 1990s (Image 1) whether it referred strictly to "performance art" or whether it was a useless and/or imperialist concept. "Performance", some said, was an Anglo word, imposed from the North, to signal a self-centered, a-political practice on artists long committed to a Marxist, collective form of art making known as *creación colectiva* or collective creation. I argued for a broad meaning of performance that included a wide range of practices. These ranged from artistic forms of embodied practice, to the "social dramas" of anthropology (Turner, 1974, pp. 38-42), to the ritualistic processual activities such as church services, funerals, baptisms and so on, to events such as sports, political protests and manifestations, concerts and theatre that rely on conventional rules and behaviors (Taylor, 2016). They included political

scenarios and events that give communities «simultaneously connote[ed] a process, a praxis, an episteme, a mode of transmission, an accomplishment, and a means of intervening in the world» (Taylor, 2003, p. 15). Some, like me, emphasized the urgency of recognising, sharing, and studying embodied, expressive culture especially in the Americas where knowledge, memory, and notions of identity did not pass through print culture, *la ciudad letrada*, in Angel Rama's term, the written technologies so privileged in the west. But how to share performed or embodied practices without being there, part of the transmission? The Hemi *Encuentros* which brought together five to eight hundred artists, scholars, and activists from the Americas together every year, then every two years, gave us one way of collaborating face to face that helped build up the trust, shared interests, and collegiality needed to develop ongoing working relations. But they did not address the archival and scholarly needs of understanding performance across space and time. If you did not see the performance, there was not much to go on.

In the late 1990s, emergent digital technologies offered us at Hemi a partial solution to sharing and archiving performance online. Why not upload the videos Hemi had taken, and those artists had offered us of their work? It had never been done. With the help of NYU Libraries and the Andrew Mellon Foundation, Hemi created the first digital video library, Hemispheric Institute Digital Video Library or HIDVL[23] (Image 2).



Image 2

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[23] http://www.hemisphericinstitute.org/hemi/en/hidvl

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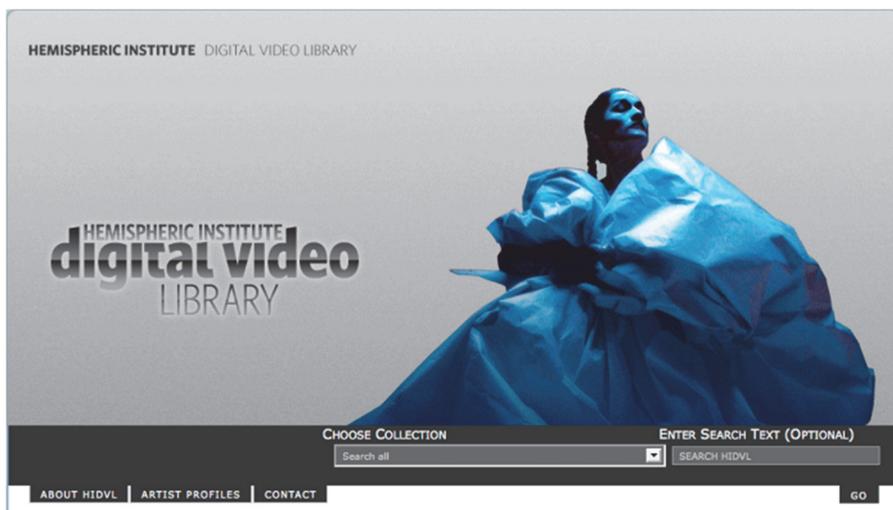
The initial practical debates had to do with ownership: who should hold the copyright to the materials online? Mellon wanted their foundation or NYU to own the copyright. I insisted artists and the cultural authors or producers of the materials needed to retain their rights. Two years and many lawyers later, Mellon agreed that the original rights owners could conserve their rights to the materials online while Hemi retained the non-exclusive right to show the works in non-downloadable, streaming formats through our website into perpetuity. HIDVL prioritized open access and long-term preservation. If anyone wants to buy the rights to reproduce or use the materials, they must contact the rights holders whose information accompanies the videos. This arrangement with Mellon and NYU led Hemi into adventures in archiving video performance and creating digital masters that live in deep in the ground of Iron Mountain along with U.S. government documents, Disney films, MGM archives, Twitter and Snapchat collections and other materials destined to survive nuclear fallout and other catastrophes. Archiving performance also created theoretical challenges. "Performance", embodied, expressive behaviors and acts are usually considered ephemeral, taking place in the now, usually in communication with others. In other words, the antithesis of digital archives. The ubiquitous/unlocatable nature of the virtual gave a whole new twist to discussions of archives and repertories, enduring and ephemeral materiality, presence, distance, and time. Like traditional archives, digital web archives seem built to last. I personally am heavily invested in that supposition, and the Hemispheric Institute works hard to curate, catalogue, and upload performance materials. Yet, I have never experienced ephemerality to the degree I did when our website was hacked the first time – all I had was a printed brochure that described our vanished archival project. Yet, magically it seems, the digital remains, much as I claim the repertoire does, (almost) always there though not always available to vision. The illusion of spontaneity and fleetingness we get from our email exchanges is only an illusion. The deleted email, it seems, can always come back to haunt us. So will a song, or a saying, or a culturally coded gesture get handed down from generation to generation.

And what about embodiment? Embodiment as in "having a body", thinking, working, remembering, and expressing through our bodies, is central to performance studies where we focus mainly (though certainly not exclusively) on incorporated behaviors and practices. Archives don't have bodies – the living author, as creator of a literary work, for example, becomes a literary corpus in the library (their pun, not mine). Online, of course, the blurring becomes more intense. Pure personas, unencumbered by our persons, have full play. «On the Internet,» as one *New Yorker* cartoon reminded us in the 1990s, «nobody knows you're a dog» (Steiner, 1993).

These questions are not only the matter of theoretical discussion among scholars. Artists want to know how their performances will change when they are available online through streaming video. As political performer Reverend Billy put it, «You go forward and it [the video of the work] is still there. People take it into their lives in the present tense» (Reverend Billy, 2006) (Image 3). «Looking at the collection of his work in the archive, he said: I'm not sure if that's dead and I'm alive, or if that's alive and I'm dead». Performance, clearly, has many lives.



Image 3 – Courtesy of the Hemispheric Institute

The first life of performance, for many, centers on the body of the performer in the here and now (Image 4) in direct connection with the audience. Artists and activists invest in the present to make a clear artistic and/or political intervention. They find their audience and create a community of spectators/participants, to communicate pressing concerns. This is the urgent moment of communication and solidarity that artists Marcelo Denny and Marcos Bulhões from Brazil create at Hemi, with CEGOS, as part of their alter globalisation project (Image 5) or in their recent *Banho de Descarrego* anti-fascist project (Image 6). These performances call attention to the economic and political crisis populations are experiencing not just in Brazil at the moment, but in the world. Their force lies in their immediacy, their urgency.

The second life of performance, for some artists, might be the edited, commercial version of work available for sale on DVDs or video. These lack the element of presence, but they are still marketed to specific audiences. Artists control the quality of the performance through editing and other processes. Artists, such as Cuban Ana Mendieta, do not always want to perform for a live audience – often they perform for the camera. The photograph performs, and their work circulates without them being present. Artists such as Anna Deavere Smith develop highly staged and edited versions of their live performances, now performed for large television audiences.



My Art is my Body: The place of desire — repressed and then released — becomes the body in all its most intimate manifestations violently brought to the surface and subjected to collective verification. And it is naturally this test 'in the sight of everyone', that is unbearable in more than one performance.

Francisco Copello.
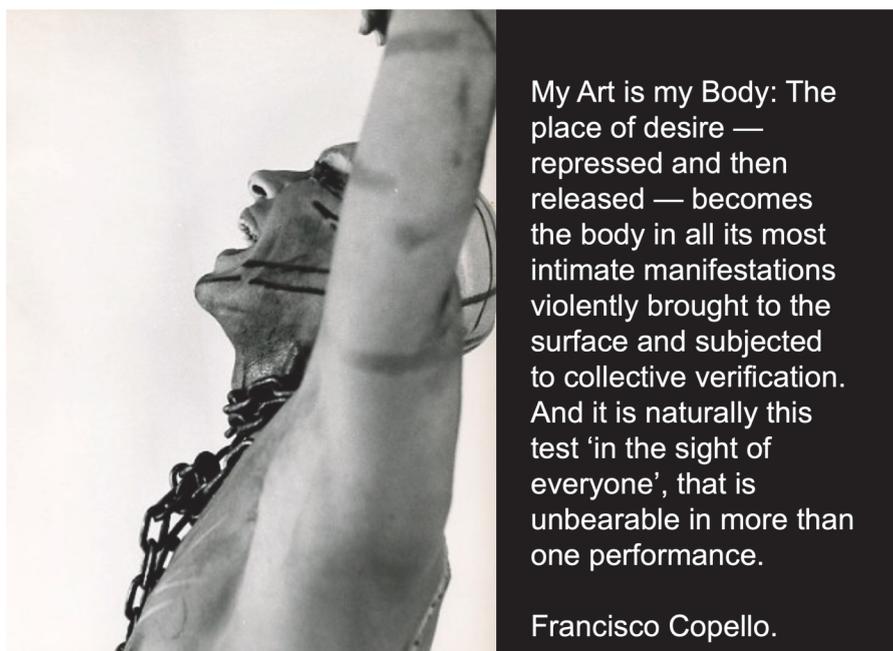
Image 4

The third life of performance – the archival life of online streaming video – takes the long, historical view: *Preserving Performance for 500 Years*[24]. While the video will not change, the experience of the spectator might well alter over time, rendering the performance dated or even incomprehensible. In order to situate the creators in their historical, geographic, and political

[24] See Apple's articles on HIDVL by Bija Gutoff, "Expanding the Stage for Political Theater" and "Preserving for 500 years". http://www.hemisphericinstitute.org/hemi/en/hidvl

Image 5 – Cegos 2016



Image 6 – Banho de Descarrego 2019
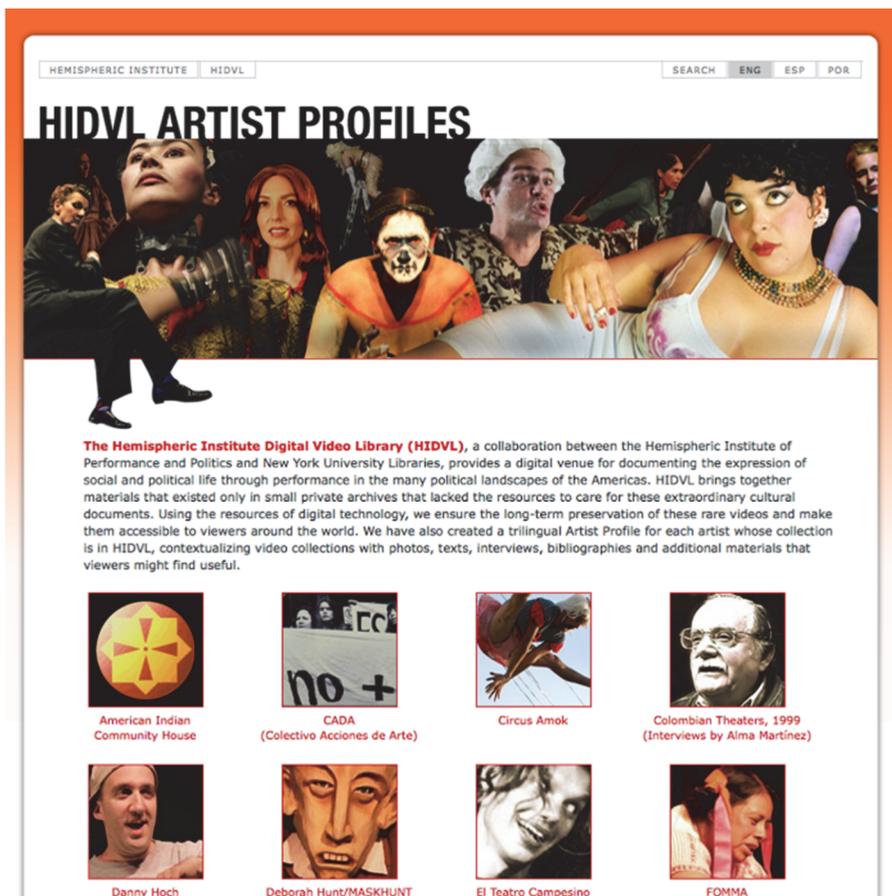
Image 7

moment, Hemi needed to create Artist Profiles[25] (Image 7) that brought together photos, essays, interviews, ephemera, and other related materials to contextualize the work. At this stage, we were embarked on a more scholarly project. How can we understand Chicano theatre in the U.S., or popular theatre movements, without having access to the collections of El Teatro Campesino? These collections include not just the glossy productions – in fact the HIDVL preserves only the original materials – no edited or commercial products.

Hemi soon started to commission artists to create works that could be archived, and to create performances in born-digital platforms, that never had

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[25] https://hemisphericinstitute.org/en/hidvl-collections

a "live", "embodied" character. Some performances, for example, stage the archive, presenting revivals based in part on old scripts and videos. Others are re-performances, a new iteration of an earlier work, now considered "the original". A famous example of re-performance was Marina Abramović's blockbuster show, *The Artist is Present* at MoMA in 2010 (Images 8 and 9). MoMA's website stated the intention of the re-performances: «to transmit the presence of the artist and make her historical performances accessible to a larger audience». Notions of authenticity, originality, historicity, the accurate re-do of great signature works, and broad accessibility underlie re-performance.



Image 8 – *Imponderabilia*, MoMA 2010 – Courtesy of Abigail Levine

If we remember the 1960s and 1970s, when Abramović's work was all about the ephemeral, the daring, the unauthorized, then this retrospective was a surprising bid for the sustainability of performance by an artist in her 60s who knows that film or video or photos or other recordings may document the work and keep it visible but cannot keep it alive. The logic of the archive controls the repertoire, demanding the live, even as it insists that the live behave as one more artifact. The living body is treated as script. The point, it seems is to create the record – the photo, video, notation, score – and then re-perform it. But even this contradictory and impossible drive to keep a

specific, "authored" performance alive which animates Abramović seems deeply at odds with MoMA's investment – the powerful institution, annulled, rather than preserved, the earlier Abramović performances. The re of re-performance, in this case, proved the re of repetition and reiteration yet drained of the works' life force. The re-performances by the artists had approximately the same form but the new framework and context evacuated the meaning. Re-performance, understood within the logic of cultural and economic circulation and preservation, might not be, then, the future of performance, but rather its MoMAfication.

Re-performance, then, might be antithetical to performance, which as Richard Schechner argues never had an original; it is by nature re-iterative, «twice-behaved behavior» and «never for the first time» (Schechner, 1985, p. 36). Other performances are better known as video than as live solo work. Some performances become themselves only through the process of documentation; for example, for example, a Guillermo Gómez-Peña piece staged for the camera and known only through photographs or video. We have born digital materials that never had an "original" in another medium and hybrid work in which archived videos of performances provoked new "live" and online performances. These materials give rise to new scholarly thinking about the many lives of performance (past and present), allow us access to work and traditions that we cannot see live, and encourage us to reflect on what happens to "live" events that rely so heavily on context and audience when shown to people from very different contexts. I would love to speculate what viewers in 500 years will make of Rev. Billy and the Church of Stop Shopping, but this is not the time. By now, the lines between online and offline, live and digital became so blurred that we needed to develop newer theories and approaches to "saving" or preserving the "live". Instead of thinking of archives as stable, and performance as ephemeral, we began thinking of archives, as Marianne Hirsch and I note in our *Editorial Comments* to the issue of *E-misférica* we co-edited:

> as engines of circulation, as archival acts or practices that both mobilize different media and are mobilized by them. Instead of valuing notions of originality, fixity, authenticity, and legitimacy, we look at the archive as the site of potentiality, provisionality, and contingency (Hirsch and Taylor, 2012).

The so-called "live" and the archived continue to interact in many forms of again-ness. Any given performance may be ephemeral, exceeding the archive's capacity to capture the "live". A photograph or video of a performance is not the performance. But this does not mean that the archive is "dead" or holds lifeless materials. The holdings in the archive – the videos

that we see displayed, the photos, artifacts, and so on – can spring back to life. They convey a sense of what the performances meant in their specific context and moment, and what they might mean now – re-activated by the artists or transmitted through HIDVL. Beyond their documentary function, the videos at times form part of new performances. Sometimes, the artists themselves (re)animate the archive, as we invited Carmelita Tropicana, Arthur Aviles, and Lois Weaver and Peggy Shaw of Split Britches to do in our *Performing the Archive* event. We of course again archive what they do.
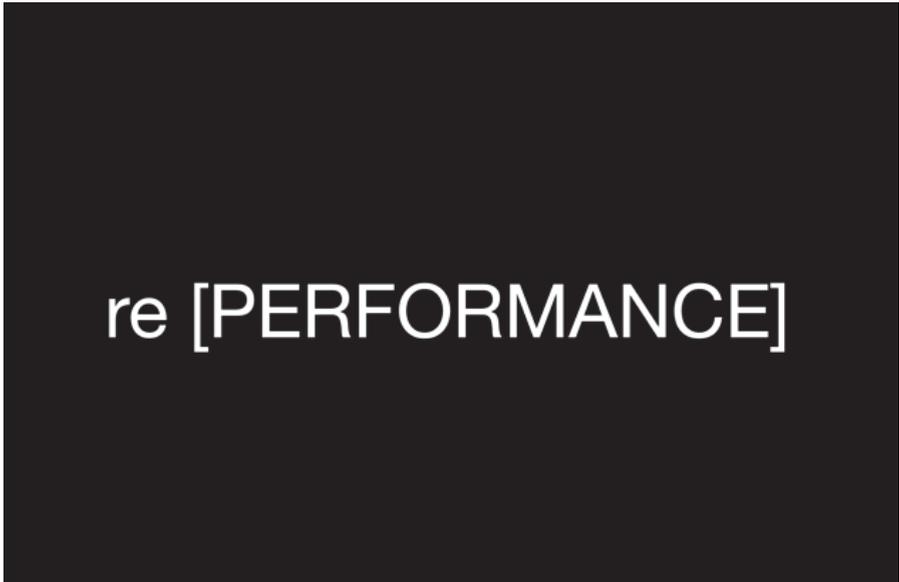


Image 9

The Hemispheric Institute's archives, which include HIDVL with its 900 plus hours of streaming video as well as a physical archive with print documentation, props, and other ephemera, were developed not to resolve the contradictions that come from trying to archive the "live" but to prompt more conversations and interactions about and between the many lives of performance.

**Third Act**
**Performing the Social: Education**

# 7.   The Change of Paradigm in the System of Education

*Pier Cesare Rivoltella*

## 1.    Getting Rid of the Teacher's Desk

*Il paese sbagliato* (the wrong country**)** is a book written by Mario Lodi (1970) dedicated to one of his former primary school pupils, Katia, who, after middle school, continued her studies in high school to become a teacher[26]. To this day, the programmatic title of this book stands out as a testimony to the great modernity of Lodi's reflection. As he noted, there are «analogies between the period immediately after the war and today [1970]. Like then, there is now a strong need to morally reconstruct our society by recovering abandoned values». His proposition to address this concern is to counter «the philosophy of consumerism and careerism» with «collaboration, cooperation, solidarity, nonviolence» (Lodi, 1970, p. XIX). Fifty years later, this analysis is still perfectly relevant and in tune with the theme of this paper, which proposes a political vision for the schooling system and education. Herein we propose to counteract a logic of consumerism and competition with that of *communitas* and participation, or, following Martha Nussbaum's categories, an education grounded in democracy to contrast an education geared towards profit (Nussbaum, 2010). In his introduction to the book, entitled *Letter to Katia*, Lodi wrote:

> I find myself in the middle of the classroom. In addition to the cupboard, the podium on which my desk is placed, the flipping blackboard, and the gas stove, there should be space for individual small desks with suitable chairs, a table, and a wardrobe for the children. I tried again and again to reorganise the students' desks in different ways, but regardless of how I arranged them, they would still obstruct the children's movements. If worse comes to worst, my desk will have to go, as it serves no purpose, and the cupboard as well can be moved to the corridor […].

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[26] In those years, the four years of the "Magistrale" high school were still sufficient to become kindergarten and primary school teachers (the latter, at that time, was still called elementary school). From 2000 onwards, the new university Courses in Primary School Education (initially a four-year program and then a five-year program) became a requirement to teach to those age groups analogously to the requirements already in place for secondary school teachers.

And what about the podium? I have an idea! It can be pushed against the wall, below the blackboard, it will be our... little stage or, better yet, the little piazza where the public gatherings of our small community will take place. I used to bump into it when I was walking through the classroom as it was hidden by the desks, but I have decided not to get rid of it because that square metre of social space, where the children will have the opportunity to sing, play, tell stories and paint, is the most important piece of furniture of all (Lodi, 1970, p. 17).

We are facing a paradoxical situation in which the children cannot fit, because the classroom seems to have been designed for the furniture and not for the students: as it is the case with many institutionalised spaces, this classroom suffers from rigid, constraint-based regulations. Lodi choses to value the children's needs above the traditional use of this space, and that is why the desk has to be taken out of the room. It is a very dramatic and bold action this «taking the desk off stage»: «getting rid of the teacher's desk which serves no purpose». This physical removal of the desk from the classroom constitutes an abandonment of a teacher's symbol of power and of a specific way of conceiving the school system and education. Conversely, the podium can stay, because it can be turned into a «stage» and a «social space» for the teacher and his pupils alike. The podium is the «most important piece of furniture» because the children can become protagonists. Lodi is a member of the Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa (movement for educational cooperation) that introduced in Italy the techniques of Freinet, one of the masters of the Movimento delle Scuole Nuove (movement of the new schools)[27]. That movement was developed around the idea that the didactic relationship should be turned around: the classroom should not be an auditorium but a laboratory/workshop, where the cooperation between teachers and students is paramount.

This way of rethinking the classroom centres around the desire to reconnect schools with everyday life. The school is an artificial space, where traditionally one learns through symbolic intermediaries (Damiano, 1999) such as writing and other notations (mathematical symbols for example).

