

A Strategy for a Different Stage Writing. Carlo Quartucci and Jannis Kounellis' Work in the '60s

Abstract: Since the late 1960s a tendency arose in the context of New Theatre with the aim of enlarging the boundaries of the stage and its material dimension. The target was to establish a closer relationship with the audience. People were no longer called to 'watch' the theatrical work, but to 'live' the spectacular features of the performance.

In the context of a constant process crossing the frontier between New Theatre and Arte Povera space is taken on as a semiotic element useful to 'write' the dramaturgical nature of the spectacle.

This article is strictly focused on the analysis of the creative dynamics and process experimented in two of Carlo Quartucci's spectacles: *I Testimoni* (1968) and *Il lavoro teatrale* (1969). In both works the director involved the artist Jannis Kounellis to 'write' the space transforming scene and hall like an enormous performative installation with animals, poor machineries and natural, organic and industrial materials. These two works can be considered fundamental examples for the investigation of a particular season of New Theatre in Italy: a moment in which the stage writing is completely articulated on the research for the living and the authentic, going beyond the notion of scenography.

Keywords: *new theatre, performative, scenography, space, environment,*

1. New Theatre in Italy

After the Second World War, Italian theatre was not famous for its innovations. Shows were usually centred on the critical analysis of theatre texts, as the Academy of Dramatic Arts taught. During the '50s there was very little concern for avant-garde in Italy. For example, Eugène Ionesco or Samuel Beckett were almost unknown. The same was true for Antonin Artaud. Beside Pirandello, Italian audiences started to get to know some other authors like Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams.

The creation of the first state theatre was a considerable phenomenon: the Piccolo Teatro of Milan was founded by Giorgio Strehler and Paolo Grassi in 1947. In addition to a concern for the Italian tradition, the Piccolo Teatro was oriented from the beginning toward a massive importation of the theatre of Bertolt Brecht. This choice was very coherent with the two founders' philosophy and aesthetics, based on Marxist parameters and criticism.

Between the end of the '50s and the early years of 1960s the discovery of Ionesco, Beckett, Jean Genet and Fernando Arrabal had a strong impact on the cultural dimension of the scene, chocked within the narrow limits of bourgeois entertainment. Irrational, chaotic and grotesque elements imported from this avant-garde dramaturgy – together with the first translations of Artaud's

manifestos – allowed Italian theatre to be transformed into something new. Therefore a first wave of Italian avant-garde theatre arose: a phenomenon called New Theatre.¹

During the '60s the artists of New Theatre in Italy, including Carmelo Bene, Mario Ricci, Claudio Remondi, Carlo Quartucci and Leo and Perla, tackled the subject of the autonomy of theatre. They faced this question by creating relationships between different art forms.

The avant-garde of the 1960s – Dorota Semenowicz stated – drew from film, conceptual art, contemporary dance, happening and new trends in music in the vein of John Cage. Performances were shown in galleries, art houses, museums, and at exhibitions including the Biennale in Venice and Documenta in Kassel.²

Unlike the French avant-garde of the '50s that originated in playwriting, the Italian New Theatre did not arise from writers but directly from stage directors that thought about their function in terms of total authors.

This new generation of Italian theatre directors did not solicit new plays, nor did they necessarily concentrate on staging classic texts. Their target was to create a new standard of dramaturgy, including all the stage codes and elements. They worked on a meta-linguistic level reducing the performance to a kind of essay, “a demystification, an analysis and commentary about the original play and its sociological and political implications”.³ This way of thinking and creating theatre was defined by critics and performers as “stage writing”. Giuseppe Bartolucci introduced this critical label in the middle of the '60s when he published *La scrittura scenica*, an anthology of essays inspired by the experience of New Theatre artists.⁴ “Stage writing” is a category used to indicate a very specific way to create theatre starting from the elements of the scene: space, music, lights, acting, voice, gesture. It was no longer for the written text to establish the creative coordinates of the performance, but for theatrical language itself. Bartolucci’s critical perspective was strongly connected to the group of Italian critics – Ettore Capriolo, Edoardo Fadini and Franco Quadri – who supported and promoted New Theatre and organised the “Convention for a New Theatre” in Ivrea in 1967. Their starting point was the desire to create a system of interpretation capable of critically representing, in the best possible way, the semiotic revolution of the new avant-garde artists. Suddenly, some of the Italian theatre artists shared the same vision of art expressed by the work of Jerzy Grotowski, Living Theatre, Open Theatre, Bread and Puppet, Kantor’s Cricot 2, and the Odin Teatret.

