

# Acting Archives Essays

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## THE ACTOR AND STAGE WRITING\*

### *The Forming of the Body*

Among the linguistic issues associated with stage writing, acting has a special place. The question of acting is particularly complex because it involves an enormous and extremely diverse amount of documents produced in the twentieth century, on acting and on the actor's profession in general. The theatre that centres on stage writing is no stranger to this problematic. Indeed, it is in within this theatre current that some of the theories and practices that have most influenced the actor's role in twentieth-century theatre have emerged, as shown by the work of the likes of Grotowski, Brook, Barba, Bene, Leo de Berardinis, Sandro Lombardi. It is evident, then, that in stage writing the question of the actor and acting plays an important, but in many ways distinct, role compared to other forms of writing, since it focuses on a specific form of expression, tied to specific techniques and equally specific formation processes. It would be beyond the scope of the present study to address the problem in its totality. What we wish to do, instead, is to focus on a more specific question, that is, the stage identity of the actor, the actor as "body on stage". What do we mean by this? By "body on stage" we intend to refer to the material aspects of the actor's presence, in his or her relation to other forms of stage writing, and especially space.

When, in the first phase of his theoretical development, Meyerhold addressed the question of the theatre of "convention", one of the first problems he faced was that of adapting the actor's language to a theatre that was no longer interested in mimesis, in the psychological qualities of the character, or in *illustrating* the dramatic text.<sup>1</sup> In this context, Meyerhold reasoned, it was necessary for actors to develop an entirely new and particular form of expression, explicitly revolving on their presence on stage. This presence had to express itself, for Meyerhold, through movement and in gesture, that is, the expressive qualities associated with plasticity. Starting from the theories advanced by Craig in 1905, Meyerhold stated that words address the ear and plasticity the eyes. Therefore, also on a visual level, there must be a pattern that allows spectators to correctly interpret the scene.<sup>2</sup> From the start, therefore, movement was for Meyerhold the key to the actors' work, the central element of their expressiveness, a notion he was to fully articulate in his theory of biomechanics. The art of the actor seems to address, in Meyerhold's theory, two different requirements: a text related requirement, consisting in the correct enunciation of the

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\* Translated by Gabriele Poole, Università di Cassino. From L. Mango, *La scrittura scenica*, Roma, Bulzoni, 2003, pp. 281-345.

<sup>1</sup> See V. Meyerhold, *Premières tentatives de création d'un théâtre de la convention*, in *Écrits sur le Théâtre*, ed. by B. Picon-Vallin, 4 vols., Lausanne, La Cité-L'Âge d'homme, I, p. 109.

<sup>2</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 116.

poetic language, and a stage related requirement, which corresponds basically to movement. This double aspect of the actor's presence was certainly no innovation and Meyerhold was quite aware of this, writing that the old theatre too regarded plasticity as an essential means of expression (and makes references to Salvini in *Othello* or in *Hamlet*). But the old form of plasticity corresponds closely to spoken language, whereas the plasticity he wants to use does not correspond to words.<sup>3</sup> Movement, so carefully studied by nineteenth-century actors, and by Italian ones in particular, served to emphasize the verbal element, it *wrote* the language of the body, its scenic presence, in the same direction of verbal language. As such, it was essential to the actor's style but remained fundamentally a derivative element, lacking expressive autonomy. A mere corollary of acting. Meyerhold instead is thinking of a plasticity that does not correspond to words and explains the concept through an eloquent example. Imagine we see two people talking but cannot hear their conversation. The two talk of art, the weather, and so-on but their gestures convey something else. The gestures do not run parallel to the conversation, rather they suggest their deeper relationship, whether they are friends, enemies, lovers. What do we, as spectators who see but cannot hear, actually perceive? Certainly not the verbal discussion (which we cannot hear). Rather it is the non-verbal communication we perceive and allows us to understand things that we would never had understood if we had been able to hear the conversation and focused exclusively on it. Gesture in theatre, for Meyerhold, must function in the same way. Rather than accompanying words, it must define a communicative *score* with its own horizon of meaning. Autonomously from the verbal text, this score allows the actor and the director to intervene on the text and on the character pursuing their own autonomous and personal interpretations. Herein then lies the difference. Traditional acting associates gestures and words. In the new theatre, each one must have its own rhythm.<sup>4</sup>

When, fifteen years later, Meyerhold produced Crommelynck's *Le cocu magnifique*, the score he proposed to his actors was based precisely on the distance between verbal and non-verbal communication. Not in the sense of a complete independence of the two but rather of an interference between two different codes. During these years, Meyerhold was involved in the more constructivist phase of his research, in which he elaborated his theory of biomechanics. The notion of the autonomy of the gesture was emphasized and scientifically codified. Gesture was studied in its structural components, it was disassembled, analyzed, segmented in sections that had to be acted each according to a criterion of its own and then reassembled in such a way that, despite the fluidity of the end result, the constructive dynamics that had produced each gesture remained visible.