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[27] The Movement was founded in 1951 in Fano. Giuseppe Tamagnini, Aldo Pettini and Margherita Zoebeli were its inspirers, and notable members were Anna Marcucci Fantini, Danilo Dolci and Mario Lodi, all elementary school teachers and all enticed by the techniques that the *école* Freinet developed. Convinced of the centrality of the child and of the importance of the active methods, the Movement has recently found interesting interpreters in teacher Franco Lorenzoni's home-laboratory in Cenci (Lorenzoni, 2014), and in Marco Orsi, a school director who, inspired by Freinet's ideas, outlined the method of the *Scuola Senza Zaino* (school without backpack, see Orsi, 2016). For a retrospective reconstruction of the MCE in Italy, see Rizzi, 2017.

These intermediations are far removed from life, which offers different experiences and follows different logics. To transform the classroom into a workshop or a laboratory constitutes an attempt to bring life back "into" the schools, to make meaningful what happens inside the classroom precisely because it has a real connection with life experiences.

Central to this rethinking of school and life, is the role of the podium which has become the «stage» for both teachers and students. Lodi is not comparing the stage to an end-of-the-year show for parents and families to enjoy; rather, he is thinking about it in terms of a «social space», an arena where the active participation of the students can blossom, empowering them to grow little by little into citizens. This idea is connected to his belief that the classroom is a "school cooperative", a training camp for democracy, which gives to teachers and students the tools and spaces to fight for their rights. This way of thinking is very similar to what Don Milani was experimenting in the School of Barbiana[28] around the same years.

These three key-concepts – the school as a workshop, the reconciliation between school and everyday life, and the school as a social space – bring the school very close to the theatre. Let us think for example about Grotowski's or Barba's training and theatre-laboratory, Artaud's theories, the anthropology of performance and the social function of the theatre: these are analogies, not just similarities.

## 2. School, Theatre and Writing

Derrick de Kerckhove, McLuhan's successor and director of the *McLuhan Project* at the University of Toronto, through an investigation of these three analogies, discusses the relationship between theatre and the transition from orality to writing; he writes:

> In short, the difference between incarnation and imitation, interiorisation and exteriorisation, is the same that distinguishes the proprioceptive mimesis of the minstrel (*aoidós*) and the imitative acting of the actor. When Grotowski demands the actor to live his role with every muscle of his/her body, when Artaud requests that the play should feel like a dentist's appointment, they both expect the impossible: that the actor can find him/herself in the same conditions as the minstrel, for whom the known things were inseparable from the lived ones. A minstrel is an actor in a trance (1990, p. 69).

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[28] In the last pages of *Il paese sbagliato*, Lodi mentions his visit to Barbiana in 1961 and the meeting with Don Milani and his boys. They started a correspondence between their classes: another technique inspired by Freinet and aimed at building citizenship through literacy.

However, as soon as he understands that there could be a relationship between theatre and the minstrel's performance, de Kerckhove does not further develop this concept, abandoning it in support of the erroneous thesis that traces back the genesis of the theatre to writing instead of orality.

First of all, according to de Kerckhove, what theatre and writing have in common is the order of vision. This is proven by the fact that the theatrical lexicon refers explicitly to sight and not to hearing: the theatre is the place where one goes to see (*théatron*), confirming that the Greeks invented visual space. Spectators, indeed, are invited to concentrate their attention on what happens on stage and, thanks to visual perception, they can summarise what they see. De Kerckhove adds:

> it is only the theatre that made us into spectators in the strict sense of the term. All other media force us to change constantly point of view and consequently to create bonds and cognitive relationships between the different planes and points of view of the filmed sequences […]. Even our habit to read teaches us from infancy to see the world from one point of view (ibid., pp. 76 and 77).

Secondly, exactly in the same manner in which writing separates the meaning of words from the code that conveys it, the theatre separates the public from the action. A similar situation is experienced when, while reading, we soon forget about the materiality of the pages of the book we are holding in our hands because we are completely transported into the narration; or when at the theatre we feel as if we were transported into the play forgetting to be seated in a theatre. This is what de Kerckhove calls «transparency of the code», which is clarified through the concept of the «double articulation» (de Kerckhove, 1991) of writing. The visual perception of the individual graphemes that make up the word and their perceptive organisation in a sequence, generates a «mental sound» that in the long run no longer needs to pass through the representation of the corresponding object (first level of articulation) in order to be understood, while «skipping» directly to the abstract meaning (second level of articulation):

> it was the theatre itself that encouraged, after the development of writing, our inclination for abstractions. It was in the theatre that we began to cultivate this typically Western ability to abstract meanings (signification) from the senses (sensitive). It seems that the theatre was developed to accelerate these tendencies towards desensorialisation, teaching us to separate the body from the mind (de Kerckhove, 1990, p. 71).

The conclusion of this reasoning is relevant to education. Following de Kerckhove's theorisation of the origins of theatre from writing, it «is the place of education and of the centralisation of the gaze». Training the eye is a recurring obsession in the history of Western education. According to the ancient Greeks, being able to see enables to discern the truth. This belief can be explained by the centrality that visual culture holds in ancient Greek culture; even from a linguistic point of view, knowledge is categorised in terms of vision (as clearly proven by the aorist *oida* of the verb *orào*: "I have seen" and therefore "I know"). This principle carries through to Christian culture where it becomes charged with spiritual and ethical values. According to the Early Church Fathers, the gaze is a symbol of providence, chastity and faith. In the mystic tradition – let's take for example Hildegard of Bingen, Francis of Assisi, Richard of St Victor – sight is an instrument of the *visio estatica*. From the first centuries of the Christian era, "to take a look" acquires the educational meaning of consoling, urging, caring for. From the Middle Ages onwards, moreover, the *concupiscentia oculis* increasingly came to denote the *concupiscentia cordis*. Sins occur mainly through the eyes and it is no coincidence that a significant part in the education of young girls was achieved by teaching them from an early age "how to look around them". This is the case reported in a paper written at the end of the 14th century – *le Ménagier de Paris* – in which a man in his sixties illustrates the recommendations he gave to his 15-year-old wife on proper behaviour, which required her to keep «her eyes down […] without looking around, without looking up and without peeking here and there» (Giallongo, 1995, p. 218).

The theatre does not only educate the gaze, it also facilitates its centralisation. This is made possible by the spectatorial *dispositif*: someone is on stage, speaking, communicating, moving around, someone else is in the stalls, watching. Silence and attention play a cardinal role in this situation, apparently favouring concentration instead of participation.

We find here the distinctive elements of the school *dispositif* (Rivoltella, 2019), as Foucault described it in *Discipline and Punish* (1975): surveillance (of the students' absences, behaviours, movements in the school premises, attention paid to lessons) and sanctions (their grades, track records, the disciplinary reprimands, suspensions, postponements and rejections) (Massa, 1986; Cappa, 2009). If de Kerckhove is right and theatre stemmed from writing, and if its aim, as his analysis suggests, is to educate and focus the gaze, then in this notion of theatre one can find the same obsessions that are at the base of some traditional forms of education, those that Mario Lodi contested when he pushed the teacher's desk into the corridor. In brief, this understanding of theatre and schooling would be functional to socialisation,

cultural reproduction and the preservation of the status quo. The symptoms of this common destiny are clearly detectable:

- the primacy of the dramatic text and the centrality of the textbook;
- the one-way communication between actors and their public and teachers and their students;
- the orientation of the point of view and the didactic suggestion of what must be emphasised and held in high consideration;
- the institutionalised space (the theatre or the classroom) as a socially constructed place;
- the word disconnected from the body and the teacher's "blabbering", which, according to Paulo Freire (1970), describes a manner of talking that is devoid of concreteness and agency, typical of those teachers who are not interested in developing critical thinking but in reinforcing oppression and exclusion.

## 3.   The Total Technology of the Word

Eric Havelock (1963) and Walter Ong (1982) are both renowned for their studies on the development of Western culture and on the process of alphabetisation that sees the transition of mankind from orality to writing. Havelock's work can lend some evidence that helps to radically rethink the perspective briefly exposed in the last paragraph.

First of all, it is clear from Havelock's description that the storytellers' performance in Homeric Greece was a "place of education", well before writing and the codification of canonical theatrical space. This is something that is hard for us to understand, since the experience we have today of those Homeric songs is mediated by their transcriptions – which took place between the 7th and 6th centuries B.C. – and this has created a gap between the celebrated deeds of those ancient heroes and us, a distance that is not merely temporal but also cultural. That type of singing is nowadays only experienced in middle and high school, when reading a few dactylic hexameters from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in the original Greek, which is actually mixed with ionic and aeolian dialects, proof of the gradual transition from the oral tradition to the written text. This experience is rarely exciting for students. Epic, as a school subject, reduces Homeric poems to repertoires of names of characters and to their narratively complex events that students are asked to summarise and draw a profile of, which proves to be a difficult task to accomplish given the temporal and cultural distance from today's children. On the other hand, at high school level, the students' brief encounter with a few passages in the original language, is more often reduced to a grammatical and syntactical hurdle or a first encounter (also not very

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pleasant) with metrics, rather than being a real opportunity to understand a significant moment of early Western culture.

On the other hand, everything changes if we think that the deeds of the heroes before being captured on paper were handed down orally for centuries. The interest that the Greeks had towards these deeds was not narrative or "literary", but functional and bureaucratic (Graff, 1981). As Havelock puts it, Homer's poems were the encyclopaedia of the Greek people, a massive repository of actions, maxims and useful knowledge instrumental to the transmission of the ethos and nomos: habits and customs, practical rules, and rules of civil coexistence. Singing those deeds and teaching them to the younger generations was, therefore, something more akin to schooling than to performance. If those deeds had not been handed down, the very culture of the Greek people would not have been passed on, which would have led to the death of their civilisation. Moreover, in an oral civilisation, the only way to ensure this transmission was through the repetition of the songs sung by the storytellers.

How did these stories produce learning? How can we imagine the performance of the storyteller? Plato supplies an answer to these questions in his reprimanding of poetry and theatre for fostering learning by imitation, through mimesis, implying that it was, for this very reason, a "light" form of learning, not based on the rational understanding of the concept. Thus, he hinted, when the storytellers sang the heroic deeds, they would fall into the same state of trance mentioned by de Kerckhove[29].

> The technology of memorisation as exploited by the minstrel will seem unfamiliar to us, for we have long been accustomed to dispense with it. […] The Homeric audience submitted gratefully to the hypnotism of another. The situation most comparable to the Greek would in our modern culture be found in the effect upon the popular memory of verses which are wedded to popular melodies and recorded and played on machines. Particularly close is the analogy provided by Jazz and other dance rhythms so far as these are often married to words which are then remembered (Havelock, 1963, pp. 146 and 147).

Let us think about what Havelock suggests: the storyteller's performance is at the same time a spoken word and movement (analogy with dance) and is

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[29] It is a fact that Plato's relationship with poetry, and more generally with art, is controversial. The rejection and ostracism of poetry/art from his Ideal City in the *Republic* is more a debt paid to the rational logic with which he constructed his politics, which is consistent with the assumptions of his metaphysics rather than with the result of a convinced adhesion. For an in-depth analysis of Plato's relationship with art, see Melchiorre, 1986.

accompanied by music (analogy with jazz). Havelock says that the listeners were:

> bombarded simultaneously by two disparate sets of sounds organised in a concordant rhythm: the metrical speech and the instrumental melody [to which was added the rhythm of] the legs and feet and their motions as organised in dancing (Havelock, 1963, p. 150).

The result is learning based on a globality of perception, capable of activating all the senses of the audience, who:

> either [...] do this themselves in recitation, or they watch it being done, in which case the mnemonic assistance is mediated to them through the eyes, as they watch the dance rhythm, and perhaps as they watch their nervous systems respond sympathetically with small concealed motions of their own without necessarily agitating the legs. [...] The entire nervous system, in short, is geared to the task of memorisation (ibid., pp. 150 and 151).

At least two important considerations can be drawn from these observations. First of all, it is clear that Homeric minstrels were proto-actors. We can imagine them while they tell stories – similarly to the storytellers of our tradition and to the African griot (Fadonougbo, 2007) – modulating the tone, timbre and pitch of their voice, moving in space, accompanying their actions with the lyre (the griot with the drum), working with facial mimicry, exploiting the space's proxemics. All this was already theatre, long before the advent of alphabetic writing.

The second consideration stems from Havelock's hint to the neurophysiologic results of his analysis, extraordinarily advanced compared to the neuroscientific findings of his time. When the spectators watched the minstrels' performance, they moved with them, «respond[s/ed] sympathetically» as Havelock underlines. Against this backdrop, it is hard not to think about the function of the human mirror system (Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia, 2006 and 2019), or the importance of this discovery to explain human learning (Gallese and Guerra, 2015), or the insights achieved by the theories of the anthropology of performance developed by Schechner (2002a), Barba (1994) or Turner (1989). Knowledge is, according to Gallese and Guerra (2015), to perform or mimic within one's own body what is being observed, through the activation of the same neuronal system that would be activated if one was performing the same action. The action, or deed, consistent with the concept of embodiment, is not only the executor of what our brain decides, but also the space where our knowledge is produced. This

is an utterly radical conclusion: the idea of a theatre which aims to capture the spectators' gaze and expects them to be concentrated in silence with their eyes fixed on the scene, leaves the place to a theatre that makes the body vibrate and that builds knowledge through bodily movements.

All that remains to be done is to retrace all of these ideas and identify the ways in which they can impact our understandings of schooling and education.

## 4. A Provisional Conclusion. The Teacher-Actor

From what we have thus far seen, it is clear that the Homeric minstrel is not only a proto-actor, but also a proto-teacher. Theatre, schooling and education all stem from orality. Through this understanding, theatre and education cannot be distinguished one from the other: theatre is education and education is theatre. If this holds true, then the minstrel is also a teacher, a teacher who does not just care about the students' minds but also attends holistically to their mind-body-brain system. This way of thinking is not usually encouraged within traditional didactics, which understands teaching as a design science (Laurillard, 2012) that prioritises the designing of projects, the planning of future actions, and the preparation of teaching materials over situated action. It is necessary to rethink teaching as an «art of life», following Jean-Marie Pradier's definition (Rivoltella, 2017). Three quick thoughts can help understand the meaning of this process.

First of all, if teaching is an art of life, its agency must centre on voice and body movements. A new training method should be devised both for novices and experienced teachers which, instead of focusing on discussing behaviours, should emphasise their cortical appropriation, as it is taught in acting school. Such embodied training would prepare teachers to become more attuned with their bodies and thus able to develop stronger connection with their students. This training will also enable teachers to balance theory and practice, conceptualisation and action.

Secondly, rethinking teaching as an art of life makes class work similar to writing a script: a choral dramaturgy where the most important skills are the ability to "be aware" of the group, to create the appropriate generative environment for the group, and to use feedback to keep the structural coupling with the students in constant balance. The discoveries of enactivism (Rossi, 2011) and the theory of action (Durand, 2015) provide interesting insights on this perspective.

Finally, the teacher-actor is also a teacher-director, with whom the class produces culture similarly to the way in which Renaissance festivals were staged (Francastel, 1951 and 1967). The work is divided into three main actions: the first step is to identify the cultural elements that one wishes to

work on; these elements must be selected from everyday life and mainstream culture. The second step is to take these elements into the classroom/laboratory where they can be reassembled giving them new meanings. Lastly, the achieved new assemblage of cultural objects is reintroduced in mainstream culture. This is a political act, as schoolwork always inevitably is.

Mario Lodi's book ends with the memory of an evening theatrical performance in the middle school gymnasium in June 1969. Lorena, one of his students, sings and plays «on command» as he would have never wanted to see her do. He remembers her in first grade and does not recognise her anymore. Lodi writes,

> I return home with great sadness and listen to Lorena's tapes in the silence of the night. I am under the impression that a crime has been committed. I think of how many similar crimes are committed in the schools that conform to the system and gather consensus through coercion. The aim of these schools is not to foster free children, nor happy men. To defend men means to be on their side and thus to rebuild the school, the system, and everything else (Lodi, 1970, p. 468).

# 8.   Schools and Theatre Pedagogies

*Guido Di Palma and Roberta Carpani*[30]

## 1.   Theatre and Pedagogy. An Experiential Learning Model for the Theatre in the Social Sphere

The practices of social theatre bring into play the statutes of the theatrical institution (Bernardi, 2004[31]; Pontremoli, 2007 and 2015) by shifting the emphasis from the performance to its processes and inevitably to those experiences of relationship and listening that are the basis of the acting techniques. Participating in a workshop or the staging of a performance in non-commercialised contexts, one can reach unknown parts of oneself and a quality in relationships with others that do not have the opacity of everyday life.

The theatre thus moves away from that oratory pulpit imagined by Diderot, where «the player […] weeps as might weep an unbelieving priest preaching of the Passion» (Diderot, 1883, p. 17). In it we find, instead, the roots of a particular quality of experience that can become the seed of a regenerated humanity.

Relationships are, therefore, fundamental to rediscover the sense of a theatre pedagogy able to offer the fundamental didactic principles to those who want to use theatre as an instrument for the formation of man and therefore of society.

### a)    For a listening pedagogy

What is pedagogy when it comes to social theatre?

Fernand Deligny offered a suggestion by intervening on the role of the psychologist educator in post-Sixty-Eight society during a debate in Montpellier in the occupied Faculty of Literature:

> I was there to say something, so I said it: what needed to be done? Take a travelling theatre troupe and go wherever there are children placed

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[30] This essay was conceived together by the authors; the writing was divided as follows: paragraph 1 was written by Guido Di Palma, paragraph 2 by Roberta Carpani.
[31] In particular, see Claudio Bernardi's definition of social theatre (2004, p. 57).

in institutions or homes, be a painter and have fun and pick one here, one there, a brat here two brats there … try to discover with them [...] how to get by in existence (Deligny, [1947] 1973, p. 226[32]).

In order «to get by together in existence» it is necessary to put into play, on both sides of the pedagogical relationship, an openness that goes beyond the rules. In order to go beyond mere protocol applications and reach effectiveness, social theatre interventions also require a similar condition, pushing people towards a wider openness in the relationship with themselves, others and the environment.

This is an exquisitely pedagogical problem. Which model should be chosen to optimise the results of a training process in social theatre? Is there a training model? What are the sources from which training protocols can be structured? What is the relationship between all the exercises that are part of a protocol? How do pedagogical traditions intersect? Can a training protocol be constructed from different traditions?

The reality that we live today in the field of theatre education is no longer organised poetically but pragmatically. It is therefore necessary to be aware of which training culture one wants to choose as the foundations of an intervention. The running of a laboratory, for example, requires a historical and theoretical awareness, in order to achieve a deeper understanding in the implementation of training actions, that in no case can be considered neutral, that is independent of historical and ideological processes. Today it is essential for trainers to clearly distinguish which theatrical traditions they move from. In pedagogical practices no extraterritoriality of the conductors is possible: they must be aware of the origin of the exercises they use and how they have adapted them. Finally, last but not least, what is the educational aim? Is it commensurate with the context to which it is proposed? If the aim is to change people's perception and open up horizons, another reflection by Deligny comes to mind, inspired by the group of marginalised people he took care of in 1946:

> Any rehabilitation effort that is not supported by research and revolt smacks far too quickly of dirty old linen or decaying holy water. What we want for these kids is to teach them to live, not to die. To help them, not like them (Deligny, [1947] 1970, p. 207).

Research and revolt, two things that often go hand in hand, invite us to ask another essential question in the field of training: once the focus has been

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[32] Translator's note: translated from Italian edition as some texts differ from French original.

identified, should the intervention model be "closed", i.e. fixed in all its parts, or "open"?

A clarification is necessary for this question to make sense. The 20th century has taught us that in the history of theatre training there was a creative phase of pedagogy and a protocol phase; in the latter the forms experienced in the context of the birth of directing and of designing a new actor were transformed into "systems". Should conductors apply learned protocols? Or must they be "guardians of chaos", who let experiences be produced and then steer them towards solutions that take into account the different variables on the axis of the individual relationship with the participants and in the context of specific groups?

These questions cannot find easy or, even worse, unequivocal answers; rather, they serve the purpose of underlining how delicate and uncertain is the process to build a didactic path. For this reason I propose here some observations on the dialectic between revolt and didactic protocol, on which it is useful to reflect in the perspective of a social theatre pedagogy.

Radical as it may seem, we agree with Ivan Illich that «the institutionalization of values leads inevitably to physical pollution, social polarization, and psychological impotence» (Illich, 1973, p. 3). Training is first and foremost a relationship and the quality of this relationship is the foundation and the channel through which the information, or rather the facts, are put in front of the disciple by the trainer. A pedagogy that focuses on the values of the relationship, as in the case of social theatre, must necessarily put itself to the test by renouncing any advantage that institutionalisation could guarantee. This places it in the sphere of the «fourth knowledge» (Reggio, 2010, p. 164), whose essential characteristic is to operate through experiential learning and not to be «an act of depositing» (Freire, [1970] 2005, p. 72), as otherwise it would not be creative.

b)       *The adventure of meaning*

Piergiorgio Reggio, who echoes a rich pedagogical literature linked to experiential learning, maintains that difficulties should not be removed because they represent «vital formative material, through which passes – in transformative terms – the possibility of generating learning» (Reggio, 2010, p. 71).

However, the convenience of fixing learning processes through formulas represents always a very strong temptation. If the didactic forms are kept open, this does not mean that those who participate in them cannot translate their experiences into series of exercises to be applied on other occasions. The protocol is too tempting a shortcut for teachers and learners alike, as it offers many advantages. The formalisation of the exercises is much simpler

than the management of a process of awakening of critical consciousness (Freire[33]). This is the problem that social theatre pedagogy has to face. How to deal with chaos? How to welcome what Barthes calls «the adventure of meaning», that is «what *advenes*: what comes to me from the Signifier)» (Barthes, [1985] 1994, p. 4)? It is a matter of opening up to the meaning of forms by surrendering to their logic, of letting the relationships between the notes in a melody reveal their implications without interference.

## c)     *Protocol and experience*

The rigorous codification of exercises and techniques often runs the risk of erasing the value of experience as a personal discovery. The learning of a technique cannot be confined to the mere application of exercises, as all too often happens in many theatrical contexts. On the contrary, it should develop the quality of listening to oneself and to the context, both closely related to affectivity. Feeling the effectiveness of the imitation of a gesture generates an emotional reaction and makes the gesture memorable to those who make it. In a similar pedagogical context, then, it is not at all appropriate to separate a mimetic behaviour from a transformative one, as Howard Gardner points out (Gardner, 1989). The mimetic reproduction of effective behaviour is only partially achieved by the application of a protocol. Individuals know that certain behaviours produce certain results, and satisfaction guides the repetition of effective gestures towards a transformative adaptation to the needs of their body and environment. This can also trigger a process of «awakening of critical consciousness» that, going beyond the satisfaction ensured by repetition, allows a more conscious use of the skill achieved.