2. The Performative Space

Every element of the stage was scrutinized by an anti-traditional perspective. In the context of the explosion of 1968 political protest, avant-garde directors worked on

theatrical space, erasing the boundaries between stage and audience, between the aesthetic dimension and the living one:

New Theatre – Valentina Valentini wrote – contested stale concepts of stage and spectacle with experiments centered on new concepts, including those around environment, event, performance, action, and installation.⁵

⁵ Valentina Valentini, *New Theatre in Italy, 1963-2013* (New York and London: Routledge, 2017), 19.

During the late '60s there is a tendency to enlarge the physical boundaries of the spectacle. Theatre is not longer done in exclusively conventional and institutional spaces. Traditional places are denied by directors and companies of the New Theatre in order to create a strongly authentic and strict relationship with the audience. Avant-garde artists want to immerse the spectators in an environmental experience but “as demonstrated by the avant-garde’s efforts to reform, this separation [between stage and audience] cannot simply be abolished by getting rid of the apron stage or the assigned seats”.⁶

⁶ Benjamin Wihstutz, “Introduction”, in Erika Fischer-Lichte and Benjamin Wihstutz, eds., *Performance and the Politics of Space. Theatre and Topology* (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), 4.

In Italy Carlo Quartucci, Mario Ricci, Giancarlo Nanni, Remondi e Caporossi were among the main artists who conceived the theatrical work as a performative organic structure and no more like a well packaged product or a beautiful ‘picture’ to stare at. In this completely new structure audience had to be totally involved with its own physical and sensorial presence. Therefore we attend a process of overcoming the classic notion of stage direction, focusing on an experimental space configuration. New typologies of theatre and performance spaces were created “... questioning seating solutions, the mutual positioning of actors and seats and the resultant political implications of these spatial choices”.⁷

⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

The semiotic transformation of space from container to environment with dramatical and performative features breaks the physical and metaphorical frame of the scene, as emblemized by Arte Povera.

In 1967, the Italian art critic Garmano Celant coined this term to describe the work of a generation of young Italian artists who used a simple ‘poverty’ of gestures and materials to explore the relation between art and life. The work of the artists belonging to Arte Povera – Giovanni Anselmo, Alighiero Boetti, Pier Paolo Calzolari, Luciano Fabro, Jannis Kounellis, Mario Merz, Marisa Merz, Giulo Paolini, Pino Pascali, Giuseppe Penone, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Emilio Prini and Gilberto Zorio – continued to be a major influence on contemporary international art. Arte Povera bridged the natural and the artificial, the urban and the rural, local tradition and global modernity.⁸

⁸ See: Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, *Arte Povera* (London: Pheidon Press, 2005).

Arte Povera, as Nick Kaye argues:

touches not only upon sculpture, installation and notions of ‘anti-form’, but land art, conceptual art and performance, drawing on an eclectic range of post-minimal and process-based activities which, in various ways, erode or break down the constraints of the object...⁹

⁹ Nick Kaye, *Site-Specific Art* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), 141-142.

As the critic Renato Barilli writes, Arte Povera shows a different iconographic approach than the one of Pop Art trying to recover a level which lies on the other side of any closed definition:

In refusing iconography – He writes – it [Arte Povera] also refuses the painted surface, which is most habitual mode of expression; in a more general sense, it refuses to accept the concept of the ‘product’ of the ‘work’ and offers us instead not the result of a process but the process itself.¹⁰

¹⁰ Renato Barilli, Cit. in Frank Popper, *Art-Action and Participation* (New York: New York U. P., 1975), 233.

In this context, Arte Povera works challenge the conventional opposition between the physical and the abstract level of the work of art,

opening the sculpture to forces and events precipitated by the presence of materials, to ‘natural’ or organic process identified with particular locations as well as to exchanges between material processes, the environment and the body.¹¹

¹¹ Kaye, *Site-Specific Art*, 142.

In the creation of the artistic act the gesture is erased and replaced by the presence of animals, plants, primary elements of nature, raw materials.¹² Everything seems to be ruled by a motion of suspension. Once entered this dramaturgical landscape, the audience unintentionally plays a role that is defined by the signs that the artist set up.¹³ Artist and audience are both protagonists of the work, dwelling in a relationship that bans the commodification of art, freeing the process of creation in a total conjunction of act and event. At this time the objective dimension of art is overcome:

¹² See Silvana Sinisi, “Avanguardia e postavanguardia in Italia”, in Roberto Alonge and Guido Davico Bonino, eds., *Storia del teatro moderno e contemporaneo. Avanguardie e utopie del teatro. Il Novecento*, vol. III (Torino: Einaudi editore, 2001), 716.

¹³ See Harold Rosenberg, “Arte-oggetto e arte evento”, *Sipario*, 251 (Marzo 1967), 17.

the artist – Filiberto Menna wrote – creates enveloping and involving environmental spaces with a multiplicity of linguistic media: cinema, photography, words, actions.¹⁴

¹⁴ Filiberto Menna, “L’arte, il teatro”, in *La macchina del tempo: dal teatro al teatro* (Perugia: Editrice Umbra Cooperativa, 1981), 85.

A similar phenomenon takes place in theatre. The interest of many directors and companies in going beyond the boundaries of the traditional theatre building foreground the centrality of space and environment as intrinsic to the experience of performance. As Joslin McKinney and Scott Palmer underlined:

The origins of this shift can be traced back to the fertile interactions of performance and art that flourished in the 1960s and 1970s and with the means to escape ‘theatrical disciplinary systems’ and to create radical and resistant work. In the site-specific work, and in the work where the relationship of the audience to the performance is not already pre-determined, scenography is often focused on shaping the interface between the performance and the audience, and the organization or curation of space is therefore a central feature.¹⁵

¹⁵ Joslin McKinney-Scott Palmer, “Introducing Expanded Scenography”, in Joslin McKinney-Scott Palmer, eds., *Scenography Expanded* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 5-6.

Scenography and representative matrix lose their central role in theatrical creation while the focus is moved on the performative quality of the scene: the purpose is to wipe out the diaphragm between stage and hall. Therefore, according

to this new code, theatre is thought to be staged all around audience and actors, and space changes its nature from physical to playable. This creative attitude is very close to the field of visual arts. In spite of this, We have to underline that this is a theme shared in a very similar way by Richard Schechner's¹⁶ notions about environmental performance and street theatre, or Erika Fischer-Lichte's¹⁷ essays and reflections. In Performing Studies, the relationship between the position of the audience and the place where the performance happens is always central. It is not important whether we are referring to rituals or avant-garde performances. Critical analysis is always focused on the temporary community created by the fusion of the aesthetic (performers) and the social (spectators). This kind of fusion is also most apparent in some of the New Theatre experiences staged in Italy.

¹⁶ Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002).

¹⁷ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics* (New York and London: Routledge, 2008).

3. The Experience of Carlo Quartucci and Jannis Kounellis

In 1968-69s the Teatro Stabile of Turin offered to the avant-garde director Carlo Quartucci the chance to deepen his work.

Quartucci is one of the main artists of Italian experimental theatre, and one of the signatories of the collective manifesto titled *Per un convegno sul Nuovo Teatro* that anticipates the important meeting of the Ivrea Conference (1967). He is not only a very influential director, but also well known as an artist who produces striking visual theatre events with a subversive use of space, drawing from both classical texts and conceptual art. As a student, Quartucci staged *Act without Words* in 1962 and *Endgame* in 1963, two works written by Samuel Beckett. The director summoned some of the actors that will become iconic at the end of '60s: Leo de Berardinis, Rino Sudano, Anna D'Offizi and Cosimo Cinieri. In these shows, the style of stage direction was really new for Italian standards. The setting was totally anti-naturalistic: the space was empty and there were only few scenographic elements inspired by Vasilij Kandinskij's aesthetics and Quartucci's geometrical taste. After some encore performances of *Endgame* at the Teatro Ateneo in Rome with the name "Compagnia della Ripresa", Quartucci was invited by Luigi Squarzina, who was at the time artistic co-director of the Teatro Stabile of Genova with Ivo Chiesa, to lead a workshop and stage another text by Beckett. Here the director started to work on the creation of a strong relationship between performers and theatrical space inspired by *Waiting for Godot* (1965). Actors and objects were merged on the stage into shapeless figures. For example, characters were presented like Chaplinian figures that inhabit a white stage where the tree was made by a pole, slightly curved, with a sphere dangling from its end.