Behind the techniques lies, therefore, experience. Indeed, we could consider techniques as "the repository of consolidated experience". However, in order for these experiences to be objectified and therefore transmitted without losing their life-giving function, one must not limit oneself to their protocol formulation but try to rediscover the process that determined them. In other words, if training is a system that allows specific experiences to be induced, then it is the situation, not the rule, that allows a creative and conscious attitude to be achieved.

Twentieth century theatre pedagogy taught us to open up *a founding space* in the teacher-student relationship. In it we find an intermediate and precarious identitarian situation *between* the subjects and their models, which François Jullien calls «the nowhere of the between» (Jullien, [2012]

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[33] On the concept of critical consciousness or c*onscientizaçao* see Freire ([1970] 2005, p. 36 and 1973).

2014, p. 62); an atopic condition in which pupil and teacher, albeit in different ways, find themselves in the condition to operate between two shores without belonging entirely to either one or the other. In this no-man's land it becomes possible to have experiences guided by precise learning themes, but free from protocol bottlenecks and open to invention.

*d)    To become a source*

The essential problem of social theatre pedagogy is not to transform learners into people capable of performing protocols with maximum effectiveness, but to create the skills to overcome difficulties by understanding the meaning of what is being done. This is why the quality of a pedagogical process is closely related to failure. In the field of theatre, a pedagogical process must be a safe place where mistakes can be made.

In this sense it seems to me useful to put three themes at the basis of a possible pedagogy of social theatre:

1) Students *open up the* didactic relationship by demonstrating in various possible ways their willingness to learn, and submit their *vocation,* whose essential characteristic is an active attitude to learn, *to a sort of test*. For this reason Plutarch compared pupils to firewood that requires kindling, rather than bottles in need to be filled (Plutarch, 1927, p. 259).

2) The teacher does not provide formulas or protocols to be applied but produces situations from which the learner's attention and processing skills are stimulated to find personal solutions. I call this learning *situational* (Luria)[34], where experience is considered as knowledge in progress and the result of which is not the establishment of a protocol or the definition of a precise technique but a "creative openness".

3) Personal experience is the core of the pedagogical process and must produce dynamic, non-ontological knowledge. Its aim is the absorption of effective actions that cannot be defined simply in terms of techniques but rather in terms of *process* and *discovery*, because as Rilke aptly says: «*Whoever pours himself out as a spring, he's known by Knowing*» (1922).

## 2.    From Animazione Teatrale[35] to Children's Theatre

In the second half of the 20th century, theatrical practices in school contexts in Italy underwent a reformulation which was marked by a wide phenomenon called *Animazione teatrale*, closely linked to the political protest movements

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[34] On situational thinking see Luria ([1974] 1976, p. 94).

[35] For an explanation of the meaning of *Animazione teatrale* see the *Notes on Translations* on p. 7. The expression is used in this sense throughout the paper.

that developed at the end of the 1960s and to the concurrent crisis of public theatre institutions (Rostagno, 1980; Bernardi, 2004; Perissinotto, 2004; Bernardi and Colombo, 2011). The change experienced by schools at the same time concerns first of all the role of the student: the traditional idea that the student is a passive subject, receiver of the contents of education, is contested, while the tendency to conceive education as an active and dynamic process in which the participants on both sides, teachers and students, are engaged is affirmed. In this perspective, *Animazione teatrale* spreads in schools, as well as elsewhere, through the tools of dramatisation (or application of theatre techniques to educational contents), through the development of children's theatre experiences, through the multiple forms of dramatic play experimented in the classroom.

While the proposal of theatrical play in schools in various European countries dates back to the period between the two world conflicts[36], it should be noted that the word dramatisation appears in the ministerial programmes of the Italian primary school only in 1955 (Perissinotto, 2004). With *Animazione teatrale*, several novelties are experimented with: the awareness of non-verbal communication is developed; group work and audience involvement are enhanced; the work process is valued more than the exclusive orientation towards the product; the body of the pupils, usually left in the background in traditional schools, is put back into the centre of attention, recognising the inseparable connection between body and mind. As Remo Rostagno noted, the protagonists of *Animazione teatrale*[37] went through different phases, and in particular they projected their action in schools first, and then extended it to wider territories (Rostagno, 1980). Inside the school, the question of the difference between operators of *Animazione teatrale*, able to use their theatrical skills with knowledge, and teacher-animators is brought up from the very beginning.

*Animazione teatrale* continued, within and without the school, until the end of the 1980s: the phenomenon, which was originally intended to be disruptive, was over time absorbed by the institutions and transformed into a tool to educate the population and spread culture, at the same time as, throughout the country, grassroots theatre groups proliferated alongside the bourgeois productions of repertory theatres. During these decades, theatre practices in schools made progress, but the theatre-school relationship was not institutionalised.

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[36] We cannot consider here, for lack of space, the multiple instances and occurrences of theatre in the educational systems that have appeared during more than two thousand years of history of Western theatre.

[37] Among which one should mention, in addition to Rostagno, Giuliano Scabia, Franco Passatore, Loredana Perissinotto.

Interwoven with *Animazione teatrale*, the children's theatre (Beneventi, 1994, pp. 147ff.) was born in Italy at the end of the 1960s, at the same time as in various European and Western countries the TIE (theatre in education) movement began. In Italy we observe a dichotomy which opposes children's theatre to theatre for children.

To the area of children's theatre belongs the tradition of puppets and marionettes, but very soon the children's theatre focused on young people as protagonists, their creative and expressive autonomy, the authenticity of their action, often on the borderline between improvisation and action. Gradually it developed the characteristics of a genre with its own distinctive styles (Beneventi, 1994, p. 184[38]). The first period of relations between theatre and school ended with the 1980s, when there was a certain closure of Italian schools with regard to theatre activities. *Animazione teatrale*, which as a result had remained substantially outside the school institution, was [therefore subsequently] oriented towards the social sphere, redefining its vocation and leading to art therapies.

a)      *School theatre in the 1990s*

In the 1990s, the constant demand for theatre in educational institutions continued, finding a response in a growing range of initiatives. A significant turning point came with the Ministry of Education's interventions on the theme of theatre in schools: in addition to funding for theatre activities included in ministerial health education projects (such as the *Youth Project* and the *Children's Project 2000*), in 1995 the first *Protocollo d'intesa sulle Attività di Teatro della Scuola e sull'Educazione alla Visione*[39] (memorandum of understanding on theatre activities in schools and vision education) between the Ministry and the Italian theatre authority ETI (Ente Teatrale Italiano), was launched (Panigada, 2000; Garavaglia, 2007). The *Protocollo* aimed to create an organic and stable framework in which to place theatrical activity in schools, with the recognition of the educational value of theatre and the decision to include theatre in educational processes from early childhood. The good intentions of the document did not, however, translate into operational indications and programme proposals: the issue of the possible consideration of theatre as a discipline on a par with other teaching subjects remained open.

The attention of governing bodies to theatre in school manifested itself, in

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[38] The genre develops in connection with the constitution of a stable market, groups grow more numerous and in 1977 the Association of Children's Theatre (ASTRA) was founded to bring them together.

[39] https://archivio.pubblica.istruzione.it/normativa/2007/allegati/all_prot1552.pdf

the following years, with a sequence of documents directed to the definition of objectives, conditions and plans. The 1997, 2000, 2001 and 2006 *Memoranda of Understanding* added various elements: the issue of the possible educational impact of theatre languages on "ordinary" teaching practices was highlighted; universities were asked to include theatre teaching in the training processes of teachers; the opportunity was identified to create networks between operators in the different regional areas. The 2006 document on «school theatre activities and vision education», while it enhanced «theatre practice in schools» (Garavaglia, 2007, pp. 67-70), recognised the pedagogical value of theatrical workshops as a space and method in which the creative participation of young people in education could be realised. Another important point of this Memorandum was the emphasis it gave to the partnership between teacher and theatre operator as an «organic collaboration» that guaranteed the best results.

The theatre was conspicuously omitted from the school reform Law of 13 July 2015, no. 107[40], where skills and literacy for art, music, dance, media and images were discussed; but it took centre stage in the *Indicazioni Strategiche per l'Utilizzo Didattico delle Attività Teatrali*[41], that is to say the strategic guidelines for the educational use of theatre activities issued by the Ministry for the 2016/2017 school year. The extreme novelty of the document was the recognition of theatre as an ideal didactic tool, as it allowed the perfect interaction between school and society, between educational curriculum and life. In this perspective, the practice of theatre at school was not limited, like it was the case of other arts, to the acquisition by students of artistic skills, but was proposed as a transversal pedagogical tool, able to affect profoundly the development of the individual, of the class as a group and of the school community. The *Indicazioni Strategiche* also proposed a pedagogy of artistic performances, consisting of the fruition of professional theatre as well as of the realisation of real performances[42]. Central in all the three perspectives of the theatre – intended as an ideal didactic instrument, as an artistic discipline and as acculturation –, was the concept of laboratory or active participation of the students in order to know (something), know how to do, know how to be, know how to live together.

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[40] https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/gu/2015/07/15/162/sg/pdf
[41] https://www.miur.gov.it/documents/20182/254283/Indicazionistrategiche20162017.pdf/c0a41ae6-0496-4ed1-b2cf-8e060ed3bbb9?version=1.0&t=1495630692588
[42] The document reads (part two, paragraph 2): «The theatrical activities must be included in the curriculum and in the disciplinary teaching plan, if they are considered functional with respect to the objectives pursued by the teaching path. This inclusion has two macro objectives, i.e. to educate students to be both users and producers (authors, actors, directors, etc.) of performances; obviously, it is up to the teachers to make the choice of how and when to educate in or with art».

Even in professional performances, one was no longer satisfied with mere enjoyment, but wanted to study, examine and discuss every work in every way. It is not surprising that the *Indicazioni Strategiche* ended wishing for a «harmonious and dynamic integration between "making" and "watching" the theatre»: theatre activity consists certainly in learning the languages of the art of the stage, but above all it is a place for individual growth and an instrument for building the well-being of a group. There can be no product without process.

### b)    *Open questions for competency-based schools in the 21st century*

In his essay in this volume, Pier Cesare Rivoltella (infra, pp. 81-90) outlines the trends of the current transformation of the training paradigm: the emergence of children and young people as protagonists; the classroom conceived as a social space in which the participation of students can be developed, also as an indispensable attitude which should become a habit in their adult life; the classroom as a laboratory in which the teacher-director supports the collective work and creates the conditions for the growth of a learning choral dramaturgy. In the new school, as Bernardi (2004) recalls, at the centre there is the subject, a specific person characterised by an inseparable union of mind and body. As a consequence, education must accompany the development of the subject's freedom through a dialogical practice based on an expert combination of knowledge with competence. Some major issues of the last fifty years of theatre and school in Italy remain open, on an institutional level and from the perspective of concrete practice, even though many theatre practices in Italian schools show full awareness of the challenge of the complexity they face, often operating with little organisational, financial and planning support.

The question of the curricular and/or extracurricular nature of theatre practices in school activities remains unresolved; some stark choices are made in the process/product dichotomy which should, instead, be rethought in an integrated and non-oppositional way; collaboration in partnership between teachers and theatre operators remains an objective which is not always pursued, both for cultural reasons and for lack of financial resources; the offer of theatre practices, although wide, is still confined within the limits of extemporaneity, in the absence of its systematic placement in the educational offer of schools; the awareness that life skills and soft skills, transversal to every professional activity, can be developed through theatre practice is a fact that is still far from being fully accepted; the crucial role of

theatre activities to reconnect schools with their localities and communities is often neglected or ignored[43].

It seems quite clear that the trigger point of further developments depends on the role of teachers, protagonists of the educational relationship with students at the same time as intermediaries in the fruitful connection between schools, families and communities. Going to the source of the problem, the issue is therefore shifted in two directions: first of all, to the teachers' training, which should necessarily include a theatrical component (both as historico-critical and practical training), which is something that, at the moment, is neither systematic nor structural in the Italian university system. Secondly, and closely intertwined with the previous point, the idea of theatre that crosses our social horizon needs to be transformed, recovering its political scope, intended in its highest sense of "care of the polis", the same that, in the key stages of Western history, has always been organic with the poetic, aesthetic and cultural dimension of the theatrical experience. It is a long-term work of educational and cultural dissemination, which must necessarily become central to the objectives of academic life.

[43] However, there are also some virtuous cases, such as the one studied by Innocenti Malini (2011a). On the necessary connection between school and local community, see Colombo, 2001.

# 9.   Social Theatre in Italian Universities

*Livia Cavaglieri and Alberto Pagliarino*[44]
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## 1.   Introduction

Founded at the beginning of the 20th century as a specific and autonomous academic discipline (Max Herrmann's *Theaterwissenschaft*), Theatre Studies appeared in Italian universities in the second half of the 1950s (at the Università Cattolica of Milan, Universities of Rome and Padua) and came to maturity in 1970 with the foundation in Bologna of the first degree course in DAMS (Art, Music, Performing Arts and Cinema) (Ferraresi, 2019). But the relationship between university and theatre dates back to much earlier.

Since the beginning, the theatre generated in universities various representative celebrative forms and goliardic parodic practices, but also constituted a central element of the educational process and a pedagogically organic and integrated tool for the teaching of literature, language and rhetoric. Thus it enriched academic life throughout Europe, not only as an intellectual learning process, but also an active scenic practice.

In the 20th century, the relationship between theatre and university took an unprecedented variety of modulations. In Italy, in particular, this has contributed substantially to founding, defining and spreading the phenomenon of social theatre in all its forms. In the first part of this essay, we will analyse the active practices of university theatre, which have prefigured and stimulated the link between applied didactic and participatory research. This link will form the object of the third part, where the main focus will be:

> the role played by some universities in the development of social theatre, not [only attempting a] theoretical reading of the phenomenon, but rather attempting to contribute to the definition of its method, practice and obviously its theory through a direct intervention into practices and training of operators (Innocenti Malini, 2016, p. 52).

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[44] This essay was conceived together by the authors; the writing was divided as follows: paragraphs 1-2 were written by Livia Cavaglieri, paragraph 3 by Alberto Pagliarino.

## 2. At the Roots of Social Theatre: Forms and Practices of Active Theatre in Universities

The phrase "university theatre" gathers under a single category experiences born with different objectives and characterised by various articulations of the relationships between students, teachers, academic bodies and the outside world. University theatre can be many things, indeed: a spontaneous student practice or an activity stimulated by the teachers. It can be independent from the institution (even antagonistic to it) or strongly framed within it (even structured in a course of studies). It can play a professionalising function for students who wish to work in the field, but it can also be a disinterested experience of self-expression and self-awareness. It can be carried out by students, teachers, as well as by professionals and theatre-makers.

Veritable intermediaries between «academic and militant culture, theory and practice, theatre-literature and theatre-entertainment» (De Chiara, 1956), the university theatres born in Italy after World War II aimed at rediscovering and enhancing texts from the ancient and modern repertoire, through performances targeted at renewing the perspective on theatre and at freeing the theatricality of a dramaturgy suffocated by predominantly literary and philological studies. The issues of modern direction and the battle for resident companies were the pivots around which the thought of research and the practice of the stage were to be brought together. These early formations (Padua, Venice, Rome) built on the tradition of a university theatre well connected with the academic institution. On the other hand, the companies founded by students (at the universities of Genoa, Parma[45], Milan Statale, Bari, Perugia, Palermo) prevailed from the mid-1950s, and were later welcomed and promoted by teachers from the area of Humanities. University theatre pre-dates the inclusion of theatrical studies in the academic curriculum and indeed had a driving role in affirming their dignity as a fully-fledged discipline. It contributed to the opening of the first chairs of History of Theatre and Performing Arts and to the promotion of the tangible, material nature of the scene to the rank of cultural issue[46]. Places of encounter, socialisation and maturation of personal identity for young privileged people, the university theatres of the first generation promoted values and behaviours which formed favourable ground for the taking root, in the following decades, of a conception of theatre centred on its use-value: the spirit of association (particularly present in the temporary festival communities),

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[45] Since its foundation, this was a mixed group that brought together students, amateur actors and young workers.
[46] The same role was fulfilled by university theatre in France; see Rollinat-Levasseur, 2019.

voluntary work and the constitutive openness to the corporeal and experiential dimension of learning.

From the mid-1960s, university theatres underwent a radical overhaul of their content, structure and purpose and pursued the idea of «theatre and theatre practice as instruments of political communication and social action» (Gandolfi, 2015, p. 87). There was no more time for formal experiments and issues internal to the student body, as the time for class struggle had come. The reference to a more politicised horizon led to favouring the rediscovery of popular cultures and to incursions into geographical and human territories, until then considered marginal and subordinate. University theatres fully participated in the wider wave of expansion of theatre in Italian society. In some cities, actually, they were at the forefront, moving out of their contexts, becoming instruments of decentralisation and cultural animation, shifting the attention from the product to the creative process. They also relativised the aesthetic reasons for the scene and focused on the creation of recreational and expressive opportunities, with political and pedagogical aims. Finally, they dealt with the collective processes of structuring the identity of individuals, of recovering public spaces and of reactivating civil and political actions.

In their investigation of alternative forms of theatricality, the university scenes became a vehicle for the transmission of theatre anthropology, of the ideas of the New Theatre and of *Animazione teatrale*: this happened, for example, in Bari (*Animazione teatrale* actions in the schools of the old town; presence of Augusto Boal in 1976, see Di Santo, 2004) and in L'Aquila (where the intense *Animazione teatrale* activity in schools was prepared by meetings with Giuliano Scabia and Franco Passatore, see Farneti, 1994). Meanwhile at the DAMS degree of the University of Bologna, thanks to Scabia, *Animazione teatrale* had become a form of participatory teaching.

The application of theatre in political and social contexts led to disagreements and break-ups. During the 1970s, some groups left the universities and were re-founded as cooperatives of professionals or community-based theatres: from the CUT (Centro Universitario Teatrale, that is university theatre centre) in Parma seceded the Compagnia del Collettivo, today Teatro Due (Becchetti, 2003); the founding members of the university theatre of Perugia turned to professionalism and became the Gruppo di Sperimentazione e Azione Teatrale Fontemaggiore; in Palermo, the university association Teatro Libero became a professional group; the TADUA of L'Aquila founded the company L'Uovo; in Genoa, a CUT that had been in full activity until then, went into crisis and generated the Teatro della Tosse.

However, many new groups were founded and remained determined to

express their political and social commitment without severing their ties with the university: in Padua the Teatro Popolare di Ricerca officially became a CUT in 1971; in Brescia the CUT La Stanza, born in 1973, aimed from the start at entering into a relationship with the entire social environment of the city, and was one of the first to start a section of social theatre (Bernardi, Innocenti Malini and Susa, 2016).

Since the beginning of the 1980s, in the context of a profoundly changed university, it is mainly the professors – sometimes former members of a university theatre – who have been building theatre practice spaces for students (although there are many exceptions, especially during the Panther movement), incorporating active theatre activities into their research work and involving professionals and operators. This is the formula of the «*théâtre encadré*» (Ertel, 2004), in which the design and organisational weight of the trainers becomes decisive, as shown by its two most famous examples: the Centro Teatro Ateneo (Rome La Sapienza, 1981-2015) and the Soffitta (1988-, DAMS Bologna).

In this specific outline, where the practical dimension and the historical-theoretical research are intensely intertwined, the theorisation of social theatre inaugurates, at the end of the 1980s, a new and fertile chapter (Cavaglieri and Gandolfi, forthcoming), thanks to the leading experiences of the Cattolica of Milan, which will be better explained in the second part of the intervention, of Urbino (Aenigma, see Minoia, 2013) and of Ferrara (Centro Teatrale Universitario and Teatro Nucleo, then Balamós Teatro, see Gandolfi and Fuoco, 2018).

## 3.    The Birth of Social Theatre: Academy Meets Communities

In the last fifty years, many scholars and researchers have opened up to the investigation of theatrical forms in non-professional places, with non-professionals, in social contexts or for educational purposes. They have originated a number of research schools. For the purpose of this paper in the next pages we will focus on the university experience linked to the birth and development of the social theatre methodology[47], born from the fertile experience of Sisto Dalla Palma and his Milan school, which later expanded to Brescia, Pavia, Turin, Catania; we will mention briefly some of its spin-offs, independent but clearly connected with it.

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[47] For example, the research group of *Teatro sociale d'arte* (for an explanation of the meaning of *Teatro sociale d'arte* see the *Notes on Translations* on p. 7) at La Sapienza University of Rome, headed by Guido Di Palma, remains outside this brief description and constitutes a parallel path of recognised value. *Teatro sociale d'arte* is a term coined by Andrea Porcheddu (2017).

Social theatre was born and defined in the university context, thanks to Dalla Palma's research in the suburbs of Milan in the 1970s, that reached methodological maturity twenty years later. Dalla Palma was a professor at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore and a disciple of Mario Apollonio, one of the co-founders of the Piccolo Teatro di Milano, the first resident theatre in Italy. Dalla Palma developed his master's theories and studies on the themes of theatre and the active participation of citizens. The central intuition of Apollonio's work was that theatre is capable of nourishing the human being all the more when it is "acted" and not just "seen" (Dalla Palma, 1971). They shared the idea of a "bottom up" theatre. From this key nucleus comes the experience of the Centro di Ricerca per il Teatro (CRT) founded by Dalla Palma on the outskirts of Milan. The CRT became a cultural meeting place where all the great masters of the avant-garde theatre – Odin Teatret, Tadeusz Kantor, Jerzy Grotowski and many others – gathered and mixed, developing into a place of reflection on the themes of a widespread and participatory theatre. Those were the years immediately following the workers' and students' demonstrations, thus the CRT also looked with interest at the numerous experiences of *Animazione teatrale*, which took the theatre out of its traditional spaces, into political contexts – factories, universities – or into places where deep needs could easily be perceived, such as former asylums, prisons and schools (Bernardi and Carpani, forthcoming). During the first twenty years of the CRT's activity, the theatrical practices that would later constitute the roots of social theatre were analysed and implemented. The first research group formed around Dalla Palma, consisting of Fabio Antolini, Claudio Bernardi, Bernadette Majorana, Renata Molinari, Alessandro Pontremoli. In the 1990s the group grew to include Laura Cantarelli, Monica Dragone, Fabrizio Fiaschini, Giulia Innocenti Malini, Alessandra Rossi Ghiglione, Guglielmo Schininà. At the same time, working in collaboration with Bernardi, Dalla Palma created the three-year training course called Anabasi, 1994-1998, inspired by Apollonio's "bottega-workshop" concept, based on synergies between the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore of Milan and the CRT. In this way new scholars and artists were formed who, in the following decades, would contribute to developing the approach of social theatre and to spreading it nationwide.