Unfortunately, tensions between experimental theatre research and the mainstream approach of the theatrical institution arose very soon. After only a few stagings of *Waiting for Godot*, Quartucci went back to his underground cultural roots.

At the end of 1965, he met Giuliano Scabia, a poet from Group '63 and professor in Bologna. With him, the director attempted to find an agreement between the strategy of radically transforming the stage and the involvement of the audience, in order for the theatre to penetrate society. They worked at an original project titled *Zip, Lap, Lip, Vap, Mam, Crep, Scap, Pliip, Trip, Scrap e la grande Mam alle prese con la società contemporanea*. The show premiered in the fall of 1965 and appeared to be influenced not only by Commedia dell'Arte, because the characters in the show, like masks, were devoid of any psychological depth, but also by Futurism, Structuralism and Vesvolod Èmil'evič Meyerhold (the Russian director working between the '20s and '30s), because of how the space of acting was conceived. Quartucci's goal was to multiply the focus points of the performance by immersing the spectator in the performing area. He decided to spread out the action in every direction around the audience, using the entire space.

The principle of the "open work" – Mario Prospero wrote – was also applied: the form of the play was in the construction and deconstruction of ten masks, each of which represented multiple roles. The acting in *Zip* was impersonal (as the übermarionette), thus marginalizing the ego of the performer.¹⁸

¹⁸ Prospero, *Contemporary Italian Theatre*, 24.

The research on an environmental space became central in the creation process when the director was called to work by the Teatro Stabile of Turin at the end of '60s.

Counting on a remarkable production, the director finally can go deeper in the research on space as the true element of his stage writing practise. The element "space" turns into something "that has to be continuously built and desecrated".¹⁹ In order to achieve this goal, Quartucci hired Jannis Kounellis, one of the most important visual artists belonging to the Arte Povera movement, whose creative aim was to eliminate the ideological boundaries between life and art, ethics and aesthetics, creation and production. He usually employed in his works materials including cotton, burlap sacks, coal, gas flames, which he used as signs. He mixed visual props with the presence of live humans or animals. The space of installation of several of Kounellis' works is conceived as a cavity with performative and theatrical qualities in which the spectator is projected into the centre of a suspended action. Most of his artistic interventions are widely open in meaning, allowing for multiple interpretations and readings. Even though Kounellis' work seems to enact a story of some kind, the narrative dimension is never clear or detailed. Even if violence, displacement, and loss are implied, these dramatic topics are all expressed in a really blurred way.

¹⁹ See Carlo Quartucci and Giuliano Scabia, "Per un'avanguardia italiana", in Franco Quadri, ed., *L'avanguardia teatrale in Italia*, vol. I (Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, 1977), 167.

With a really similar attitude, Carlo Quartucci was interested in the introduction of non-scenographic elements intended to grant a new dimension to theatre production. On the basis of this fertile relation between art and theatre, Kounellis

agreed and participated with a contribution which immediately developed into a total collaboration.

Surely, it is not the first time that a visual artist works for theatre. But usually a painter or a sculptor would create a sort of transposition of their plastic and figurative works in a scenographic context. Kounellis, instead, was not interested in transporting the gallery on stage.

The artist's idea is perfectly stated within these words:

From my perspective we can not talk about scenography while analysing my work. Firstly, I think about "disturbance". My work intends to disturb both traditional scenography and the new code of the bare scene: my materials do not integrate, they claim a proper space and create. At the same time they originate a total space where the theatre fiction is not pretended to be forgotten. Actually they put the fiction in discussion, provoking this "fiction space" to reveal its own constraints. Moreover, these materials deliberately give "annoyance" to the actor, obliging him to look around, to "defend himself", to abandon his belonging to the tradition of well acting.²⁰

²⁰ Jannis Kounellis, "Non per il teatro ma con il teatro", *Sipario*, 276 (Aprile 1969), 13.

The starting point of Kounellis' setting is summarized in these words: "you have to work 'with' theatre, more than 'for' theatre, with a certain type of theatre that carries out on its own a research on a new space, eliminating characters and literary situations".²¹

²¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

Of course there is a continuity between critical discourses and political plannings in Kounellis' work in exhibition and scene, but the language used, the sensibility, the quality and the intentions are deeply different. According to their shared vision about art, Quartucci called the artist in order to create an 'alive scene' through which assimilating textual materials as well as provoking a physical and performative reaction of the actors.

4. *I Testimoni* and *Il lavoro teatrale*

The first example of their partnership is embodied by *I Testimoni*, inspired by three different plays written by Tadeusz Roszewicz: *Our Little Stabilisation*, *The Interrupted Act* and *The Card Index*. Quartucci connected them creating a texture of dense dialogues and monologues to represent the crisis context shared both by bourgeois couples and disappointed rebels.²² The premiere was in 1968, November 10th and the spectacle immediately appeared as something completely innovative for the traditional perspective of Italian audience.

²² See: Franco Quadri, "I testimoni", *Panorama*, 21 novembre 1968.

The scene created by Kounellis denied the function of a static and elegant framework offered to the audience view. It "became the main character of the theatrical event, in a space that never reaches a definitive set-up, but is continuously transformed under our eyes".²³ The stage was totally empty and

²³ Ettore Capriolo, "Un funerale per il vecchio teatro", *Sipario*, 73 (Gennaio 1969), 25.

enlightened by hot spot lights. Here Kounellis created an installation with more than one hundred cages occupied by multicoloured tweeting birds. There were randomly set-up some cacti, bowls of ostrich eggs, yarns of wool, mothballs, coal piles, burlap sacks. These natural and industrial elements – the same used in exhibitions and gallery works – were employed in their basic expressiveness and sensorial immediacy.

What the artist had on his mind was to give a kind of body to the environment. The whole stage writing was totally inspired by the research for the living and the authentic. But “this authenticity had not to be understood as a search for the natural, but like ‘true’ and ‘alive’, in terms of leading elements to perform an action...”.²⁴ This search for living and truth created on scene a tension between “rebellious gesture”²⁵ and “encapsulation in the product”,²⁶ a dramatical relationship used by Quartucci to manage *I Testimoni* dramaturgy. The rebellious gestures embodied by the actors – as the same Kounellis stated – had not a representative function, but were used both as ‘materials’ and ‘expressiveness tools’, exactly like the scenographic elements that were used on stage:

a rebellious gesture – ‘material’ and ‘expressive’ – has the function of a continuous disturbance forcing the actor to face the character he is playing at the same time in a physical and psychological dimension.. Also, that rebellious gesture is a continuous disturbance for audience to get into relationship with both the action of watching and the participation he is called to.²⁷

Actions and lines were phrased and crumbled. The gesture and physical actions were totally separated from the meaning of the few dialogues in order to create a short-circuit between the visual level and the narrative one.

Furthermore compulsive actions embodied by characters were in a continuous relationship with the dissonance produced by living materials.

The stage – Blasich writes – is an open field where every character can place itself where pleased but however everyone is forced to hit rocks, topsoil, coal. The trajectories that actors cover are simultaneously opened and closed because they are braked by hurdles and expressive materials. Also the voice that could be free has to struggle with the caged birds tweeting on stage. So every theatrical element removes each other, even though all of them are interchangeable from a dissonant perspective.²⁸

Many carriages were used to describe the trajectories of the actors as Quartucci and Kounellis wanted to crumble the play really hard. Performers actually acted on these basic machineries pushed from a scenery flat to the other, in a very violent way, experiencing a dangerous position too. In this way, dividing the space horizontally, actors gave their contribution in the figurative dynamics making the visual part of the spectacle completely asynchronous. Living materials finally made responsive the performer, politically and technically, who knew now that “he can

²⁴Jannis Kounellis, “Del corpo, del comportamento, del ‘naturale’, del ‘vivo’ come autenticità teatrale”, in Giuseppe Bartolucci, ed., *Mutations. L’esperienza del teatro immagine*, Roma: edizioni OOLP, 1975), 54.

²⁵“Rebellious gesture” belongs to performative and physical reaction of actors.