The first definition of social theatre to appear in writing was formulated by Bernardi:

> social theatre is concerned with the expression, training and interaction of people, groups and communities through performative activities that include the different genres of theatre, play, feast, ritual, sport, dance and cultural events (Bernardi, 1998, p. 157).

In the following years university research produced many publications to improve and expand the methodology (Bernardi, 2004; Pontremoli, 2005; Rossi Ghiglione and Pagliarino, 2007).

In Milan, from 2001 onwards Anabasi's "bottega-workshop" was developed into a post-graduate further education course – promoted by the Università Cattolica – which in 2019 reached its seventh edition. This path of research and action was and still is partly channelled within the wider framework of the CIT Centro di Cultura e Iniziativa Teatrale "Mario Apollonio" (Mario Apollonio Centre for Culture and Initiative in Theatre), founded by Annamaria Cascetta and directed since 2014 by Bernardi, with a section dedicated to social theatre. The "bottega-workshop" model is thus structurally brought inside the university context, where the training of students focuses on group management and makes use of field internships within projects carried out in contexts such as prisons, mental health institutions, care-homes for the elderly, among others (Bernardi and Carpani, forthcoming).

The experience of social theatre research, training and action gradually spread out from Milan to other cities in Lombardy. In Brescia, Innocenti Malini taught social theatre in the Sciences and Technologies of the Arts and Performing Arts (STARS, Scienze e Tecnologie delle Arti e dello Spettacolo, that is to say sciences and technologies of the arts and performance) degree course until 2011, while Bernardi and Carla Bino carried out projects on sacred and festive themes from 1995 onwards. At the University of Pavia – initially Faculty of Modern Languages and Cultures and now Department of Humanistic Studies – Fiaschini continues the advanced training course launched by Dalla Palma in collaboration with the Fraschini Theatre of Pavia.

Social theatre became social community theatre at the University of Turin in 2003 thanks to the collaboration between Pontremoli, Rossi Ghiglione and Pagliarino. The research group was involved in the early 2000s in the strategic regeneration plan of the suburbs of Turin.

In this context, a research-action phase on theatre and community was launched, involving universities, local authorities and theatre companies to conduct cultural experimentation in the context of the *Progetti Interdipartimentali Ambiente e Salute* – social support plans. This experience brought the focus of cultural work on the active participation of citizens. As a consequence, the methodology was expanded by adding the concept of community empowerment to the founding core of social theatre, that is the concept of "working with the group". Community empowerment, in turn, is based on community dramaturgy (Rossi Ghiglione, 2013) and on the creation of social capital through cultural action with the locality and through the

development of local networks (Pagliarino, 2011). Deriving from the Social and Community Theatre Master – the first Italian master course in the field, which run for four editions until 2011 –, the Social Community Theatre Centre (SCT) was founded in 2014, under Rossi Ghiglione's scientific supervision and direction[48]. It is an establishment of international relevance resulting from an agreement between the University of Turin, the centre for research and lifelong learning Corep (Centro per la Ricerca e l'Educazione Permanente) and the Associazione Teatro Popolare Europeo or European people's theatre association.

The Centre promotes research, training and implementation of national and international projects. In particular it is carrying out an extensive work of methodological dissemination and innovation taking advantage of calls for proposals by Creative Europe, Erasmus Plus and Interreg-Alcotra (Rossi Ghiglione, Fabris and Pagliarino, 2019). These initiatives involved, among others, the Odin Teatret, the National Theatre of Nice and twenty-three other partners and forty-six associated partners from sixteen European countries, and cooperate, on a world-wide scale, with the International Organization for Migration and several international cooperation agencies – among which CIFA ONLUS and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs – in Libya, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Lebanon.

Since 2003 the Turin team has developed a considerable experience of theatre and health, directed and conceived by Rossi Ghiglione, which has now become a permanent research area of the SCT Centre on cultural welfare and the first structured and interdisciplinary experience of theatre and health at national level (Pagliarino, 2017).

Starting from field research in health promotion and healthy ageing conducted originally in an oncology ward (Rossi Ghiglione, 2011a), a network was created involving the School of Medicine of the University of Turin, the Dors (regional documentation centre for health promotion), the Aress (regional strategic agency for health and social affairs), the Regional Oncology Network, several RSAs (residential care homes for the elderly), ASLs (local health services) and hospitals.

Since 2006, the network has been creating art and health courses for patients and care givers in Italy and abroad and developing university training for students of health faculties, launching impact assessment processes for the training of care professionals (Pagliarino, 2018) and stimulating a national debate with the first Forum on Theatre, Health and Wellness in 2013.

Now based in Milan as well as Turin, the research groups are open to

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[48] The management team also includes Alberto Pagliarino, Maurizio Bertolini and Silvia Cerrone. http://www.socialcommunitytheatre.com/it/

interdisciplinary and interdepartmental projects and collaborations with courses in social theatre dedicated to students specialising in different disciplines: primary education sciences, educational sciences, professional education, medicine, psychology and nursing.

The collaboration between CIT and SCT Centre led to the creation in 2018 of the first National School of Social and Community Theatre based in both cities. Milan holds a course on running and planning social community theatre workshops, while Turin offers a course on social community theatre dramaturgy and direction.

Between the end of the 1990s and the first years of the 2000s other theatre courses in the field of social fragility were developed in parallel with the Milan and Turin experiences, notably in Bologna and Urbino. In the University of Bologna, Cristina Valenti, a pupil of Claudio Meldolesi, carries on the reflection on the concept of "theatre of social interaction", in particular in the areas of disability and prison (Valenti, 2004). On these topics the magazine *Quaderni di Teatro Carcere* – of which Valenti is editor-in-chief – was launched in 2014, with the contribution of the University of Bologna. The magazine is part of the wider panorama of the Coordinamento Teatro Carcere Emilia-Romagna (Emilia-Romagna theatre prison coordination), which includes, together with the Emilia-Romagna Regional Authority, several theatre companies with strong background in the field.

The Urbino experience is led by Emilio Pozzi – Chair of History of Theatre and Entertainment at the Faculty of Sociology – co-founder with Vito Minoia of the Aenigma Association. In 1999, Pozzi and Minoia published *Di alcuni Teatri delle diversità*, where they proposed to:

> verify the possibility of acknowledging the specificity of forms of acted theatre, considered until recently marginal, each in its own singularity, and which instead have a solid common denominator: the imprint of diversity (Pozzi and Minoia, 1999, p. 7).

The book is an open and evocative reflection on theatre and its anthropological function in contexts of diversity – such as prison, disability, mental illness, drug addiction –, analysed through papers and interviews with artists and professionals including among others Armando Punzo, Enzo Toma, Donatella Massimilla, Marco Martinelli, Pippo Delbono. This experience led to the foundation of the magazine *Teatri delle diversità* (theatres of diversities) directed by Minoia himself and of the homonymous conference – in its twentieth edition in 2019 – based first in Cartoceto and then in Urbania. They should be granted the merit of collecting and systematising different national experiences of theatre in contexts of diversity.

More recent is the birth of the Officine Social Meccaniche di Catania (socio-mechanical workshop), a group of social theatre operators who trained in 2010-2011 at the I Vulcanici (the volcanics) advanced training course promoted by the Università Cattolica of Milan and directed by Guglielmo Schininà. The Officine, founded by Luisa Cannella, Maria Giovanna Italia, Maria Chiara Salemi, conduct social theatre activities in the San Berillo district of Catania and host a biennial social theatre event in collaboration with the University of Catania, consisting of shows, debates, workshops and conferences.

The history of social theatre was born in the university context and is placed alongside the hundreds of social theatre groups working throughout the entire nation, with various forms and results. The research work in universities also develops through projects in action always striving for methodological innovation, creating a national ecosystem – with great knowledge transfer and exchange – made up of essays, journals, laboratories, research, evaluation activities and projects in action. This ecosystem of practices and scientific research has resulted in continuous evolution of teaching and training activities. In this case, the university is on the borderline between its role as a place dedicated to higher education and research and what in Italy is known as the "third mission", i.e. the opening of the academy towards civil society with a view to sharing knowledge and assuming a role of reference for the region. In Italy this has enabled social theatre to open a dialogue with local contexts, to consider the differences between practices in the field as an asset and to create networks of professional bodies.

Two recent cases worth mentioning are: the case of the TiPici Network – Trasformazione Partecipata della Comunità (Transformation-Participation-Community) – in Milan and that of the Distretto Sociale Barolo[49] in Turin. The TiPici Network was founded in 2019 by Innocenti Malini, bringing together twenty-one cultural and social organisations that carry out theatre projects in areas of disadvantage in the city of Milan. In the same year in Turin, the Spazio BAC was created and became the permanent seat of the SCT Centre. It is located within the Barolo Social District, a large social system consisting of several buildings and courtyards hosting dozens of third sector associations, with which the Centre develops special projects and collaborative networks with the idea of promoting increasingly deeply-rooted synergies between culture, society and the local environment.

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[49] The headquarters and the District itself are owned by the Opera Barolo Foundation, which promotes the idea of beauty as a vehicle for the care and well-being of people.

# Fourth Act
# Performing the Social: Care

# 10. Performing Arts and the Promotion of Health

*Alessandro Pontremoli*

## 1.     Health, No Matter What!

The concept of health, like every other concept, has a cultural origin and undergoes epistemic changes with time. Together with the discourses it produces, it is strongly influenced by the zeitgeist. Today more than ever before:

> the preoccupation with what, for lack of a better word, we call "health", has invaded our everyday life. One could almost consider it an activity in itself and for itself, separate from other preoccupations (Benasayag, 2008, p. 9).

The phenomenon of «health at all costs» (ibid.), which generates compulsive behaviours imposed by an obsession with healthy living, stems from a vision of the living person as an aggregate which is required to work as a machine, different from inanimate machines only from a quantitative point of view (Benasayag, 2018, pp. 56-57).

Gripped by their fear of death, parents are possessed by a fierce desire to defend their children in order to prepare them to face a competitive and economistic society, where the individual is considered like a private firm, and is valued and judged in quantitative terms. In a society where the sum of competencies is what really counts, old age and ill health must be concealed in order to parade individuals always equipped with the plasticity required to adapt to change and to the advancements of technology. The same applies to people affected by disabilities: only the thriving, highly driven ones are tolerated. In order not to cause uneasiness because of their fragility – a fragility common to us all but "obscenely" displayed by them – disabled people are required, as old people are, to appear as «asexual angels, devoid of desire, alien to wickedness; to walk around displaying their gratitude for the fact of being tolerated» (Benasayag, 2018, p. 22).

The recent pandemic emergency has dramatically highlighted this situation: on the one hand, the lockdown, with the closure of schools and of every educational agency, has de facto achieved the biopolitical containment of the potential of the new generations; on the other hand, it has made the

marginalisation of the elderly and the disabled, more exposed to the risk of contagion, painfully clear. The obsession of contemporary society with the removal of death and illness has shown its sinister and deceitful face in this terrible circumstance of collective and universal trauma. As Judith Butler writes:

> To seek a form of human action capable of overcoming death is itself impossible and dangerous, taking us further away from a sense of the precariousness of life. In this perspective, the body imposes a principle of humility and a sense of the necessary limit of all human action (Butler, 2015, p. 47).

In this context it is clear that health is not considered by the powers that be as an inalienable right, because it is too dependent on the inequalities created by capitalist society and by the practice of extreme liberalism. The unequal demographic distribution of precariousness brings to the surface an extreme differential exposure to mortality, a condition peculiar to people affected by fragility and subordination.

What the establishment is doing in the present, which is well described by Giorgio Agamben, is the deconstruction of life. In order to define itself, the state power must be founded on bare life, preserved and protected if it is subjected to the right to life and death of a sovereign and of the law (Agamben, 1995 and 2011, p. 90), it must therefore separate the bare life, the mere abstract precondition of human life, from the forms-of-life for which life is compromised (Agamben, 2011, p. 89). And it is on this nudity that the power apparatus of medicine perpetuates its process of prescriptive subjectivisation, which originates the concept of healthy man: «the preoccupation with a "healthy life" serves as a springboard for the affirmation of the social norm over laws and codices» (Benasayag, 2008, p. 12).

## 2.    Action, Health and Performance

The utilitarian grid of functions is not enough to understand our bodies, our lives, our societies: life experiences imply complex mechanisms not susceptible to modelling. For living beings, the world is experience and their acts are always caused in a horizon of meaning and are carriers of meaning (Benasayag, 2018, p. 76).
Miguel Benasayag states that the body is constantly in action (Noë, 2004; Berthoz, 2009), independent of any centre of control and it «develops through movements; a knowing body is in full action» (Benasayag, 2008, p. 102). For the well-being and health of people it is therefore essential to

strengthen and develop their "power to act". Along the same lines, Paul Ricoeur defined freedom not in relation to moral laws but to the body, intended as a unified and indissoluble mixture of own subject and own body. A body intended as flesh, immersed in the chiasm of the visible and of the sensitive in a situation of reversibility, is the condition of the possibility of freedom.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty pointed out that:

> the thickness of the body, far from rivalling that of the world, is […] on the contrary the sole means I have to go unto the heart of the things, by making myself a world and by making them flesh ([1964] 1968, p. 135).

Human actions are therefore an immanent experience, rooted in life. The creative action, capable of «impressing the character of being on change», manifests and reveals itself not in *contemplative* forms, but rather in the *experiential* forms of art, the art that Nietzsche identified with the will to power, and Ricoeur matched, thanks to the similar concept of *puissance d'agir*, or power to act, with human freedom (Ricoeur, [2004] 2005, pp. 89-93 and 134-149; see also Piras, 2007). Social theatre and performance are based on what Ricoeur, utilising a concept defined by Arthur Danto, calls the «basic actions», those actions we can carry out directly with our bodies without the mediation of other actions (Danto, 1965). Voluntary movements, therefore, performed immediately, directly dependent on the power of the subject. These movements, constituting a knowledge without representation, are, according to Ricoeur, a way to access reality as power, they are «the conatus, or the power of being of all things» (Ricoeur, [1990] 1992, p. 316), practical capability to start a course of action in the world (Piras, 2007, p. 120). Similarly, Agamben affirms that:

> a political life, that is oriented towards the idea of happiness and cohesive in a form-of-life, can be thought of only starting from the emancipation from this split, from the irrevocable departure from every sovereignty. [He asks himself] is it possible, today, is there today anything like a form-of-life that is to say a life for which, in its own life, life itself is implicated, a life of the power? (Agamben, 2011, p. 92).

He replies that thought is the constitutive connection of the form-of-life, thought intended as experience «that has the potential character of human life and intelligence as its object(s)» (ibid., p. 93). The experience of thought configures itself always as the experience of a common power, that is, as an identification «without residue» between community and power.

This plural human action therefore has an eminently bodily character and, as

Butler points out:

> the body or, rather, concerted bodily action – gathering, gesturing, standing still, all of the component parts of "assembly" that are not quickly assimilated to verbal speech – can signify principles of freedom and equality (Butler, 2015, p. 48).

## 3.    Theatre and Health

It is clear that in the society of efficient functioning, where the body has been separated from the forms-of-life, the myth of health at any cost suffers a setback because fear is not only the engine that causes the power to organise itself as a bio-power, but also a devastating and irrepressible consequence of the inevitable failures of an idea of care unable to take into account complexity in an adequate manner. One must think, in this regard, of the inequality of outcomes in traditional health treatments and cures, due to social, cultural, economic, political and other variables. One thinks, in this regard, of the inequalities that are created by a series of social, cultural, economic and political variables, the outcomes of which are controlled with increasing difficulty by traditional health treatments and care interventions[50]. The theatre, brought back to its origin of being a personal experience, is today watched with interest and sometimes included, all due allowances made, in treatment protocols (Rossi Ghiglione, 2011a). On the one hand the bio-power medicine is thus trying to harness and tame it, forcing it into rigid protocols; on the other hand, Social and Community Theatre[51], training ground of our power of action, looks more and more as a movement of resistance capable of bringing out desire, a sure sign that alerts us to the possibility of acting in the situations of real life.

The theatrical experience is a body in performative relation with other bodies, it is a body that assumes, creates and transforms languages, it is free representation of oneself within a defined and recognised perimeter, it is a question about the sense of being and of being in a particular situation. Without considering this existential dimension of theatricality, one can never understand the reason that today pushes people of different social backgrounds, of different ages, of the most different origins to want to "make" theatre rather than to "go to" the theatre.

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[50] For further information please refer to the forthcoming *Proceedings of the International Study Day Teatro, salute e disuguaglianze*, Turin, 1 February 2018, one of the projects issued from the PRIN *Performing the Social. Education, Care and Social Inclusion through Theatre*.
[51] For an explanation of the meaning of Social and Community Theatre see the *Notes on Translations* on p. 7. The expression is used in this sense throughout the paper.

Bodies are able to produce transformation processes in public spaces through their mere presence and collective alliance. Social and community theatre activates forms of performativity, that is to say forms of coordinated action which are designed to serve as social practices of resistance:

> So this movement or stillness, this parking of my body in the middle of another's action, is neither my act nor yours, but something that happens by virtue of the relation between us, arising from that relation, equivocating between the I and the we, seeking at once to preserve and disseminate the generative value of that equivocation, an active and deliberately sustained relation, a collaboration distinct from hallucinatory merging or confusion (Butler, 2015, p. 9).

The Social and Community Theatre is the model of a necessary theatre that cares. The necessity of the theatre is not unconnected with human corporeity, but it is a consequence of its statute: just as one cannot live without eating, there is no real quality of life without the mechanisms of representation – which underlie cognitive, affective and relational processes – being nourished by experience.
Theatre is this sustenance, the place where one can rediscover oneself, one's own history, one's own dimension as a subject and one's role within the world one lives in. It is, in short, the *possibility to act* in the *what if* dimension, but also a direct performative action to achieve and maintain health, as this was defined in The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion in November 1986:

> Health is created and lived by people within the settings of their everyday life; where they learn, work, play and love. Health is created by caring for oneself and others, by being able to take decisions and have control over one's life circumstances (WHO, 1986).

# 11. Theatre and Health: Origins, Areas and Perspectives

*Alessandra Rossi Ghiglione*

## 1. The Current Challenge

COVID-19 has clearly demonstrated how a life of relationships and active cultural participation is essential to the psychosocial and physical well-being of people and communities. Given that they are eminently social and symbolic animals, human beings need to express themselves and create and experience meanings through actions involving other human beings and interacting with the environment in which they live. The pandemic has had a greater negative impact on the health of the disadvantaged and vulnerable (Bambra et al., 2020; "COVID-19 casts light", 2020), for whom the lack of opportunities and of access to social and cultural resources is greater (Pitas and Ehmer, 2020; Van Bavel et al., 2020). Additionally, COVID-19 has highlighted the fundamental role of religious and civil rituality in the elaboration of mourning and in the production of collective meanings able to generate shared values and visions of possible futures following the experience of death.

## 2. Origins and Evolution of the Relationship Between Art and Health

In the ancient world the healing scene was integrated: medicine, spirituality and rite constituted a unitary knowledge geared towards the *salus*, the healing of mankind as a whole. According to the Hippocratic school (5th-4th century B.C.), health did not concern only the biological dimension of the individuals, but it included their lifestyle and their natural and social environment. Hippocrates was the first to point to the theatre as a practice of health, inviting his patients to treat themselves with a vision of tragedy and comedy (Cosmacini, 1997).

In the following centuries, art and care were separated. The notion of health was reduced to the mere absence of illness. Medicine became a cure for the physical body alone. Although now outdated, this so-called biomedical approach still informs many health systems throughout the world, as well as the basic training of professionals and part of scientific research.

The questioning of the Cartesian dualism of body and mind, which began at the end of the 19th century, and the birth of the social sciences – anthropology,

sociology, psychology, new pedagogy – relaunched the role of culture in shaping human experience and paved the way for a paradigm shift in medicine. In 1977, the US psychiatrist George L. Engel opposed to the biomedical model a new biopsychosocial model, highlighting the decisive role played by psychic and social factors in health (Engel, 1977). To this model refer today the new branches of medicine, such as PNEI or Psychoneuroendocrineimmunology (Bottaccioli, 2014), epigenetics[52] and neuroaesthetics, which, following the discovery of the role of mirror neurons (Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia, 2006), concentrates on what happens to people in the experiences of artistic fruition and creation (Gallese, 2010 and 2013).

In parallel with developments in scientific research, from the post-war period, the World Health Organization has been gradually endorsing the change in the concept of health and expressing the new principles on which international health policies are based.

> The following principles are basic to the happiness, harmonious relations and security of all peoples: Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition. The health of all peoples is fundamental to the attainment of peace and security and is dependent upon the fullest co-operation of individuals and States[53].

The 19 December 1946 Declaration – included in the preamble of the WHO Charter – formulates the current definition of health and, paying attention to the right to health and the interconnection between health, peace and security, lays the basis for subsequent declarations on the issues of health promotion (Lemma, 2005), intersectoral approaches to health policies[54] and equity (Arcaya M.C., Arcaya A.L. and Subramanian, 2015).

In 1986 with the publication of the WHO's *Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion* (WHO, 1986), the idea of health as a dynamic state determined by a plurality of factors was ratified with greater clarity. Along with factors that cannot be modified – biological and genetic – there are numerous other health factors that are modifiable and upon which it is possible to act both preventatively, with health promotion, and therapeutically. The focus is on

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[52] Epigenetics is gathering evidence on the possibility that human behaviour, including that stimulated by cultural and artistic practices, can modify genetic factors (Martienssen, Riggs and Russo, 1996).
[53] The constitution was ratified on 7 April 1948 (WHO, 2002). The same definition is also proposed in the *Health Promotion Glossary* (WHO, 1998).
[54] This approach was ratified in 2013 in the WHO declaration of Helsinki (WHO, 2014).