²⁶It is referred to the Italian traditional set-up for staging and its architectural configuration: *all’italiana*. It is defined like a product only involved in a commercialisation approach because connected to Court and political power from an historical point of view.

²⁷Kounellis, *Del corpo*, 54.

²⁸Gottardo Blasich, “I Testimoni”, *Lecture*, 1 (Gennaio 1969), 51-52.

not play anymore according to the perspective designed by habits and bourgeois architecture”.²⁹ Completely estranged from the textual guidelines, intent “to use stones, coal or bags for actions recalling some manual works”,³⁰ the actor became himself a “real and living element in terms of first witness for the refusal of the product within the product itself”.³¹

²⁹ Kounellis, *Del corpo*, 55.

³⁰ Capriolo, *Un funerale per il vecchio teatro*, 26.

³¹ Kounellis, *Del corpo*, 55.

The dramaturgical climax was given by the collapse of this spectacular machinery created by Quartucci and Kounellis. Tweets, noises, screeches were suddenly turned into silence. It was the first moment where everything was motionless. Also the actors were idle on the carriages. Fifteen minutes of impressive silence ran. Only the “builders” moved again after a while.³² Through an extreme slowness and using gestures of daily habits, they took “bags and use[d] them to cover everything, from the actors to the bird cages, from the stage floor to the balconies and the audience”.³³ In this way the spectator was physically incorporated into the dilation of stage writing process becoming the accomplice of this moment of destruction of the show (and, more generally, of theatre itself):

³² These characters did not appear in any of the three Rosewicz texts. They have been invented by Quartucci who gave them with the function of moving, removing, composing, decomposing the scene trying to oppose a process of physical edification to the verbal dispersion.

³³ Capriolo, *Un funerale per il vecchio teatro*, 26.

This procedure – as Bartolucci stated – is worked by Quartucci, when the viewer is first “disturbed” by the vision of the “living” elements and the “poor” materials, and then enveloped by the increasing of the imagination. So, the relationship between stage and audience is expanded as the actors become performers and accomplices of that same vision, also going from a situation of “disturbance” to one of creativity.³⁴

³⁴ Giuseppe Bartolucci, “L’ ‘organismo’ de I Testimoni: sua composizione e scomposizione”, *Maratré*, 43-44-45 (Luglio-Agosto-Settembre 1968), 223.

Finally “the three ones [builders] wash their faces and bodies. Then they eat an apple with the satisfaction of the ones have done something feeling very proud”.³⁵ Quartucci’s direction worked to get stronger “the starting points of this spectacle: ‘What is art?’ ‘Which is the function of theatre?’ He seems to answer to these questions with other doubts connected to the banality of the communication between people and emptiness that every new day brings with”.³⁶

³⁵ Capriolo, *Un funerale per il vecchio teatro*, 26.

This kind of theatrical texture and staging will inspire the following *Il lavoro teatrale* wrote by Roberto Lerici. Quartucci and Kounellis wanted to deepen the research on “breaking off the space with the proposal of an unidentifiable or classifiable setting”.³⁷ They actually threw down a new challenge: to exhibit a spectacle that could describe the destruction of theatre inside the institutional setting of the Biennale of Venice. During the rehearsals of what is considered to be as the final act of some studies and experiences, the director wanted everyone (actors, author, space designer, etc.) to be totally involved in the creation because he believed that “space configuration and writing is no longer to be considered as an aesthetical matter, but as an ideological issue”.³⁸ It is a matter of attitude, he said:

³⁶ Giorgio Zampa, “Un frullato di Rozewicz”, *Il Dramma*, 3 (Dicembre 1968), 33.

³⁷ Giuseppe Bartolucci, “Del rapporto primario e non primario”, *La scrittura scenica*, 1 (Gennaio 1971), 70.

³⁸ Carlo Quartucci, “Il lavoro teatrale” in Carlo Quartucci and Edoardo Fadini, eds., *Viaggio nel camion dentro l’avanguardia* (Torino: Cooperativa Editoriale Studio Forma, 1976), 146.

By attitude we mean the critical, political, creative disposition. In other words, the aesthetic, social, technical problems faced by everyone who works on theatre today independently by the way it is involved.³⁹

³⁹ Carlo Quartucci and Roberto Lerici, “Il lavoro teatrale. Progetto-lettera dello spettacolo”, in Quadri, *L’avanguardia teatrale*, 174.