"health resources" from which we can take action on two levels: on an individual one, by strengthening knowledge and «health skills» (empowerment) (Laverack, 2005) and developing processes that «enable people to gain greater control over the determinants of their health and improve it» (WHO, 1986); and on a socio-environmental level, favouring the creation of «healthcare opportunities» based on an approach from below, generated by the community itself, which is integrated into the local traditions of its members (IUHPE, 2008; WHO, 2020).

The paradigm shift is fundamental: from the centrality of disease treatment to the strategic role of health education and health promotion, from the biomedical approach to a «salutogenic» approach (Antonovsky, 1996) that acts effectively on the «determinants of health». It is in this perspective that artistic actions are recognised for their ability to impact on the social (Cooper et al., 1999; Allen J. and Allen M., 2016) and cultural (Abel, 2007 and 2008) determinants of health.

Social capital (Putman, 2000), that is, all the social resources available to a person or a community, has a positive correlation with both the well-being of a person or a community and their life expectancy (Hyyppä and Mäki, 2003). Evidence has also been gathered on the correlation between cultural capital (Throsby, 1999), in particular participation in cultural activities, and subjective well-being (Grossi et al., 2011) and life expectancy (Bygren, Konlaan and Johansson, 1996; Johansson, Konlaan and Bygren, 2001).

Research on the impact of culture and art on health reached a milestone on 19 November 2019 with the publication by WHO Europe of a review of world literature over the last twenty years (Fancourt and Finn, 2019). The research affirms the contribution of the arts to mental and physical health in the four areas of prevention, promotion, management and treatment and calls for health policies to take this into account. The benefits of the arts under consideration (performing arts, visual arts, literature, culture and digital arts) are found both in active participation and in passive and spectatorial forms. The effectiveness of artistic practices can be traced back to three main characteristics: the holistic perspective, the multimodal dimension, the ability to link the individual health dimension with the social context[55].

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[55] According to this research, the answers produced are psychological, physiological, social and behavioural and depend on nine types of activation typical of artistic practices, which the research indicates: aesthetic engagement, involvement of the imagination, sensory activation, evocation of emotion, cognitive stimulation, social interaction, physical activity, engagement with themes of health, interaction with health-care settings.

## 3.    The Power of Theatre in Building Personal and Community Health

Both in the field of promotion (Matricoti, 2010; Rossi Ghiglione and Tortone, 2020) and of treatment (Brodzinski, 2010), theatre is nowadays recognised as an effective practice important for health challenges: healthy ageing and mental health of the elderly, health education and development, vulnerability, social inclusion, care and training of health personnel (Pontremoli and Rossi Ghiglione, forthcoming). Many are the specific impacts that the theatre produces and that contribute to the construction of individual and social health in these areas. They concern: the strengthening of life skills (WHO, 1994) (with particular regard to empathy, effective communication, emotion management and collaboration) and of mnestic and cognitive skills; the development of social value and social capital; the organic physical reactivation and the integration of body and mind; the inclusion and acceptance of diversity; the ethical reflection and the strengthening of critical learning; the promotion of resilience and stress management.

The original anthropological matrix of the theatre combines the ritual (Turner, 1982), ludic and symbolic dimensions. Being a complex multimodal and multilinguistic cultural device, which favours active participation (Rossi Ghiglione, 2014), theatre – intended both as what is acted and what is watched – activates men on many levels and creates many dynamic connections (involving sensations, emotions, cognitions, relationships) (Rossi Ghiglione, 2019a). This device originated in Greek civilisation, where theatre was as much a social and civil care process as a pedagogical and andragogical arena (Knowles, 1980).

Contemporary theatrical practices oriented towards well-being and health have their roots in the 20th century theatre revolution. Copeau and the master pedagogues of the beginning of the last century (Cruciani, 1971 and 1985) were the first to refocus their attention on the ethical dimension of theatre, its role in the community, its ability to build groups and to connect different cultures (De Marinis, 2011). They also developed a rich repertoire of psychophysical and relational practices which is the basis of the techniques currently used in theatre and health. In the 1950s, and with greater effect in the 1960s and 1970s, a theatre movement emerged consisting of artists, intellectuals and pedagogues who chose to move out of the theatres – both the physical spaces and the commercial production models – and engage with citizens in processes of social and political exchange and change (De Marinis, 1983): *Animazione Teatrale*[56] in France and Italy, community-based

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[56] For an explanation of the meaning of *Animazione teatrale* see the *Notes on Translations* on p. 7. The expression is used in this sense throughout the paper.

theatre in Anglo-Saxon countries and South America[57], moved into communities and met disadvantaged groups with a social and political, rather than therapeutic objective.

Social and Community Theatre or *Teatro sociale di comunità*[58] (Bernardi, 2004; Pontremoli, 2015; Rossi Ghiglione, 2019b) today, which in Italy reaped the legacy of the 20th century theatre in its function of social care and cure, is well recognised even among the community based arts for the support of the psychosocial well-being of individuals and communities in emergency situations (Rossi Ghiglione and Schininà, 2019). The specific methodological and evaluative research on theatre and health which was launched in Turin in the early 2000s (Nicotera et al., 2009; Rossi Ghiglione, 2011a; Pagliarino, 2017) in partnership with health and university institutions, today constitutes an intersectorial heritage able to meet the challenges indicated by the 2018 European Agenda for Culture on social inclusion and community well-being and the more recent ones on combating the inequalities of the pandemic.

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[57] Of interest are the experiences inspired by the pedagogist Freire and Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, whose approach is widely used in health education.

[58] For an explanation of the meaning of *Teatro sociale di comunità* see the *Notes on Translations* on p. 7. The expression is used in this sense throughout the paper.

# 12. Care Aesthetics in Time of COVID-19

*James Thompson*[59]
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When I first started writing on the theme of *care aesthetics*, my purpose was to question the boundaries in social theatre between, on the one hand, the artists who had the capacity for operating in an aesthetic register and, on the other, the social, education and health workers who operated in the register of care (Thompson, 2015; Stuart Fisher and Thompson, 2020). I became interested in how artists demonstrated care in their work – whether through attention to actors, focus on objects, involvement of communities, or design of spaces. This was, of course, also an exploration of when they *did not* demonstrate care in their work. It valued the care taken in arts practices, but it was also a critique of when artists, who might claim they were pursuing projects of social change, showed a lack of care in their dealings with participants or the communities in which they worked. Similarly, I was interested in when social, health or care workers demonstrated an artistry or craft in their work – when they practiced with a certain attention to aesthetics and what it might mean to critique care practices for their lack of attention to a sensory experience or when they were executed without an aesthetic sensibility.

In seeking to dissolve this boundary *care aesthetics* was trying to imagine practices which were both caring and aesthetic without an assumption about who was automatically entitled to the designation "carer" or "artist". So, the physiotherapist could demonstrate *care aesthetics* in her work with a patient, as her touch and hold exhibited a certain craft. Similarly, a neighbour may cook a meal for an isolated friend which communicated her love and affection for them. A social movement might be structured with a certain care aesthetics in the beautiful way it maintains bonds and support between its activists. A community association might shape its day centre for its elderly members with attention to the look and feel of an environment in a way that

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[59] This essay replaces the one Thompson presented at the International Conference *Performing the Social. Education, Care and Social Inclusion through Theatre* held in Milan in September 2019, which will be published in extended form in *TDR – The Drama Review* during 2021 (Thompson, 2021).

respected their sense of worth and sense of place. Care aesthetics was trying to get away from the idea that social theatre, applied theatre or community arts was about places empty of aesthetics inviting the artists into their midst to invigorate them with joy, play and craft – with a model that suggested there is care aesthetics in many different parts of life. The argument was that we needed to sustain our ability to care for each other, for our communities and for the worlds in which we live with great craft and skill without thinking that only those with the formal title "artist" could provide this. Of course, artists can and do provide rich *care aesthetic* experiences – but we need to democratise who is valued for their aesthetic work and recognise the artistry of multiple practitioners and professionals.

Of course, care aesthetics is making another claim. One that suggests that increasing the artistry that takes place between people in their communities makes healthier, potentially more equitable and joyful lives. Similarly deepening our capacities to care for each other – not as an idea but as an actual practice – can provide more sustainable, healthy neighbourhoods and more mutually enriching lives. Care aesthetics is descriptive in analysing and documenting the aesthetic experience of care in community, health and arts projects. But it is also normative – it is a proposal for change. It is suggesting that improving the aesthetic quality of care practices (whether a theatre project or a health practice) will enhance the likelihood of them offering life enhancing and transformative experiences. When the times we live in value the technical and managerial over the embodied and affective, it is a demand for a slower, more human-centred relational focus for acts of care. Similarly, it is making a demand that in a world of extremes of lack of care, and the ugliness of poverty, exclusion and discrimination, we need to improve the way we live together to ensure the damaging and unequal relations that dominate our worlds have a chance to be transformed. Care aesthetics is about the shape and feel of how we look *after* each other and how we look *out* for each other – it is about the art and craft of solidarity.

And that was before COVID-19 – before we entered what has been the biggest international crisis in care in any of our lives. It is a global event that has brought the practice, quality and fragility of the care services we all need into sharp relief. It has shown how care cannot be abstracted from the policies of our governments, our communities strengths and weaknesses and the multiple inequalities that cut through our different contexts. In March 2020, people in the UK watched the situation as it unfolded in Italy. In a classically British condescending way, our press and TV reports hinted that something particular had happened that was catastrophic because of some inherent

problems in Italian society and its health sector and of course nothing of that scale could possibly happen in our "superior" system. Little did these commentators know then that the spectacular incompetence and arrogance of our leaders would lead to the UK becoming the worse affected country in Europe with the second highest death per capita rate (after Belgium) and the highest numbers of deaths which stands at over 45,000 at the time of writing.

In those early reports, one of the more light-hearted accounts was the images and video clips of Italian people singing and playing instruments from their balconies. While again in our reports these were tinged with both romantic and patronising notions of Italy being the home of Opera and particularly demonstrative people, I remember thinking how joyful and resistant these videos seemed. They had that wonderful "in spite of" quality familiar in arts projects that I have previously documented in war zones, where communities in spite of their terrible situation want to sing, dance and act as a way of maintaining both their sense of humanity and also their connections with others. These acts could easily be categorised as an art of resistance, or possibly an art of relief. But to me they were an example of care aesthetics in action. In a context of forced isolation, the event of coming out onto the balcony and singing can only be an attempt both to find some sense of space for yourself, but also reach out to others. At a time when touch – that basic craft of human relations – was not possible beyond one's own immediate family, singing became a way of touching others through the voice. If care is how we look out for, ensure the welfare of and maintain our social connection to others – singing became both a symbol of the demand for community connections, but also an act of making and sustaining them. The images of balconies of musicians seemed to me to be micro acts of an affective, artistic solidarity.

These micro acts also started to appear in the UK as we entered our period of intense lockdown – again often in spite of the government whose incompetence did much to undermine the communal solidarity that is required to keep a strict lock down in place. In the UK we had a weekly *clap for the carers* as people came to their front doors, driveways, and streets to applaud those people who were risking their lives in confronting the pandemic. While I don't want to overlook the irony of many individuals clapping the very people who through voting for the conservative government they had condemned to years of non-existent wage increases, there was still an element of positive solidarity in these and many similar events. These creative care acts might have started with clapping, but soon there were multiple examples of people playing live and recorded music,

dancing in their streets and sharing a weekly moment of collective, if socially distanced, partying. These moments of solidarity with carers, and acts of caring solidarity with immediate neighbours, were joined with different accounts of local acts of kindness. These included baking, cooking, shopping and delivering for isolated or shielding neighbours, making signs for windows for creative walks for children, and making home-sewed protective equipment for health professionals. Why these enter the register of care aesthetics for me is that rather than a perfunctory effort of providing basic provisions, there were multiple accounts of the special effort people put into the craft of these acts. Cakes and meals were made with an attention to their quality and presentation – the aesthetics of the acts of kindness seemed to reach beyond the demand to meet material needs. Care needed a sense of focus and attention – a crafted concern – for both the carer and cared-for to realise a more poignant and powerful sense of connection.

In my local community a bike courier service was started delivering provisions from local traders to people in need, sometimes free meals from local restaurants or groceries for people too unwell to venture out. The volunteers behind this new venture, including my partner who was part of the organising team, knew that it was not just a matter of getting care packages to their recipients, but also the quality of the engagements they had with both traders and people in their houses. In a world when standard means of community relations and interhuman contact were radically altered, they provided an interaction between people – a quality caring relation that prioritised moments of human contact where time was not a constraining factor. These were small but vital networks of solidarity in difficult times. In another example, a friend set up a network of sewers to create scrubs for health care workers. They were largely machinists from an area in North Manchester where they had traditionally worked in the different clothes factories, and now their skills were gaining recognition and being valued for the contribution to the safety of other carers. Again, it was not merely the sewing up of the protective gear and getting it to the staff, but also the attention and care with which these garments were made. Their craft of care became a means to reach out and connect to people who, of course, should have had adequate Personal Protective Equipment as part of their employment – but who had often been left to fend for themselves by poorly coordinated services. Stepping into a gap with these beautifully and carefully made scrubs was also an act of resistance to the incompetence of our government.

All these examples illustrate different elements of care aesthetics. The value of craft skills, the way that their execution is often *more than* the basic required as people make an extra effort both for their personal sense of worth, but also for how that effort communicates your affection for and solidarity with the person to whom you are sending the materials. And then they are about an aesthetics of relations. The objects created certainly had an aesthetic quality – the scrubs, the meals, the cakes, the masks, the care packages, and the shopping bags – were all prepared with an attention to their quality, shape and look. However, more than in the quality of these objects, care aesthetics is also located in the relation that is created between the person, the object and their recipient. The interaction that is made possible by these multiple acts becomes the source of the embodied care that is experienced between different people meeting the challenges of the situation. A person to person conversation on a door step – perhaps an act of kindness while providing a parcel of goods – is an aesthetic engagement because it is attuned to the sensory needs of both parties, and it has a style, approach, a narrative and regard for the emotional and affective shape of the encounter.

Some might argue that in locating aesthetic experiences in these everyday acts during COVID-19 I am ignoring the work of artists – and that artists too have been involved in responding to the pandemic. There is no doubt they have – they have created amazing online and physical responses, and of course their livelihoods have been appallingly affected by the lockdowns and the ongoing demands of social distancing. The point to emphasise is that care aesthetics is not just about the arts, it is about the artistry of carers and the care of artists – and the craft of the care that many others exhibit in the community-based solidarities in which they are involved. Also, what is important to reemphasise here is that care aesthetics is both a descriptive and normative, that is evaluative, account. So, the examples I gave above were largely where the aesthetics of the care was notable for the positive connections and affective resonances it made. We could describe an encounter between two people as perfunctory and absent of any care craft. Care can be done poorly, and of course at worse it can be a location of abuse or cruelty. In discussing care aesthetics, it is important to criticise the inequalities in caring relations (both poorly paid carer to wealthy cared-for, and powerful carer to vulnerable cared-for) and note the embodied, sensory nature of the practices that are part of neglectful care. Linking this back to artists, they can create artistic projects that demonstrate an astounding positive care aesthetics, that create experiences for groups, communities and our wider society that enable and champion beautiful caring relations between people. My point is that they cannot be assumed to be doing this –

they might act selfishly, created hierarchical relations between themselves and others, or create work that exhibits neglect and poor treatment of others. Care aesthetics seeks to challenge artists, carers and citizens more broadly to attend to the relations we create with others, our mutual interdependence, and consider how its shape, craft, sensory and embodied elements, enhance our abilities to live mutually enriching, safe, just and more fulfilled lives. COVID-19 has provided this challenge – and in many ways, in diverse places, people have shown that human relations can be about creative, artistic and imaginative forging of caring bonds between people.

We are going to need the strength of these acts of affective solidarity in the difficult months, and certainly years, ahead.

# Fifth Act
# Performing the Social: Social Inclusion

# 13. The Play's the Thing: Towards an Aesthetics of Engagement. Carving Our Futures from a Tombstone

*Tim Prentki*

## 1.    Introduction

> *The play's the thing*
> *Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king.*
> [*Hamlet*, II.2.600-601]

Hamlet commissions a performance of *The Mousetrap* in the expectation that Claudius will respond in a way which will confirm his guilt in the murder of Hamlet's father. He believes in the power of a simulated action (like the re-enactment of a crime scene) to engage an audience member so profoundly as to alter their behaviour. When the king exits hurriedly from the auditorium in a disturbed state, Hamlet thinks his plan has worked. However, it remains unclear whether Claudius is the possessor of a conscience that can be "caught". He has thus far successfully separated his action from his public performance as king in the manner of many contemporary politicians.

This paper is an exploration of the possibilities of applied theatre for imagining, and perhaps taking the first, tentative steps towards achieving, a different future from the one which seems to be beckoning as we perform our nationalist, neoliberal dances around the vortex of planetary destruction. I'm taking the opportunity so kindly afforded me by the Organising Committee of *Performing the Social* to reflect upon my career as a Theatre for Development pedagogue: what I've learnt and what I've still to learn. At the heart of this reflection lurks an inextinguishable hope that the human species will "forsake its foolish ways" in favour of a search for a path which more truly traces out a potential for equitable, non-exploitative relations in pursuit of social justice. Allied to this hope is the contention that theatre is an essential means for achieving this aspiration.

## 2.    Dicing with Humanity

DICE (*Drama Improves Lisbon Key Competences in Education*) was an international EU-supported project. In addition to other educational aims, this two-year project was a cross-cultural research study investigating the effects of educational theatre and drama on five of the

eight Lisbon Key Competences [:] communication in the mother tongue; learning to learn; interpersonal, intercultural and social competences, civic competence; entrepreneurship; cultural expression. Furthermore, we believe that there is a competence not mentioned among the Key Competences, which is the universal competence of what it is to be human (Cziboly, 2010).

The sixth face of the DICE asserts not only that being human is enabled by engaging in theatre but also that this enabling is universal. Whatever the context, social, geographical, cultural, young people are more likely to develop their human potential if they are given the opportunity to engage in theatre processes. This is the startlingly ambitious conclusion of the study, the implications of which, if taken seriously by those involved in education the world over, require an entire rethinking of what today passes for education across the globe. The further implication is that a failure to act on this conclusion is, in effect, a denial of what it is to be human. In other words, our present educational systems are not the means by which we achieve our potential but rather barriers to that achievement. Perhaps it is not surprising that there is very little evidence that this conclusion has been acted upon. In a speech given at Madison Park High School, Boston, on June 23rd 1990 Nelson Mandela said that «education is the most powerful weapon which we can use in order to prepare our youth for their role as leaders of tomorrow»[60]. Maybe this is why politicians and educational policy-makers are so concerned to keep this weapon out of the hands of the young people who have a vested interest in changing the world. The kind of education made possible by applied theatre will produce changes that would result in an alternative future to the suicidal one towards which we are currently stumbling.

The *status quo* is not the result of ignorance but of the wilful intention of nations, democratic or totalitarian, to keep the weapon out of the hands of tomorrow's young change-makers. Article 13 of the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that:

> The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989).

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[60] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b66c6OkMZGw&ab_channel=GBHNews

All nations with the exception of the USA have subscribed to the CRC. Our young people have a right to theatre; a right to a process that supports the development of their potential as humans.

In those countries where the responsibility to educate the population is honoured (and there are many where it is not), the curriculum follows what Ken Robinson (Robinson, 2015) has called "the industrial model" where young people are treated like the products of a production-line, subjected to identical processing according to age rather than aptitude, interest or capability. It is, indeed, a model deriving from the Industrial Revolution when the "captains of industry" realised that for the work-force to be efficient and, hence, profits maximised, it was necessary to educate it to a minimum standard. Today we are still creating educational systems according to this principle and therefore training young people for a world that either no longer exists or is writing its own suicide note, all under the pretence of "employability". Knowing this, we, all of us, are reneging on our responsibility to the generations who succeed us, if we do not offer a curriculum constructed with the central pillars of creativity and criticality. In the words of my old colleague David Pammenter:

> If we truly believe in the humanising power of theatre, then as theatre artists we must, by extension, be concerned with concrete issues of justice, rights and responsibilities. This holds true whether we are creating the theatre, presenting it, observing it or participating in it. Our theatre must be about the amplification of voices and the revelation of experiences that cause us to question our perceptions, assumptions, beliefs and actions (Jackson and Vine, 2013, p. 84).

## 3. Developing the World, Applying Theatre

In his inaugural address to the nation on January 20th 1949, Harry Truman coined the term "underdeveloped" to describe most of the countries comprising the southern hemisphere. Henceforth the "developed" North has made interventions, both military and "soft", into the affairs of underdeveloped nations in order to expose them to the benefits of development. Thus development became the new colonialism with transnational corporations, supported by global financial institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF, performing the roles previously assigned to invading armies. Through the notorious "conditionalities", the repayment of loans became the mechanism by which most of the world's countries had to conform to the template of economic and social development imposed by the Washington Consensus. Rather than meaning the fulfilment of human

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potential, to be developed meant to be like "us" – "us" being principally the United States and its Western allies:

> The mental space in which people dream and act is largely occupied today by Western imagery. The vast furrows of cultural monoculture left behind are, as in all monocultures, both barren and dangerous. They have eliminated the innumerable varieties of being human and have turned the world into a place deprived of adventure and surprise: the "other" has vanished with development. Moreover, the spreading monoculture has eroded viable alternatives to the industrial, growth-oriented society and dangerously crippled humankind's capacity to meet an increasingly different future with creative responses (Sachs, 1992, p. 4).

The desire for everyone else to be like us can easily be converted in the mouth of a demagogue to crude racism. The casualties have already been many of the, now lost, languages of the world, together with the knowledge and ideas that were held within their discourses. Today Japanese architects visit Machu Picchu to try to discover the secrets of the Incas earthquake-proof construction methods because the Conquistadores were not interested in finding out before they massacred them. Like the European settlers in North America and the Zionist immigrants to Palestine in 1948 («a land without people for a people without a land»), if the inhabitants did not look and behave like us, they could not be classified as humans. These are extreme examples but similar tropes are played out more subtly all the time.

Many applied theatre and theatre for development projects have the undeclared aim of getting participants to conform to another's notion of how to live. "Social inclusion" has a cosy feel to it. Nothing is worse than feeling left out. However, it can mask a coercive intention if those whom we are trying to include have freely opted for exclusion on the grounds that they do not wish to be like us. Much of applied theatre arises from a neoliberal deficiency model of society where the participants – prisoners, the homeless, users of mental health services, the disabled, etc. – lack something that "normal" people possess. By giving these unfortunates a dose of theatre; by applying theatre like a bandage to the open wounds of their deficient social conditions we may be helping them back into the orbit of a neoliberal social consciousness. By declaring an aim of social inclusion we shall also increase the prospect of getting funding for projects which will domesticate recalcitrant and disruptive sections of society, especially if we can demonstrate how our intended outcomes will be measured in quantitative data.

Jamil Ahmed's Bangladeshi experience can be replicated throughout "underdeveloped" communities:

It is a subtle form of manipulation, in that local NGOs are apparently not forced or even dictated to but are simply not funded unless they are willing to follow the normalising framework set by the donors. More often than not local NGOs simply function as mercenaries who are first normalised by accepting donor funding and then they go out to normalize the "community" and "help" its members to lead docile lives (Ahmed, 2007, pp. 209-210).

However, the confidence with which President Truman announced a brave new world of development with the United States as global saviour has long since vanished under the rubble of man-made conflicts of power, money and nationalism, or been burnt to death or drowned by man-made global warming. As Naomi Klein writes in her aptly titled *This Changes Everything*:

Free market ideology has been discredited by decades of deepening inequality and corruption, stripping it of much of its persuasive power (if not yet its political and economic power). And the various forms of magical thinking that have diverted precious energy – from blind faith in technological miracles to the worship of benevolent billionaires – are also fast losing their grip (Klein, 2014, p. 465).

The very notion of conventional development is, in these circumstances, discredited. If the concept is to be of use in our world, it will have to transform itself into a bottom-up, grassroots process which takes effective account of the various functions of culture in relation to human behaviour. In 2004 Helen Gould and Mary Marsh wrote a report for the UK Department for International Development, *Culture: Hidden Development* which exposed the lack of consideration given to cultural factors in development:

… culture is invisible because cultural plurality is inconvenient for development. It is far easier for the machinery of development to function in a world where cultures do not get in the way of political and economic progress: where communities share a set of universal values which make them respond uniformly to change. Furthermore, culture is part of the landscape of human rights which makes it doubly uncomfortable – not only are people diverse in language, thought, belief and identity, but it is part of their inalienable rights to remain so (Gould and Marsh, 2004, p. 22).

## 4. Back to the Future

This matter of culture lies at the core of applied theatre, a discipline that is located at the crossroads of many others: anthropology, history, human geography, performing arts, psychology, sociology and, more recently,

neuroscience. Darko Lukic speaks of applied theatre as existing «in between cultural production and social activism» (2021, p. 82) while for Jan Cohen-Cruz «applied theater, between culture and art, draws on expressive means to uplift what is special about groups of people often in ways that connect them to everyone else» (2021, p. 241). I'm speaking here of culture in its anthropological sense (how we make meaning of our lives) and in its aesthetic sense (how we make art of our lives). The unique function of applied theatre is to weave a dialectic into the fabric of culture whereby it simultaneously puts art into the meaning of daily living and invests art-making with meanings drawn from daily life. This integrative process is actualised through a theatre aesthetic that stimulates the imagination to conceive alternative futures that grow out of lived experience. The creative tension between imagination and reality which stretches like a spinal cord down the skeleton of applied theatre is recast in relation to culture by Arjun Appadurai thus:

> culture is a dialogue between aspirations and sedimented traditions. And in our commendable zeal for the latter at the cost of the former, we have allowed unnecessary, harmful and artificial opposition to emerge between culture and development (quoted in Gould and Marsh, 2004, p. 17).

This opposition is expressed when theatre for development projects separate the art from non-theatrical outcomes; when we engage in theatre for a predetermined result such as reducing re-offending rates among prisoners or instances of teenage pregnancy among socially deprived young women. In these cases a notion of what it means to live well has been imposed by an outside agency and theatre is just a delivery mechanism for that notion. However, where the focus falls upon the theatre engagement, the affects and effects upon participants, and hence the meanings that may emerge are unpredictable, potentially rich and containing the possibility of self-actualisation.

The *DICE* project spoke of «what it is to be human». Philosophy down the ages has offered many definitions but a frequent common denominator has been the expression of the seemingly contradictory impulse to free will on the one hand and the recognition of the constraints into which we are born on the other. Karl Marx offered his analysis in his essay *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*:

> Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare

on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionising themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language (McLellan, 1980, p. 63).

Marx reminds us that control of the meaning of the past is crucial in determining how we relate to that past. In our digital, so-called "post-truth" world it is easy to fall victim to versions of the past that serve the current interests of those who would manipulate our present. The ghosts of empire and world war clank their chains in rhythm to the Brexit chant of «take back control» while the flaming crosses of the Ku Klux Klan illuminate demands to «make America great again». The jack-boots of fascism echo to cries of «*Prima gli Italiani*» and the perennial appeal to «*il buonsenso*». A fundamental element of community theatre is the creation of space in which participants explore their experiences of cultural identity on their own terms, unmediated by the discourses of neoliberalism, nationalism or populism. Part of that exploration is a consideration of the past that shapes them. What do they bring into the theatrical space from which any imagined reality might emerge? Notwithstanding Peter Brook's famous phrase «the Empty Space», no space is empty but always contains the meanings projected onto it which are themselves the product of past physical, psychological and ideological encounters.

I witnessed one of the more dramatic examples of this phenomenon back in the 1990s when I was supervising a masters project taking place on a Cree reserve in Alberta, Canada. The two masters students had been working for three months with two terminally ill elders (women in their fifties) who lived in a hospice on the reserve. They were persuaded to create a performance for family and friends involving shadow-puppets and music. One of the women was confined to a wheelchair so possibilities for physical performance were limited. Much of the content of the performance revolved around the women's childhood memories which involved being told stories by their grandparents of the days before the arrival of the Europeans in large numbers. They were tales of the old ways, packed with indigenous knowledge and wisdom. What struck me most at the time and has stayed with me ever since was the polarised responses to the show which emerged in the conversations that immediately followed it. The children of the performers together with others of the same generation were polite and respectful but did not engage with the quaint, old-fashioned tales. The grandchildren by contrast were enthralled, and infuriated that these understandings had been

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kept from them. They demanded to know more and to be put in touch with the well-springs of this existence. It was as if they had just uncovered a part of their identities previously hidden from them. The breaking down of a wall of cultural alienation had released them into newly imagined places of self-discovery.

The experience chimes in with Paulo Freire's view of education as a process which can lead to transformation only if grounded in the historical realities of the subjects:

> Problem-posing education bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality, thereby responding to the vocation of persons as beings who are authentic only when engaged in inquiry and creative transformation. In sum, banking theory and practice, as immobilizing and fixating forces, fail to acknowledge men and women as historical beings: problem-posing theory and practice take the people's historicity as their starting point (Freire, [1970] 2005, p. 84).

Freire, like Marx, identifies ideology as the source of a false consciousness that alienates people from the roots of their own being and prevents them from taking an active hold on their self-development. The antidote to ideology is the grounding of each person's participation in lived experience; that is in the historical moment of their being. In the words of the Control Chorus at the end of Bertolt Brecht's Lehrstück *The Measures Taken*: «Taught only by reality can/Reality be changed» (Brecht, 1977, p. 34).

## 5.   Danger: Live Wire

The underlying concept that links all the various branches of applied theatre – TIE, TfD, Community Theatre, etc. – is change. We devote our professional lives as practitioners and academics to this activity because we believe in the possibility and necessity for change. This is why I take Brecht to be the founder of the discipline. In his *Katzgraben Notes* written in 1953 he reflects on the fundamentals of his theatre:

> I wanted to apply to the theatre the principle that it is important not only to interpret the world, but to change it. The changes, whether big or small, that ensued from this intention – an intention which I myself only gradually came to recognize – were only ever changes within the framework of theatre (Kuhn, Giles and Silberman, 2014, p. 251).

The basis of our art is change understood as both social change to address manifest injustices and inequalities (changing the world), and personal change because each of us is a member of an evolving species, constantly in

a state of flux. We do not choose change; change chooses us. Recent discoveries in the neuroscience of the human brain confirm not only that we are wired for change in that our neural pathways are stimulated by responding to the signals given out by others, «altercentric participation» (Bråten, 2007, p. 2), but also that faults and short-circuits can be repaired through engagement in dialogue and interaction.

Vittorio Gallese asserts in his Embodied Simulation Theory that the discovery of mirror neurons means that our behaviour and emotional states resemble the brain activity of an audience observing theatrical action:

> … the fundamental mechanism that allows us a direct experiential grasp of the mind of others is not conceptual reasoning but direct simulation of the observed events through the mirror mechanism (Gallese, Keysers and Rizzolatti, 2004, p. 397).

In other words our brains operate through the theatrical modes of actor, character and audience. When Stein Bråten describes the stages through which recognition of the social environment occurs, he provides a neurological parallel to the process of a drama workshop:

> The shifting between dialogical competence and consciousness manifests itself in the intersubjective attunement at various levels – from confluence of affect at the primary level to advanced self-other simulation and constructions at a more advanced level involving internal self-creative and dialogical circles of complementary self-other perspectives (Bråten, 2007, p. 23).

We invite workshop participants to bring their life experiences into dialogue with those of others so that perspectives are altered and changes become possible. At that point imagination is drawn upon in order to rehearse a future action that grows from these changes. The neurological circuits are lit up by input of energy deriving from the stimulus of collective creation.

Drama therapist Salvo Pitruzzella has worked for many years on the borders of therapy and intervention or, as I might express it in this discourse, repair and change. For him the theatre process offers the opportunity for the patient (the one who suffers) to be transformed into the agent (the one who proposes an action):

> The boundaries between the actor and the audience, as well as the distance between the actor and its role, become flexible and permeable and sometimes they vanish entirely. Each of us is actor, audience and character at the same time, and the narrations become scenarios for

improvising in a relentless process of creation and representation (Pitruzzella, 2017, p. 106).

The concept of distance is significant and explains why Pitruzzella has used Brecht a lot in his work. I have observed in my own practice that when someone performs her own story, the process of recollection creates a space between the person at the moment the event occurred (the character) and the person in the present of the performance (the actor). Far from robbing the event of its original emotion, this process preserves that emotion while enabling its expression to be channelled in the direction of a social consequence. Long before advances in neuroscience, Brecht's understanding of theatre allowed him to grasp the essential dialectic between empathy and representation which Pitruzzella has transposed to the territory of dramatherapy. Consequently, his version of therapy is not the conventional one which supports the neoliberal deficiency model whereby the patient is brought back into the fold of social inclusion through a process of domestication, but rather a notion of therapy as change whereby renewed self-possession leads to both personal and social intervention to enable a different future.

A different future at both micro and macro levels is a matter of urgency given the state of the planet. In his book *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Survive* biologist Jared Diamond comes to this conclusion:

> Two types of choices seem to me to have been crucial in tipping their outcomes towards success or failure: long-term planning, and willingness to reconsider core values. On reflection, we can also recognize the crucial role of these same two choices for outcomes of our individual lives (Diamond, 2005, p. 522).

Applied theatre is a means of reconsidering "core values" because it creates an arena, a safe space if you will, where the unsayable can be said and the unthinkable thought. Here we can rehearse futures in which such fundamentals as over-population and unfettered consumption can be challenged.

## 6. Wired for Hope

Although we are equipped with the neuroplasticity required to remake ourselves according to how we wish to live rather than according to the economic and ideological dictates of others, there are, as "Bifo" Berardi has pointed out, powerful obstacles in our path:

Reviving the intensity of bodily sensibility, and disentangling the potency of the general intellect from the techno-economic apparatus are the cultural and political tasks of the future, and they are narrowly linked (Berardi, 2015, p. 295).

Adopting the concept of neuroplasticity as the means by which new conjunctions are forged between the world and the mind, he speaks of «neural evolution» (ibid., p. 257) through epigenetic recoding as the only means of finding our way out of the semiotic model of capitalism that is currently our only «grid of perception and interaction» (ibid., p. 261).

Today that way out is strewn with the rubbish and pot-holes made by demagogues who would happily carve our futures from tombstones to secure their own power over us: Trump, Putin, Bolsonaro, Duterte, Salvini, etc. The phenomenon of creating enemies is not new, as Theodore Zeldin points out:

> fabricating enemies is one of the oldest and busiest of human industries, and the raw material may be nothing more than hurt pride and anger, gradually hardening until the manufacturers become prisoners of their hatred. When they do not choose their enemies for themselves, others do so on their behalf (Zeldin, 1998, p. 218).

The antidote to this broadcast and social media induced false consciousness is an educational process, accessible to all, that is grounded in the lived experience of young people and of all those with whom we engage through an applied theatre approach. The right to make our own meanings rather than succumb to interpretations of reality fostered by corporate giants is fundamental to our processes. Berardi again shows how applied theatre methods are at odds with the prevailing styles of corporate communication:

> In the sphere of the digital economy, the faster information circulates, the faster value is accumulated. But meaning slows down this process, since meaning needs time to be produced and to be elaborated and understood. So the acceleration of information flow implies the elimination of meaning (Berardi, 2015, p. 162).

The uncovering of meaning lies at the heart of our two-way processes. We engage with theatre drawn from the raw material of our lives in order to benefit from a distance that enables us to see better how we relate to the wider world and the act of engagement itself lends meaning to our existence. The purposelessness and alienation that accompanies so many lives when people feel they are unable to exert any control over their circumstances, can be combatted, albeit temporarily, by framing life in art that opens up the possibility for change. We may only see enough to see how little we can see

but that "little" can offer a kernel of meaning that sets us off on a different path. There may be no single meaning to life but as self-conscious humans each of us can enhance the quality of our existence by discovering a meaning and that process of discovery is greatly assisted by the interaction between life and art, reality and imagination.

Young people in particular are prone to frame their expectations in terms of social justice as their most recent manifestation, the Extinction Rebellion movement, demonstrates. This is why it is vital to honour their right to engage in theatre; to roll the dice for their turn to create. As my former colleague Michael Etherton wrote:

> What constantly amazes us adults is the quality of the drama the young people create in the process of defining the infringement of their rights. In country after country, in culture after culture, children and young people have a beautiful sense of dramatic improvisation. Young people's art in all kinds of creative media, coupled with their struggle for their rights in an unfair world, stands a good chance of changing the future in ways we adults cannot now imagine (Etherton, 2006, p. 118).

When it comes to the «universal competence of what it is to be human», the play is, indeed, the thing. If not now, when?

# 14. Socially Engaged Theatre and Performance in Italy: Politics, Ethics and Aesthetics

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## 1. The Legacy of the Sixties

In historico-critical terms, the relationship between aesthetics and ethics in performance and social theatre in Italy can be exemplified by the publication, between 1968 and 1969, of the Italian editions of Antonin Artaud's *Le théâtre et son double* (1938) and Walter Benjamin's *Programm eines proletarischen Kindertheaters* (1969).

What these two powerfully visionary and heterodox texts have in common is, above all, the emergence of the performative device, highlighted by the body-action synthesis: the core of an anti-narrative and anti-representative artistic process, brought back to the ground zero of a non-specialised cultural action, which goes beyond the closed, self-referential forms of the mainstream theatre. In this perspective, the performative device feeds a widespread creativity, with a socio-anthropological matrix, capable of influencing the transformations of the political system, without ever indulging in instrumental and functionalist ideological drifts.

Within this scenario, the revolutionary path indicated by Artaud is one of desecratory cruelty, of a regressive and painful aesthetics of the body, heading in the direction of the synthesis of body and mind. This indissoluble unity of thought and action, represents, for Artaud, the original source of a lost organicity, and of an affective athleticism made of poetry, flesh and breath, oriented more towards life than towards art, for the regeneration of the human being and consequently of society (Ruffini, 1996 and 2000; Cambria, 2001 and 2007; De Marinis, 2006).

The other path, traced by Benjamin together with director Asja Lacis, privileges the ludic aspect of theatre, conceived as a non-imitative practice of incorporation of reality, of deconstruction and recomposition of the world. It is a work of improvisation, freed from aesthetic, political and social aims, whose results take shape in the unfinished articulation of the childish gesture,

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[61] This essay was conceived together by the authors; the writing was divided as follows: paragraph 1 was written by Fabrizio Fiaschini, paragraph 2 by Roberta Gandolfi.

becoming a «secret signal» of a future awaiting completion (Fiaschini, 2019).

Prompted by these two visions of performance, the Italian Protest Theatre gave life, between the end of the 1960s and the early 1970s, to some of its most original and innovative experiences.

Simplifying a little, one could say that the Artaudian line fed the developments of what goes under the name of New Theatre: a differentiated and multiform phenomenon based on the experimentation of laboratory theatre and on stage writing (De Marinis, 1983; Mango, 2003; Schino, 2009; Margiotta, 2013; Acca, 2019). These two devices similarly overcame the concept of work of art as a product heading towards an open and not aesthetically programmed process, which was connoted as research on the essence and identity of what is human, starting from the transformative and regenerative value of the synthesis body-action, where body meant both the individual body and the social body. In this perspective, the New Theatre was conceived, internally, as the turning point of an aesthetic (re)foundation of a new theatrical language, and, externally, as a form of cultural-political militancy, aimed at reconfiguring the mechanisms of theatrical production, organisation and communication. The theatrical profession thus ended up encompassing the artist, the cultural operator, the political activist and the militant critic in a single profile. The individualised and specialist approach to culture was replaced by group culture, understood both as a self-managed model of cooperation and as an artistic practice of collective writing, open to the participation of the spectator and the involvement of the community. This activist thrust was artistically interpreted by the community-based groups and the research theatre by activating all the possibilities of the performative device, such as site-specific art, installation, happening and environmental theatre. A widespread contamination of theatrical practices that aimed to regenerate urban spaces of social interaction or reinvented itself in the nomadic forms of itinerancy.

Next to the intense projectuality of the New Theatre, the line inspired by Benjamin fed instead the other strand of the 1968 protest: that of the so-called *Animazione teatrale*[62], probably the most eccentric and transgressive proposal of those years, certainly the closest to contemporary socially engaged theatre experiences (Scabia and Casini Ropa, 1978; Perissinotto, 2004; Fiaschini, 2015). Not entirely satisfied with adopting the principles and languages of laboratory theatre and stage writing, the *Animazione teatrale* was in fact the most explicit example of aesthetic "profanation",

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[62] For an explanation of the meaning of *Animazione teatrale* see the *Notes on Translations* on p. 7. The expression is used in this sense throughout the paper.

aimed as it was at restoring creative potential to common and amateur use, undoing the double link between art and professionalism that had separated ("sacralised") and made this very potential unavailable, even in its most avant-garde forms.

It is no coincidence that the term itself, *Animazione teatrale*, underlines the idea of nourishing a theatricality that animates everyone, indiscriminately, before and beyond any artistic convention, technicality and professional specialisation.

In this respect, the line of the *Animazione teatrale* not only embraced the antagonistic positions, extremely critical towards the capitalist model of artwork's commodification, but also fully recovered the ludic meaning of theatre evoked by Benjamin. In the practices of *Animazione teatrale*, the primacy of play, in fact, brought the theatrical action back to a performative level which, in its gratuitousness and social shareability, was freed from any subordination to professionalism, as well as from any aesthetic constraint between the performative action and its purpose. The play-space released by the *Animazione teatrale* device restored the theatre to its original status of «means without end»: that is, paraphrasing philosopher Giorgio Agamben, of aesthetic practice which, while maintaining the instrumental nature of the medium, was not obligated to any predetermined end (Agamben, 1996 and 2005). The result, borrowing Bartolucci's words, takes the form of a «horizontal dramatisation» (Bartolucci, 1973, p. 30 and 1976, p. 11), which is at the same time the aesthetic sign of a non-artistically formalised beauty and the political sign of a change that was not ideologically programmed. In other words, the performative actions of the *Animazione teatrale* testify to the chance of an aesthetic of community action, favouring the reappropriation, by the choir-group, of its own imaginary and resources in terms of socialisation and change (Dalla Palma, 1971).

The aesthetic revolution of the ludic paradigm was moreover reinforced by the close alliance between *Animazione teatrale* and alternative pedagogy – the latter particularly supported by the school reform movements, such as the Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa (MCE, Italian Educational Cooperation Movement) inspired by Célestin Freinet (Alfieri, 1974) based on the principle of free expression of speech, body and gesture.

Notable among the protagonists of this short but intense season is Giuliano Scabia (Marchiori, 2005; Casi, 2012). Between 1969 and 1970, within the theatrical decentralisation project promoted by the Teatro Stabile di Torino, he carried out a set of community performative actions in the suburbs of the city, aimed at giving voice and political visibility to struggles of FIAT workers (Scabia, 1973). Performances involved the entire neighbourhood, the workers' families and especially the children in a process of improvisation and

collective writing based on the assembling of heterogeneous materials (audio recordings, newspaper articles, photographs, video documentaries, signs, puppets). In the same context, Scabia also tested his "empty scheme": an educational and social dramaturgy open to the free composition of the participants, later reproposed in 1971 with the children of the school of Sissa and merged in a series of performative dramatisations dedicated to themes chosen daily by the children themselves (Bartolucci, 1972).

Scabia was also the creator and director of one of the first projects of socially engaged theatre in the context of mental illness, in collaboration with the antipsychiatry movements that in 1978 led to the introduction of the so-called Basaglia Law and the closure of psychiatric hospitals. Inside the Trieste asylum, Scabia ran an open laboratory of collective creativity and political reflection which led to the multiplication of artistic codes and languages (painting, puppets theatre, singing, scenic actions) and ultimately resulted in the creation of *Marco Cavallo*. This was a large blue papier-mâché horse, which was taken out of the asylum after knocking down the narrow door of the room containing it and was paraded through the streets of the city of Trieste: an overwhelming performative gesture, which for everyone involved (patients, educators, artists, actors, psychiatrists, citizens) became a living metaphor of a freedom unexpectedly rediscovered in the great urban theatre of the collective feast, regardless of any artistic or ideological finalisation (Scabia, 1976).