The play was not written but recorded on tape like a modern *scenario*. So the author was a kind of plural identity formed by a writer or poet (Lerici), a director, an artist and actors. Before staging Lerici led the poetical tension, while Quartucci worked with Kounellis and actors to turn the drama frame into theatrical code. The tape – as living materials – allowed to think about staging not like something to execute but as an extemporaneous or accidental fact to manage.

Spectacle – Quartucci stated – is “directed”, but “directing” is not a job. Also the tamer in circus is able to direct but in a very different way. His directing is useful to control unexpected events. So, I wish that the debut would be disturbed by something never happened during the rehearsals. And even more, as a director, I would like to disturb the work previously done and, at the same time, to create an action useful to give new directions to the sense of the spectacle.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Programma del XXVIII Festival internazionale del teatro di prosa di Venezia, 107.

It is a discourse more radical than the one faced in *I testimoni*. While there the action of disturbing was one of the elements for the performance, here it was the principle on which the whole work was focused. Now the disturbing element did not work to involve audience like an accomplice. “The real target was not to involve but to break action every time audience could have shown its acquiescence towards the play staged”.⁴¹

⁴¹ Quartucci, *Il lavoro teatrale*, 147.

During the rehearsals there was only a short guideline:

24 independent and changeable scenes.

Two characters: He and She.

There is a magnetic tape where the all words are spoken.

There are a director, the author and two actors that have the tape they created and performed with which they have to stage the spectacle.

There is a tape that is now independent from author, director or actors.⁴²

⁴² Quartucci and Lerici, *Il lavoro teatrale*, 174.

At the beginning the equipe worked on this unfixed text comparing comments, points of view, discussing and analysing the spectacle staging and its own creation. So the theme was not narrative or connected to a story but inspired by “how to do, where to do or not theatre today, trying to answer to these questions exactly when they arise, from the perspective of a group that is working on something”.⁴³ In this way writing was assumed like a direct trace of a scenic experience that produced both a pretext for a narrative dimension and a “final abandonment of theatre”.⁴⁴ Set on a metatheatrical frame Lerici’s work can be defined like a *scenario* inspired by Beckett’s world inhabited by characters carrying out senseless actions. The plot was completely absurd and nonsense. The main characters He and She were in a relationship totally played on doubleness connections and infinite multiplications finally presenting four different couples.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Quartucci, *Il lavoro teatrale*, 144.

The dramatical dimension was not obviously created by the relationship between characters, but arose from the connection that director, scenographer,

actors, author, audience had “with the theatrical society to which they would have to belong or would have to be its own expression”.⁴⁵ Indeed the stage writing was focused on political questions: “to have consciousness of the authenticity of the work that an artist does, that is to have a relationship of deep awareness of the society we live in”.⁴⁶ However, also in this spectacle there was a disturbing and overflowing scenic machinery, conceived by Jannis Kounellis.

⁴⁵ Programma del XXVIII Festival internazionale del teatro di prosa di Venezia, 108.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Unlike in *I testimoni* the space here was exhibited like a totality, overcoming the diaphragm between stage and audience, with the project to invade every part of the theatre through signs. Stage and hall were occupied by “dogs, chickens, a quartered ox, bags, beans, flour, a bicycle, a sewing machine, buckets of water, objects thrown against the audience in order to make it dirty”.⁴⁷ The action was structured like curtain raiser sketches and performed as dialogues simultaneously acted all over the theatre. It was a real invasion of Palazzo Grassi worked by the aggressive placing of living materials and the dislocation of actors. The performers’ presence was really annoying. Some examples: they went to lagoon to fetch water, they stopped at the entrance to hinder people coming in or out, they stopped audience who wanted to escape from the hall and so on. The main feature of this stage writing was not to perform the actions, but to break them every time people wanted to follow the plot or what was happening around. Inside this polyfunctional system all the artistic personalities – particularly actors – had the political and creative duty to clarify their attitude in relation to their work and their position. They had to be considered as poetical presences in society, even though not careless or just hedonistic. Their behaviour, language, style had to confirm the same value both up and down the stage.