From the second half of the 1970s, the aesthetic utopia of the *Animazione teatrale* and of some key experiences of the New Theatre underwent a marked transformation. The implosion of movementist ideals and the extremist drift of the political struggle led to a U-turn in the extroverted drive of cultural and social militancy (militant groups), towards increasingly institutionalised disciplinary boundaries, more and more formalised in artistic, productive and professional terms. This signalled an aesthetic reversal that led the research of the New Theatre to move the scenic writing back within mainstream theatre, and to dissolve it into a multiplicity of experimentations: ranging from the mental and conceptual minimalist theatre of the Post-avant-garde, to visual poetry and environmental installations, down to the re-foundation of the relationship between playtext, actor and director in a new critical perspective of staging (Valentini, 2015; Valentino, 2015).

Similarly, the most eccentric fruits of *Animazione teatrale* (amateurism, collective writing, contamination between artistic languages, festive dramaturgy, participatory art) were rapidly metabolised in a process of professionalisation which, although with original and innovative outcomes, returned to focus on an exclusive relationship between process and work of art. This relationship had two effects: on the socio-educational and

therapeutic side, it tended to privilege, through the training – play – improvisation paradigm, the protected process framework of the theatre-lab; on the artistic side (for example in theatre for children), it fuelled an artistic-spectacular tension, which, however, almost never included direct engagement in the socio-political context (Fiaschini, 2016 and 2018a).

In this context, a new alternative to traditional theatre and research theatre should be underlined: the experience of the Third Theatre movement. Founded by Eugenio Barba in 1976 the Third Theatre aimed to bring together all the theatrical entities that were operating in marginal situations and identified themselves with a "group culture" more interested in the anthropological declinations of performance than in its aesthetic ones (Barba, 1985 and 1990). Starting from an approach of transcultural research and from the principle of daily self-training as a discipline of life, the Third Theatre thus went back to the social perspective: however, its direction was geared more towards the comparison with performance practices of other cultures (especially Asian theatres) or of traditional Italian popular culture (street theatre, festive dramaturgy, folk dances), rather than in the direction of any explicit political commitment. This is demonstrated by the fact that, from the very beginning, a fracture opened up in the Third Theatre between community-based theatre groups, which conceived this anthropological-cultural tension as a civic commitment, and groups, more linked to the Odin Teatret, which instead understood it as the matrix of an internal work process, most often in an artistically-oriented perspective (Schino, 1996).

In order to find explicit signs of a socio-political engaged theatre again, it is necessary to wait until the beginning of the 1990s, when a wide and varied geography of theatrical and performative practices, often heterogeneous, began to emerge from below in equally numerous non-artistic contexts: from the therapeutic field to that of social marginality, from new poverty and inequality to schools, inter-cultural and migratory phenomena, down to the experiences of social theatre and urban regeneration (Pozzi and Minoia, 1999; Bernardi, Cuminetti and Dalla Palma, 2000). This galaxy of experiences is characterised mostly by spontaneous and self-determined entities, often equally alien to the theatrical research culture and to political activism. However, their strength lay precisely in the spontaneity of the peer relationships they created, reinforced by a non-predetermined theatrical approach based on the ethics of contribution: that is on the power of theatre to create value and to plan change through participatory action, in order to translate (passive) consumerism into (active) generativity.

These are the movements that characterise the constellation of "socially engaged theatre" today (Bernardi, 2004 and 2015; Rossi Ghiglione and Pagliarino, 2007; De Marinis, 2011; Fiaschini, 2013; Rossi Ghiglione, 2013;

Pontremoli, 2015; Porcheddu, 2017). This definition is not meant to delimit a particular type of theatre (with its method and field of intervention), but, on the contrary, it underlines the a-specific character of its identity and the extreme permeability of its theoretical and methodological models of reference, as well as the heterogeneity of the experiences it has been able to generate.

In this perspective of disciplinary trespassings, during the last ten years socially engaged theatre (together with new trends in participatory art) has established itself on the national scene as one of the most innovative practices of contemporary theatre research, in both an artistic and socio-political sense. And it seems emblematic that, exactly forty years after the momentous biennium 1967-1968, the new affirmation of socially engaged theatre has been consolidated in the biennium 2007-2008, marked by the worldwide collapse of Lehman Brothers: the symbolic epilogue of the crisis of the neoliberal model based on the competitive principle of social inequality and of excellence, on the myth of individual well-being and of the mediatised aestheticisation of life. A subjectivist and privatistic drift to which socially engaged theatre has opposed a systemic relational vision of creative relationship, a collaborative approach capable of mending the fracture between individual and community, between public and private. According to socially engaged theatre principles, this can be achieved by giving voice and expression to an action in which the relationship between individual and society is no longer the result of an unbridgeable fracture between the man (the private subject) and the citizen (the public subject), but it is the outcome of a constructive interaction between the search for individual well-being and the aspiration to the common good (Fiaschini, 2018b and 2020a).

In this frame, the aesthetics of socially engaged theatre can therefore be defined as an aesthetics of care, where the word must be interpreted in its bio-psycho-social meaning of taking care of oneself and of the others in a systemic perspective of change, starting from a common act of assuming responsibility towards the world (Fiaschini, 2020b).

A solidaristic approach based, in turn, on the unconventional flipping of the idea of weakness, no longer seen as a condition limited to specific disadvantaged or marginal categories, but as evidence of a widespread fragility: a vulnerability of the individual as well as of the collective body, which concerns everyone and the ecosystem itself, making us all fundamentally helpless and therefore increasingly dependent on each other.

In this scenario of vulnerability and proximity, the aesthetics of socially engaged theatre therefore attempts to capture, in the fragile sign of a performing art restored to common use, the foundations of a cultural plan which, once again, finds in a theatrical gesture that is neither artistically

programmed nor ideologically connoted the most effective way to understand oneself and to look lucidly at the world, orienting it towards a better future.


## 2. With Women's Bodies: Theatre as a Tool for the Empowerment of Collective Subjects

The second part of this co-authored paper moves away from the field of theatre and its Italian developments (*Nuovo teatro*[63], *Animazione teatrale*, social theatre) and privileges the social and political scope of the period. It takes into consideration the new subjectivities that were protagonists of the renewal of Italian society in the second half of the 20th century, and it focuses on their agency and their recourse to performativity. Point of departure is one of the most important of the many activist movements of the 1960s and 1970s: the women's movement, whose struggles and agendas transformed the patriarchal structure of society, bringing lasting changes in European legislation and customs.

The agendas of women's movements converge symbolically with the territories of performativity: as a matter of fact, body and language have always been the two main expressive registers of theatre and performance, they were (and are) also the privileged terrain of the feminist revolution. During the second half of the 20th century the feminist battle for self-determination, as it is known, started from the reappropriation of the female body, defying the normativity of motherhood as a biological destiny and of a female sexuality intended for exclusive male consumption. The feminine body needed to be freed from the specialisms of the medical discourse as well as from the objectification of women proposed by the consumerism of mass society. It is no coincidence that in 1970s Italy the practice of self-help became very popular in women's groups and in the first self-managed counselling centres that later became a public service. This trend was disseminated in Europe by the Boston Women's Health Collective thanks to a book of great accessibility, designed to be available to each and every woman, *Our Bodies, Our Selves* (1970).

On the other hand, gender awareness grew thanks to an extraordinary and choral attitude to speaking out adopted by women, originating from the separatist and liminal practice of consciousness-raising, based on the stance that «the personal is political» (De Lauretis, 1990; Bracke, 2014). The political practice of small groups of women who compare and discuss their

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[63] For an explanation of the meaning of *Nuovo teatro* see the *Notes on Translations* on p. 7. The expression is used in this sense throughout the paper.

respective oppressions by confiding in each other, was later transferred to the theoretical elaboration, with the philosophical proposal of relational paradigms that suggest mutual listening as the basis of any recognition of identity. This was very well analysed by Adriana Cavarero in her eloquently titled book *Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti. Filosofia della narrazione* (1997; En. transl. *Relating narratives. Storytelling and Selfhood*, 2014). Cavarero has recently continued her philosophical elaboration with the volume *Inclinazioni. Critica della rettitudine* (2014; En. transl. *Inclinations: a critique of rectitude*, 2016) where she rethinks subjectivity in terms of inclination; she argues that the postural inclination towards the Other (the Child, in Marian iconography) has an ethical and aesthetic value, and formulates a vision akin to the paradigm of care hitherto formulated. Cavarero's postural paradigm of (female) inclination, as opposed to the classical (male) rectitude, is thus valuable for thinking the performativity of theatre in the social sphere, as well… Bodily postures, language, narration and subjectivity: it is not surprising that there is a convergence between the empowerment of female subjectivity and theatrical and performative agency…

The widespread recourse of women to corporeality and theatricality as a means of self-expression, self-discovery, communication, awareness-raising and care, beyond any specialist and professional divide, is part of a "history written from below" which remains largely unexplored. Despite having been scarcely investigated by academic research, it emerges clearly from first-hand reports and journalistic sources of the 1970s. *effe*, the most important Italian feminist magazine of that period, published monthly with a large circulation between 1973 and 1982, documents the use of theatre for the women's movement (Gandolfi, 2019). It bears witness to the feminist collectives who chose to adopt the languages of agit-prop and street theatre as their form of communication, privileging parody registers, while other collectives, mindful of Asja Lacis's example, committed themselves to *Animazione teatrale* as a form of alternative pedagogy, and engaged theatrically in the deconstruction of gender roles since early childhood. As a matter of fact, pedagogist Elena Gianini Belotti's ground-breaking study, *Dalla parte delle bambine* (1973), translated as *Little Girls: Social Conditioning and Its Effects on the Stereotyped Role of Women During Infancy*, was published in in Italy at this time. *effe* also mentions the Nemesiache, a Neapolitan visionary collective that theorised the choral and amateur appropriation of visual, verbal and performative creative registers as a privileged form of «feminist reinvention of the political» (Bracke, 2014); the Nemesiache committed for many years to socially engaged art with the inmates of the Frullone Psychiatric Hospital in Naples (Campese, 2019). Last

but not least, *effe* documents at large the deeds of the Teatro della Maddalena (1973-1989), the most important Italian feminist theatre, founded in Rome by feminist writer and playwright Dacia Maraini with a group of fellow Roman intellectuals, journalists and actresses. From the very beginning the theatre's repertory was inclined towards socially engaged art, intertwined with feminist activism in the suburbs, the new dormitory districts that were growing up on the outskirts of Rome during those years of wild urbanisation. The feminists' aim was the redemption of the condition of suburban proletarian working women and housewives; their debut at the Maddalena, *Mara Maria Marianna*, adopted a medallion dramaturgy, with stage portraits of women met and interviewed in the Magliana area, employing the aesthetics of truth theatre and enquiry theatre (Stelliferi, 2015; Gandolfi, 2018; Pulga, 2020). For over fifteen years the Maddalena remained faithful to its radical ethic of making the scene accessible both for professional (theatrical women) and non-professional; such policy was the source of recurring conflicts and dropouts, but it guaranteed the collective and not-specialised exercise of creativity and the democratisation of artistic languages, in accordance with the political project of empowering the expression of women, understood as a collective social subject (Maraini and Murrali, 2013).

In the 1980s and 1990s the women's scene, in Italy as in Europe, developed several networks which provided exchange, alliances, synergies and empowerment among women in the theatre: it is worth mentioning Divina, active in Turin between 1990 and 1996 (Pedrazzoli, 2007) and the international network Magdalena Project, highly active in Italy since 1986 and linked to the Third Theatre and group theatres (Palladini, 2012), whose magazine, *Open Page*, made explicit from its very title its inclusive editorial policy, giving space to many professionals, several of which committed with socially engaged theatre[64]. Thus, the theatres with female voice developed the habit of enhancing female subjectivity and privileged dramaturgies that value life experiences and intertwine individual and collective memories. In fact, plays and workshops based on witnessing, listening and exchanging stories flourished between the old and the new millennium, co-designed with various local institutions; their diffusion was wide and proves rather difficult to map.

Two long-term experiences set at the two opposite geographical poles of Italy can be mentioned as exemplary. In the Northern industrial city of Turin, land of the great workers' struggles of the 20th century, the Teatro Coordinamento Donne involved for ten years retired trade unionists of the SPI CGIL[65] in

[64] https://www.themagdalenaproject.org/en/content/open-page
[65] https://www.spicgiltorino.it/project/il-teatro-del-coordinamento-donne-di-torino/

weaving choral memory threads concerning the political role played by women in the construction of Italian society, from workers' rights to family law (Gandolfi and Pedrazzoli, 2009). In the vital and anarchic capital of the South, Naples, since 1999 La Scena delle Donne (from which the cultural association F.PL. Femminile Plurale[66] derived) has been exploring the female universe through the performing arts, co-designing with local institutions participatory theatre experiences that have involved different female communities, from elderly women to housewives (Sapienza, 2016).

It is also worth mentioning non-academic dance, valued as one of the principal forms of body expression by the women's movement in its search for freedom and naturalness of the female body (Gandolfi, 2019). The Italian tradition of choreutic modernism was revived in the second half of the 20th century by Anna Sagna and other female dancers, in an effort to transfer artistic research on corporeality to the world of amateur dance, and to dance with children and young people (Pontremoli, 2005; Fabris, 2015). These artists have become the protagonists of «a process of fluidification of social roles [that] brought them to recognise themselves with ever greater courage as cultural mediators» (Fabris, Pontremoli and Castellazzi, 2015, p. 80). Nowadays they build audience-engagement projects funded by public patrons aimed at the collective enjoyment of corporeality, at the awareness of the different ages of the female body, at its ironic and poetic choreutic expression[67].

The last few decades have been marked by the transnational vitality of new feminist movements, some of which have strong theatrical and performative roots: for example, the militant commitment of Eve Ensler, the playwright of *The Vagina Monologues* (1996), inspired the V-Days movement and One Billion Rising, thus transforming the International Women's Day celebrations into protest mobilisations (Sauvage, 2008). Thanks to this and other movements (from Me Too to No Una Menos) a clear awareness of the greatest violence exerted on women by the patriarchal system has emerged in the national and international public discourse: that is, the social scourge of feminicides. The political agendas of many countries today make it the object of their intervention, often using applied theatre to build a new cultural and social awareness. The educational, social and healthcare agencies in Italy support training aimed at the younger generations, at social and healthcare

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[66] https://effepielle.wordpress.com/

[67] Just think, by way of example, of the playful workshops proposed by Silvia Gribaudi, (http://www.silviagribaudi.com/category/works/) *over60_projects* and *What age are you acting?*, or of the way in which in Turin La Lavanderia a Vapore, a Piedmontese Residency Centre for Dance, builds lively audience-engagement and territorial welfare projects based on community dance experiences (https://www.lavanderiaavapore.eu/innovazione-e-ricerca/).

personnel, at men and women involved in gender violence through workshops based on role-playing, co-construction of imaginary situations, and other theatrical games to develop the participants' reflexivity, sensitivity, awareness and responsiveness. They adopt many different techniques, from Moreno's psychodrama and sociodrama to social theatre, but predominantly they refer to the methods of the Theatre of the Oppressed, thanks to a nationwide network of specialised theatre associations which follow Augusto Boal's methods (and apply them not only on this specific theme but also on other areas of social intervention through theatre).

Dealing with theatre as a tool for the empowerment of collective subjects, it is necessary to mention at least one other area that has been widely practiced in Italy for the last fifty years: that of Theatre in Prison, which is highly applied both in the female and male branches of correctional institutions. It is a vast array of practices which, as Claudio Meldolesi wrote twenty-five years ago in his enlightening contribution, *Immaginazione contro emarginazione* (imagination against exclusion) (1994, p. 41), continues to raise «civil issues such as the dignity of the inmates, their right to create» and which, unlike the women's scene, is widely documented through studies, reports and analyses, often commissioned and produced by public institutions (see the annual publications of the Coordinamento Teatro Carcere of the Emilia Romagna Region, Valenti, 2013). Thanks to the basic device of theatre play – discovering oneself by discovering others – theatrical workshops in prison generate social interaction and this aspect is central to the Italian applications of Theatre in prison, involving the inmates in workshops together with members of their families, with prison workers, with students, with volunteers from the community… In the last decade, stable networks have been built up, such as the National Coordination of Theatre and Prison and, on a regional basis, the Prison Theatre Coordination of the Region of Tuscany and the Region of Emilia-Romagna, funded and supported by the regional institutions who recognise their social value. In other cases, as in Lombardy, it is the universities that have built the theatrical dialogue between prisoners and civic society, with very interesting results (Innocenti Malini, 2011b). A rich live documentation in Theatre in Prison can be found on the Italian magazine *Teatri della diversità*, which has been documenting since 1996 several projects of applied theatre, narrating its deeds in fighting stereotypes and creating inclusion and relationships with disadvantaged sections of the population.

It seems appropriate to conclude this essay with a reference to Augusto Boal's latest volume, *A estetica do oprimido* (2009). Boal insists on the theatre as a critical and imaginative exercise of citizenship, and urges the

active role of spect-actors and the democratisation of the aesthetic process, aiming to establish a vision valid for the whole spectrum of socially engaged theatre:

> When those who do not belong to the artistic monarchy, ordinary individuals, are offered the possibility to realise an aesthetic process and to make art, from which they have been estranged and alienated, their atrophied expressive possibilities are amplified, their perception of the world is deepened, their desire to transform it is set in motion (Boal, [2009] 2011, p. 98[68]).

Thus interpreted and practised, the aesthetics and ethics of participatory theatres make the Brechtian perspective of the theatre relevant to today as a testing ground for the transformability and adaptability of hegemonic social and political structures: the perspective of theatre as a tool, at the service of emancipatory policies.

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[68] Translator's note: translated from Italian edition as this passage is missing in the English edition (although present in the original Spanish edition).

# 15. Performing Communities. Italian Experiences and Challenges

*Carla Bino and Stefano Locatelli*[69]
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## 1.    The Italian Fathers of Community Dramaturgy

In Italy, the historical and theoretical elaboration of the active and responsible role of the public in the dialectical relationship between scene and audience is chiefly due to two representatives of the academic world: Mario Apollonio and Sisto Dalla Palma. They have several aspects in common, revealing a thread of continuity and maturing reflection: both were refined scholars and holders of the chair of Theatre History at the Università Cattolica of Milan, both were actively engaged in political and cultural activities as well as in academia, both striving to put their thought to the test in the field, where practice in turn would enrich their theory. Apollonio was Dalla Palma's teacher and this constitutes more than a mere *trait d'union* between them. It marks the beginning of a new way of reading the history of theatre, going beyond the literary and spectacular closed forms that privilege the textual and visual component over the performative and dramatic one. This is not a purely theoretical shift; what changes is the method, that combines the philological-literary approach with the socio-anthropological one and considers the history of theatre as the history of the forms with which, over time, men celebrate and represent their being a living community in history, their collective and shared feeling, their identity as expressed by their values and social and political features. Therefore, Apollonio's thought should be viewed against the background of the Italy of the second post-war period, until the 1960s, while Dalla Palma's is substantiated by the profound changes undergone by Italy between the 1970s and the end of the 20th century. These changes influenced first of all the idea of human *societas*, which determined the semantic passage from the "chorus" to the "group" in order to express a "sense of community" that always needs to be specified. The same changes then had an impact on the idea of theatre, shifting its focus from the poetic word to the festive and ritual "summons", in order to express the meaning of the representation beyond any aesthetic, professional and

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[69] This essay was conceived together by the authors; the writing was divided as follows: paragraph 1 was written by Carla Bino, paragraph 2 by Stefano Locatelli.

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artistic element. Apollonio and Dalla Palma had in common, nonetheless, the belief that shared and responsible action was the generative principle of making theatre. Hence the idea that theatre is an expression and instrument of a "community in action".

*a)      Reversal: in the beginning was the chorus*

The centrality of the chorus is presented by Apollonio as a veritable reversal of the idea of theatre itself. In 1947 he made it the pivot of the foundation programme of the Piccolo Teatro di Milano: in opposition both to a petrified theatre of the word and to the consumer spectacle offered to a passive and unaccountable audience, he moved the generative fulcrum of the theatrical action from the stage to the "*platea*" (stalls, auditorium). The first point of his programme read:

> The theatre remains what it is in its primordial necessity: the place where the community, gathering freely to contemplate and to relive, reveals itself to itself (Apollonio et al., 1947).

«Man's industrious law», the theatre is articulated in word (the text), gesture (the actor) and audience (the spectators). It is, however, conceived as a dramaturgical process in three stages that has its centre in the audience, understood, however, not as an «undifferentiated and provisional entity» gathering occasionally to attend an event, but as a «group that experiences the need to gather [...] around an event that each of the components perceives as essential for themselves and for the group itself» (Antolini, 1993, p. 12). From this «tacit and intent chorus» is expected «the responsibility of moral life» (Apollonio et al.*,* 1947). Between the 1950s and 1960s, Apollonio continued his reflection on choral theatre first in the pages of the magazine *Drammaturgia*, which he founded in 1954, and then in his essay *Storia, dottrina prassi del coro* (1956). The antithesis between show and drama is made explicit both on a theoretical and a historical level. On the theoretical level, it rests on two elements. The first is the chorus:

> No kind of show can replace drama [...]. The drama, as long as its emphasis falls on the chorus, [...] as long as the protagonist is the group that gathers in a theatrical rite, so that the emotional, reflexive, ethical responsibility increases from the convergence of many into one [...], the drama is destined to have an influential role in the formation of a new culture committed to the person, aimed at the celebration of man (Apollonio, 1954a, pp. 22-23).

The second element is the poetic word conceived as the creative act of an individual who speaks "to" a chorus and "of" that chorus, becoming, with circular motion, an authorised interpreter of a collective feeling and responding to it. The theatre, then, is the «gulf of memory» where «what once was, returns in the act» and where the participating chorus is guided by the act to understand itself and its own history (ibid., pp. 24-25).

From a historical point of view, Apollonio identified the checkmate suffered by speech and chorus when the magic spectacle of the post-Renaissance era – the period of time called by Battisti «anti-Renaissance» (1962) – was invented, when the wonder of illusion triumphed, and prevailed during the 17th century. The Baroque becomes an example of an inauthentic spectatorship reduced to pure vision, understood as «a moment of distraction, of entertainment, not a concentration, nor a conversion» (Apollonio, 1954b, p. 29). Baroque spectatorship goes down in history as the device «most assiduously or irresponsibly accepted in modern theatrical custom» (ibid.). And if it holds true that «without spectators the theatre does not exist», these spectators are not to be understood as an audience that enjoys a merely aesthetic and leisure product, but as «authentic spectators, who know how to react and to emphasise, who know how to be a chorus, be it silent or vociferous» (ibid., p. 28). What distinguishes the chorus from the audience is the active and creative principle of responsible participation.

> Chorus is the human group that celebrates within itself the image, verifies it in its own life of relationship, ensures it journeys into the world of the living, it follows a historical itinerary, it is inserted in a language where semantic and suggestive relationships are codified; and while the chorus welcomes the image, it gives itself to it in return, it feeds on it, and thanks to it, the chorus acquires a new living space. A relationship is established [...], therefore, between the creative freedom of the image and the active responsibility of participation. [...] And we use the word participation to better signify that the essential is not the aesthetic fact, neither the cognitive formula nor the practical norm that always derives from an aesthetic fact, but the profound commitment of being, the agreement of conscience: an ontological fact, in short; and in comparison with its profound being, everything else, word and sign, is superficial (Apollonio, 1956, pp. 25-34).

However, for Apollonio the chorus remains «an ideal to strive towards and a challenge for the present» (Antolini, 1993, p. 13), since it represents the intuition of the aggregative drives of a group. It is the place where the theatrical act is realised as an experience and where it triggers a process of elaboration which affects real life.

This choral dramaturgy of participation goes beyond the theatre: Apollonio explains it is an «active moment of culture» in the first issue of the *Annali della Scuola Superiore di Giornalismo e Mezzi Audiovisivi* (1966). Here,

> starting from the assumption that the "essence of man" is freedom and that "the problem of society" is "that of communion", [he] concludes that communication must be participation, [understood as] a fact of moral life (Carpani, 2016).

Hence the idea that a culture «open to the real» is a place of reflexive participation for a society meant as a chorus, which «aims at the unity of diversities, at cultural pluralism in the sense of symphonic creation» (ibid.).

### b)      *Refoundation: feast and summons*

In the same year in which Apollonio died, 1971, Dalla Palma wrote his enlightening essay *Verso una nuova drammaturgia* (towards a new dramaturgy) designing the theatrical refoundation project that three years later, in 1974, formed the foundations of the Centro di Ricerca Teatrale (CRT). Starting from the observation that the most recent theatre experiences were moving away from the evasive-spectacular logic of entertainment and distraction well fulfilled by the mass media, Dalla Palma expressed his belief that the time was ripe for the theatre to «question its *raison d'être*» with the «clearest awareness that a theatre [...] is possible to the extent that it returns to its social role» (Dalla Palma, 1971, p. 16). He distinguished, however, the social role of theatre from the fictitious and consolatory social use of a theatre that, limiting itself to a thematic and formal innovation or the search for a new audience, did not change «the process of […] enjoyment of the theatre experience». The latter social use of the theatre was simply «a new way of doing the theatre of the past» (ibid., p. 17); it did not re-articulate nor renew the dramatic experience, but remained set according to the traditional scene-audience opposition that privileged individual creation. Dalla Palma, like Apollonio, identified the historical matrix of this theatre of «closed forms» that presupposed a passive and exclusively receptive audience, in the theatre of illusion that abdicated its social function. Whereas ancient dramatic forms were the ritual expression of the group's unity, after the Renaissance the theatre became the object of an aesthetic and disengaged gaze. It no longer had anything to do with practical life and no longer concerned the community. The alternative strategy Dalla Palma proposed for the refoundation of the theatre drew its inspiration from the «open forms» of Western dramatic civilisation, in particular from the feast. In the feast –

understood as a «time» and «device» of choral participation – theatre was instrumental to the expression and the transformation of society, becoming:

> [the] focal point of the collective consciousness, the moment in which the group explored the reasons for its existence through the images offered by the poets in a place capable of mediating between the festive values and the weekday structures, between the demands of freedom and the conditioning of necessity. A theatre situated at the centre of society and its problems, not on its margins; because in the theatre the group gathered to meet and reflect on its own reasons and to redesign its adventure in the world, freeing itself from what could be experienced as worrying (ibid., p. 22).

To the feast Dalla Palma dedicated his essay *Teatro Popolare: Diversità dei vicini* in 1977, putting his ideas to the test in his projects for the Venice Carnival and in his work in Milan in the 1980s; of the feast he developed the historical and anthropological implications in connection with myth and ritual in the first part of the book *Il teatro e gli orizzonti del sacro* in 2001 (Dalla Palma, 2001b). Starting from the feast, he hypothesised a theatre where:

> homogeneous groups, able to construct through the scene images more congenial to their own feelings, realise an experience of progressive and common awareness acquisition through an effort of elaboration from below (ibid., p. 25).

The refoundation of the theatre implies that it is no longer a product but a process «with an inductive movement that develops from the effective willingness of the community groups to "theatre" themselves» so that «the group, from the receptive condition of the audience that passively attends an event [...] returns to the condition of chorus» (ibid., p. 26). The aim is to «remake the theatre» for a different society, to nurture a different theatre that is a «dramatic event […] that does not merely reflect the world, but contributes to changing it» (ibid., p. 27). Since the 1990s, the ideas of theatre as a process and of dramaturgy as an experience were translated into laboratory practices «capable of facing requests for relationality» (Dalla Palma, 1998, p. 243). Such «models of conviviality [are] in line with the demands of recomposition of the community fabric» (ibid., p. 244). This was the turning point towards «an ethical tension in which the connection with the founding structures of social reality poses itself [...] as a matter of relationship but also as a demand for meaning». The theatre was then called to:

> test new models through which the mechanisms of reshaping collective identity are established within [...] social practices alternative to the

processes induced by the emergence of a mediatic continent that has disturbing features in the formation of people and groups (ibid.).

Thus the premises were laid for a «social and community dramaturgy» no longer aimed at the refoundation of the theatre but at the reconstruction of socio-cultural bonds between people.

## 2.   Cultural Policies in Italy

As noted by Claudio Bernardi, the very roots of social theatre in Italy can be traced back to the founding in May 1947 of the first permanent public Italian theatre, the Piccolo Teatro di Milano. There was some internal conflict between Giorgio Strehler and Mario Apollonio on how to implement the programme, a contrast that has recently come to light and which can be partially interpreted as the opposition between the former, who hoped for the advent of a sort of enlightened democracy in the field of culture, and the latter, who upheld the idea of a generative process of theatre based on the ethics of small groups and rooted in the principle of the choir and the community (Bernardi, 2004; Locatelli, 2017). It was therefore a collision between two different and alternative ways of shaping cultural policy in post-fascist Italy.

If it is true that from a political, economic and institutional point of view the "Strehlerian" line clearly prevailed, it is also true that the "Apollonian" line did not disappear, but persisted inconspicuously until it re-emerged in theatre practices towards the end of the 1960s and gradually established itself also at institutional, political and economic level, with a process which is still in progress and will be the object of this contribution.

The birth of the Piccolo Teatro is closely linked, as is well known, to the affirmation of the notion of theatre as public service, proposed in Italy notably by Paolo Grassi between 1945 and 1946 (Grassi, 1946).

Its legislative repercussions were not long in coming. From a regulatory point of view, the Legislative Decree no. 62 of 20 February 1948[70], which systematically reinstated theatre subsidies after World War II, declared from its start (article 1) the commitment of the Italian State to «subsidise, both within the Republic and abroad, Italian theatre events of particular artistic and social importance».

It was certainly also a response to a stirring that came from below, from instances – as were those of the Piccolo – that were originally local but had

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[70] Also referred to as Andreotti Law, from Giulio Andreotti then vice-president of the Council of Ministers, and chair of the Committee mentioned just below. https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/1948/02/25/048U0062/sg

national aspirations. This generated extensive discussions, as attested by the minutes (only recently rediscovered and still unpublished, see Amato, 2020) of the first consultative Committee appointed by Prime Minister De Gasperi to quantify the disbursement of funds in favour of theatrical activities: a debate explicitly related to the notion of theatre as a public service of social value, which assimilated the Piccolo Teatro to other state bodies, such as the Ente Teatrale Italiano ETI and EIST[71].

In particular, the term "social" featuring in article 1 of the Legislative Decree of 1948 was articulated by the Committee in two directions: 1) as economic support to allow access to quality theatre by the entire population; 2) as welfare support to the workers of the performing arts sector, who would otherwise have been out of work in the immediate post-war years.

In terms of cultural and economic policy, the second line was considered fundamental. Thus Andreotti concluded:

> the prevailing reason why the rules were made is of a social and welfare nature [...]. If we were to make a purely artistic evaluation, our task would be difficult. We must achieve the result of employing the masses that otherwise could not work. I believe that this goal has been achieved. I believe that with the return to normality, the State can return to its limits, allowing private initiatives to take place (Amato, 2020, p. 275).

These words clearly document the early definition in Italy of an approach aimed primarily at subsidiarity, to support and guarantee artistic professionalism, a goal which was further underpinned by the principle of economic accessibility for the widest possible public to a cultural instrument traditionally considered the prerogative of the bourgeois class.

Despite these undertakings, in Italy as elsewhere working conditions in the performing arts progressively deteriorated from as early as the 1960s; it is not by chance that this coincided with the emergence of the so-called Baumol Syndrome (Baumol and Bowen, 1965), which was also identified as particularly pronounced in public facilities (Abirached, 2005, p. 106). This slip in the meaning of the idea of theatre as a public service is accompanied by the fading of both the perception of the theatre system as socially relevant and of its social vocation, which had been defined at institutional level in the immediate post-war period.

It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the late 1960s and the early 1970s, with 1968 constituting a significant turning point, saw the emergence of new and different forms of theatrical professionalism (paratheatre, group theatre, third theatre) characterised by a strong socio-anthropological vocation,

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[71] Italian bodies for theatre and for theatre exchange.

especially in the field of theatrical research, coinciding with attempts to decentralise and extend theatrical pluralism also in terms of public support and financing.

The institutional recognition by state policies of these experiences was, generally speaking, open and flexible, although tending towards their normalisation and homologation within the equilibrium of the theatre system; particularly relevant, also in terms of political and social repercussions, was among them *Animazione teatrale*[72], which culminated in Giuliano Scabia's work between 1972 and 1973 in the Trieste psychiatric hospital directed by Franco Basaglia. It is widely recognised that his experience was fundamental to the definition of the so-called Basaglia Law, which in 1978 definitively closed psychiatric institutions in Italy (Scabia, 1976).

To evaluate the political involvement in the field of culture, and in particular of theatre, from the 1970s, it is important to take into account the intervention of the Regions. Established in 1970, through their cultural and educational departments the Regions began to launch intervention programmes in which the performing arts sector played an increasingly important role, even though these policies were often ambiguous, oriented as they were more towards an ephemeral and merely cultural promotion than towards community participation. This concerns regional and municipal activities equally.

Since the end of the 1980s, however, sometimes thanks to the coordination of local authorities (in particular municipalities and provinces), there was a proliferation of theatrical practices and community dramaturgies oriented towards community culture and localities in non-artistic areas, such as the domains of therapies, school, social marginality, social inclusion and migratory trends, down to the most recent interventions of urban regeneration (Pozzi and Minoia, 1999; Bernardi, Cuminetti and Dalla Palma, 2000). These were, more often than not, experiences born outside the circuits of research theatre, linked to the variety of volunteering and non-profit associations which to this day characterises in clear prevalence the phenomenology of social theatre (Bernardi, 2004 and 2015; De Marinis, 2011 and 2018; Pagliarino, 2011; Fiaschini, 2013; Rossi Ghiglione, 2013; Pontremoli, 2015).

With the exception of some local authorities, Italian politics remained, during this phase, mostly neutral, if not distant; on the other hand, there is no doubt that the recovery of the participative and social vocation of the performing

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[72] For an explanation of the meaning of *Animazione teatrale* see the *Notes on Translations* on p. 7. The expression is used in this sense throughout the paper.

arts in non-artistic contexts became, since the beginning of the 1990s, a widespread phenomenon elsewhere in Europe.

Particularly relevant, for example, were in the UK the Pro-Ams – amateur professionals linked to the development of community and public production strategies alien to traditional economic performance and effectiveness objectives (Leadbeater and Miller, 2004) –, and the Arts on Prescription (AoP) programme, launched in 1994 (Bungay and Clift, 2010). It is no coincidence that in 1992 the Arts Council of Great Britain commissioned the first discussion paper on the social impact of the arts, in addition to the more traditional studies on their economic and financial impact (Landry et al., 1993), followed by other reports and studies (on social impact see Matarasso, 1996; Reeves, 2002).

Between the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, the first coordinated cultural welfare interventions started to appear in Italy (Grossi and Ravagnan, 2013; Sacco, 2017), thanks to increasingly active local authorities and especially to some banking foundations (Fondazione Cariplo, Compagnia di San Paolo), with numerous artistic and cultural practices aimed at well-being, health, social integration, even in some cases with the definition of urban regeneration plans which included articulated performance activities of social support (this is the case of the city of Turin). Following these developments, the subsequent introduction of medical humanities in university training courses and the recognition of art therapy by the Istituto Superiore di Sanità (the Italian national institute of health) were significant clues of the process of institutionalisation of social theatre practices (Cicerchia, Rossi Ghiglione and Seia, 2020).

In the last ten years, institutional interventions in the field of social theatre have become increasingly systematic. Just think of the inclusion of the category "Cohesion and Social Inclusion" in the article dedicated to Promotion activities of the Fondo Unico dello Spettacolo (FUS, state grants for the performing arts) from 2014. Although it remains an item to which only residual resources are allocated, its mention alone marks an important sign of recognition or at least an attempt to incorporate the value of social theatre into the traditional state support for artistic production. Along the same lines, article 1 of the so-called Codice dello Spettacolo (Performing Arts Code) «recognises the educational and training value of the performing arts, also in order to promote integration and to counteract social hardship» and acknowledges «the social utility of the performing arts[73]».

In the same direction have been going some recent initiatives promoted by

[73] L. 175/2017 in *Gazzetta ufficiale della Repubblica italiana*, n. 289 del 12 dicembre 2017, pp. 1-12. https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2017/12/12/17G00189/sg

National Theatres, moving beyond their usual operating scope, often with the financial support of the State, of local authorities and of banking foundations (who are frequently already active in the sector with their own specific calls and projects). For example, one should mention the Istituto di Pratiche Teatrali per la Cura della Persona (Teatro Stabile di Torino) or the participatory theatre projects launched by ERT-Emilia Romagna Teatro.

Some of these activities might have been, in some instances, attempts to intercept the ever-increasing public funds earmarked for social and cultural inclusion, which are sometimes very relevant, like in the case of Creative Europe 2014-2020, for example, and of the Horizon 2020 programme.

But the participatory and social vocation of the performing arts has become, on the other hand, to all intents and purposes increasingly central at political and institutional level. Explicitly recalled by the Performing Arts Code itself, the Reform of the Third Sector[74] has been of fundamental importance in recent years. It has introduced important innovations especially with regard to the definition of social enterprises on the basis of the social impact they achieve through the production and exchange of goods and services of social utility, despite their falling outside conventional economic indicators.

This does not only imply the recognition of a long-standing tradition of theatre activities led by third sector and voluntary associations, but also the reference to principles which are already at the centre of the attention of international bodies. Take for example the Indicators of well-being, sustainability and development, resulting from the OECD research of The Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress led by Joseph Stiglitz, Amartya Sen and Jean-Paul Fitoussi (2010), which are the driving force behind many other studies and reports produced in various European countries. In Italy, for instance, the Italian National Institute of Statistics ISTAT has been producing since 2013 the Reports on Fair and Sustainable Well-being (ISTAT, n.d.).

Principles such as those of Impact Value Chain (Zamagni, Venturi and Rago, 2015), Relational Economics (Donati, 2017), Social Capital (De Blasio and Sestito, 2011) have thus increasingly entered the vocabulary and made it to the fundamentals of research dedicated to the impact and process assessment of social theatre in Italy.

These approaches can undoubtedly be extremely useful in overcoming more traditional attempts to measure the effects of social theatre in purely economic terms, attempts that are always prevailing where political requirements are at stake. The impact of social theatre in Italy is particularly

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[74] L. 106/2016, *Gazzetta ufficiale della Repubblica italiana*, n. 151 del 18 giugno 2016, pp. 1-7. https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2016/06/18/16G00118/sg

difficult to quantify, if not by rough approximations, as statistical data prove of complex interpretation, despite some efforts of recent years (such as the report *Io sono cultura*[75]). To this end, a systematic analysis of EUROSTAT data could perhaps be useful, if it was not limited to the Culture database, but also, for example, extended to include the Quality of Life and Youth sections. However, studies in recent years have demonstrated the effectiveness of developing and applying principles such as, for example, the SROI (Social Return on Investment) for the measurement in purely monetary terms of the value generated by an activity in the social sphere; in particular, it was applied in recent research on theatrical activity carried out in the Milan Opera prison (Giordano, Perrini and Langer, 2019; Giordano et al., 2019).

In conclusion, the insistence on the objectives of measuring economic impact is an ever-present danger, especially if the quantitative economic measurement is – even if only implicitly – considered useful to prove the necessity for theatre as the central, if not the primary, social and community tool, as well as an instrument of care.

It is a risk that is anything but negligible, and in some respects consistent with some recent neoliberal tendencies (Debord, 1967; Lipovetsky and Serroy, 2013). Well in advance and with greater foresight than that shown in the theatrical field, using considerable financial resources and sophisticated analytical tools, the so-called aesthetic capitalism has been working for decades on the same basic principles of participation and performance, but has the different purpose of making them effective tools of aestheticisation at the service of an insatiable individual desire.

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[75]    https://www.symbola.net/approfondimento/io-sono-cultura-i-dati-della-cultura-nella-ricerca-symbola/

# Epilogue

*Giulia Innocenti Malini*

At the end of this choral endeavour illustrating the richness and complexity of social theatre, it might be useful to suggest some resources that can be accessed online and complement the following bibliography, allowing a comparison between theoretical reflections and current practices.

The research centre CIT Centro di Cultura e Iniziativa Teatrale "Mario Apollonio" of the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore of Milan keeps an up-to-date reading list on social theatre and collects information about past and current projects of research, activity and training[76].

As far as the different applications of social theatre in Italy are concerned, without claiming to be exhaustive, given the extent of the phenomenon, it seems helpful to mention some of the most active centres in the field.

The PRIN project *Performing the Social. Education, Care and Social Inclusion through Theatre* has made available its results through its own platform[77].

On the theatre and health front, one can visit the Social Community Theatre Centre, a research centre of the University of Turin, and the Cultural Welfare Center, which dedicates part of its activities to social theatre. On the same front, the DORS Centro di Documentazione per la Promozione della Salute della Regione Piemonte devotes a section to significant experiences of social theatre[78].

The *Teatralmente* project promoted by the Emilia-Romagna Region brings together different experiences and research in the area of theatre and mental health[79].

The TiPiCi Network – Trasformazione Partecipata della Comunità is a recent example of activity of social theatre operators organised through a network

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[76] https://centridiricerca.unicatt.it/cit-materiali-bibliografia-sul-teatro-sociale, https://centridiricerca.unicatt.it/cit-home
[77] https://www.prinperformareilsociale.com/
[78] http://www.socialcommunitytheatre.com/it/informazioni-generali/sct-centre/, https://culturalwelfare.center/, https://www.dors.it/
[79] http://www.teatralmente.it/Engine/RAServePG.php/P/252711440504/T/Il-Progetto

and cooperating with their regional health protection agency in the metropolitan city of Milan[80].

Another centre of considerable interest is Teatri delle Diversità and its magazine *Catarsi. Teatri delle diversità*, which has been published regularly since 1996 and offers a wide panorama of social theatre activities in Italy[81].

On the theatre and prison front, one can refer to the Coordinamento Nazionale di Teatro in Carcere and to the Coordinamento di Teatro e Carcere Emilia-Romagna and the related magazine *Quaderni di teatro e carcere*[82].

As far as theatre at school is concerned, the AGITA association collects a wide range of social theatre experiences in Italian schools of different levels[83].

To conclude, the webzine *Ateatro* provides a constantly updated picture of the evolution of social theatre experiences against the broader background of contemporary performance theatre in Italy[84].

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[80] https://www.facebook.com/retetipici/
[81] https://www.edizioninuovecatarsi.org/riviste-journals
[82] http://www.teatrocarcere.it/, http://www.teatrocarcere-emiliaromagna.it/,
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[83] www.agitateatro.it
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Although belonging to the wider family of applied theatre, social theatre has some specific historical, methodological and contextual characteristics. When taking part in social theatre, people, groups and even larger, more recognisable social systems actively transform and improve their lifeworlds through their direct involvement in theatrical, ludic, festive and performative practices. The actors', authors' and spectators' participation in such cultural practices – combined with powerful representations, actions and relationships – leads to symbolic inner growth and regeneration in the social body.

This book, which opens with an introduction by Claudio Bernardi, explores the whys and wherefores of social theatre with particular attention to Italy. It is structured around two types of contribution. One comes from the interventions of some of the speakers at the International Conference *Performing the Social. Education, Care and Social Inclusion through Theatre*, held in Milan on 20-21 September 2019.

They are Isabel Bezelga, Marco De Marinis, David Le Breton, Tim Prentki, Pier Cesare Rivoltella, Diana Taylor, James Thompson and Emmanuel Wallon.

The second part is a more direct result of the Research Project of National Relevance (PRIN) with the same title; namely the application of social theatre in the fields of education, health and inclusion.

The authors of these essays are Carla Bino, Roberta Carpani, Livia Cavaglieri, Guido Di Palma, Fabrizio Fiaschini, Roberta Gandolfi, Giulia Innocenti Malini, Stefano Locatelli, Alberto Pagliarino, Alessandro Pontremoli, Alessandra Rossi Ghiglione.

**Claudio Bernardi**, professor of Performing Arts at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore of Brescia, is one of the leading social theatre theorists and was the Principal Investigator of the PRIN (Research Project of National Relevance) *Performing the Social. Education, Care and Social Inclusion through Theatre*.

**Giulia Innocenti Malini**, a social theatre expert, coordinates the Advanced Training Course for Social Theatre Operators, teaches Social Theatre and leads the Theatre and Performance Workshop at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore of Milan. She provides training in leading social theatre groups and runs social theatre workshops in the fields of psychiatry and prison.

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