⁴⁷ Paolo Puppa, *Teatro e spettacolo nel secondo Novecento*, (Roma: Editori Laterza, 1990), 223.

In *Il lavoro teatrale* actors had to take off every character mask in favour to build an attitude, a new disposition towards creation, to make a political use of their qualities, even exposing themselves to the “risk of desperation or confessing powerlessness”.⁴⁸ But this aim was not understood by people who reacted disturbing the spectacle until its interruption.⁴⁹ In spite of the intentions, according to Franco Quadri, the work paid its lack of structure:

⁴⁸ Franco Quadri, “Il lavoro teatrale”, *Panorama*, 16 (ottobre 1969).

⁴⁹ Gottardo Blasich, “Il lavoro teatrale”, *Lettura*, 11 (Novembre 1969), 776.

among the several elements composing the spectacle, one was not considered at all: the audience. Even though this time the spectators seemed to be very interested in interacting by playing or political contestations, the contact was denied. Quartucci refused the Happening, showing how close and theatrical his work is.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Quadri, *Il lavoro teatrale*.

As we stated, the dramatic structure was actually foreseen to break actions every time people would have been showing a recreational approach.⁵¹ Therefore the problem was cultural and not only political. Interrupting a spectacle and escaping from a theatre, should better be considered as an invitation for the audience to refuse a certain kind of communication, that was instead totally outdated if

⁵¹ Quartucci, *Il lavoro teatrale*, 147.

compared to the historical process of transformation that was constituting that period.

Audience who paid money to watch that spectacle belonged to middle class. So there was a really few political reaction to be expected. Moreover, Quartucci faced 'escaping' more as the failure of creating real connections among 'persons', rather than an artistic flop.

I Testimoni e Il lavoro teatrale were almost ignored by regular reviewers, while some of the critics close to New Theatre appreciated Quartucci and Kounellis' attempts in the context of the semiotic deflagration triggered by both spectacles. Although not directly cited, their contribution seems to be inevitably referred to in the critical debate about the difference between space and scenography as some issues on reviews like «Sipario», «Teatro», «La scrittura scenica» show.⁵²

From 1969 the director abandoned theatre and its cultural institutions. He began a new 'journey' with *Camion* – a modern Carro di Tespi – looking for a more authentic level of communication experiencing his work in the suburbs and in poor and degraded social context. With a white truck, driving through Italian peripheries, He experienced a kind of nomadic theatre in the form of an on-the-road show where traditional categories such as roles, locations, play, actors were totally rejected:

Camion – Quartucci states – lives with the people in a village outside Rome or with the people on Portobello Road in London. Tomorrow *Camion* is a puppet master, today it's a person who drives repairs hammers takes care of the truck.... And it is also the person who films and photographs it during our short or long trips.⁵³

Action, Happening and Land Art seem to be the new coordinates of Quartucci's renewed code to create theatre beyond the theatre. The white truck is used as a mobile stage where performers involved by the artist create actions to break the daily life of people by the perspective of a real cultural, social and political interchange. The same process of anarchic and radical change was performed in the final stage of Living Theatre *Paradise Now*, staged in 1968, when the company led by Julien Beck and Judith Malina rallied their audience to meet on the street because the revolution is outside theatre.

⁵² Ettore Capriolo, "3 proposte di architettura teatrale. Il Teatro Nuovo di Trieste", *Sipario*, 270 (Ottobre 1968), 16-23; Ettore Capriolo, "Teatro Nuovo di Trieste", *Teatro*, 3-4 (1968), 1-7; Luciano Damiani, "Il Teatro Nuovo di Trieste: una proposta", *Teatro*, 3-4 (1968), 8-27; Eduardo Arroyo, "Non mi interessa la galleria d'arte sul palcoscenico", *Sipario*, 276 (Aprile 1969), 14-15; "Per un teatro aperto", *Sipario*, 277 (Maggio 1969), 1-7; Jannis Kounellis, "Del corpo, del comportamento", 230-235; "Un teatro vivo e presente", *Sipario*, 291 (Luglio 1970), 14-18; Giuseppe Bartolucci, "Fuga dal contenitore", *La scrittura scenica*, 1 (Gennaio 1971), 56-64.

⁵³ Quartucci and Scabia, *Per un'avanguardia italiana*, 182.