In *Le cocu magnifique* this system was used to characterize the physiognomy of the various characters. Actors were asked to adopt an acrobatic, clownish aptitude, based on combinations of mechanized gestures, which started from a reference to reality, but then distanced themselves from it, emphasizing the artificiality of the movement. In this way, the acting of each interpreter and, even more, the common work of the various actors, created a complex *acting machine*, made of energy, physical interaction, contact, gestural schemas. This approach produced a *score* of gestures and movements, which served to estrange the scene from the plot and the psychological

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<sup>3</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> See *ibid.*

identity of the characters, already superficial and residual. While on the one hand the score serves to distance the acting from the text, on the other it helps integrating it with the scene. The gestural acrobatics of *Le cocu magnifique* is perfectly integrated in the scenic mechanism created by Popova. The actions of actors are mostly an integral part of the scene; they establish a relation between the dynamics of the body and the dynamics of inanimate objects. As a result, the language of acting depends on stage writing as much as, if not more than on the text. Indeed, we can argue that the actor, in Meyerhold's theatre, functions as an actual sign of stage writing.

The first element, then, that characterizes the presence of the actor in relation to the scene in a modern context, seems to be the semantic importance of gestures, as an autonomous score capable of intervening on the dramaturgy of action from its own point-of-view. From this perspective, it is possible to speak of movement as an actual form of writing. A second consequence is that the language of the actor must be considered in relation to the overall expressiveness of the body. In other words, in contrast with the academic tradition that focused the study of gestures mainly on the upper limbs, reducing other body parts to a mere supporting function, in the course of the twentieth century, the body is increasingly viewed as fully expressive, that is, every limb and every part of the body can have its expressive value.<sup>5</sup>

This is clearly stated by Eugenio Barba in his discussion of the "pre-expressive materials" used in acting. By "pre-expressive materials" Barba is referring to the work actors do on themselves, on the expressive capabilities of the body, of movement, of voice, of gesture, before applying any of this to a given character. It is a form of study and practice which serves on the one hand to train actors in the creative process of theatre production and on the other to help them acquire an expressive capability, a technique, that will characterize their individual style.<sup>6</sup> It is therefore a specific type of training that serves to create – to borrow the expression Meyerhold adopted in his biomechanics – as a sort of storage space, a place where the specific knowledge of the actor can be kept and cultivated.

This pre-expressive material has, according to Barba, two specific qualities: on the one hand it is a language based on signs (gestural, vocal, facial), a form of writing that functions independently of the formulation and communication of meaning, on the other it is a writing that intervenes on the here and now of the actor's scenic presence. Both these statements are essential to our argument. 'The core of the pre-expressive – Meyerhold writes at one point – concerns the *true* nature of the actor's action independently of the dance or theatrical effects, of realistic or non-realistic effects that can be produced through it'.<sup>7</sup> It is therefore the construction of the purely physical presence of the actor, a presence that studies and expands the expressive potential of the body, or rather of the mind-body, that is, that 'complete

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<sup>5</sup> Statements along these lines can be found in much of contemporary theatrical research but also in the work of figures such as Delsarte, Jacques Dalcroze, Gurdijeff, Feldenkrais, Steiner, who, while not working on a specifically theatrical context, are nevertheless interested in the expressive potential of the body. Theatrical avant-garde in the twentieth century has been highly influenced by their work.

<sup>6</sup> Barba identifies three qualities of the pre-expressive: the work that prepares the actor for the creative process, the work that incorporates the model of theatre to which one refers, and the final work presented as a value in itself. See E. Barba, *La canoa di carta*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1993, p. 160.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 183.

fusion of action and thought, or rather of action and conscience, action and will'.<sup>8</sup> If one were to schematize, at the risk of simplifying, one could say that Meyerhold's notion of 'pre-expressive' refers to the scenic presence of actors, their acting as bodies in space without any references other than the body and space in themselves. There is an element, however, that particularly characterizes and qualifies this presence: the distance from everyday gestures and behaviours. After all, theatrical behaviour is a non-ordinary behaviour and, therefore, the exceptionality of the situation cannot avoid reflecting itself also on body language.<sup>9</sup> The actor's body, the body-mind in Barba's language, is a body of difference in which the signs and writing do not correspond to those of everyday life. The pre-expressive level is, therefore, first of all an analysis and a construction. An analysis of gesture and movement from the perspective of pure potentiality and a construction of a grammar based on the analyzed elements. Working on the pre-expressive means for actors shaping their stage existence. If an actor is not effective on the pre-expressive level, adds Barba, he or she is not an actor, because it is pre-expressivity that gives one the measure of an actor's autonomy as an individual and an artist.<sup>10</sup> The pre-expressive is therefore the transformation of the stage presence of the actor from pure phenomenal datum (being here and now) into writing, that is an articulation of consciously deployed signs. It expresses a capability to construct a specific acting language, autonomous and independent from the interpretation of the character and from the communication of dramatic meaning through action. The pre-expressive appears, in other words, as endowed with its own coherence, independent of the coherence of meaning.<sup>11</sup> It is therefore a construction of signs in a pre-referential sphere, pure signs, still devoid of meaning. Meaning is achieved only in a second phase and not by simple association (the sign/gesture that illustrates the meaning), but through an interference of levels and codes. The fact that the pre-expressive is independent from the level of meaning does not mean that has no relation with it. Rather, it means that the pre-expressive has to do with the creative process rather than the final result, in which instead the various elements that characterize the process must merge once again.<sup>12</sup>

We can therefore describe the pre-expressive as a "writing" by the actor produced through the analysis of movement, gesture, etc. A form of writing not solely because based on codified signs but also because, as Barthes has it, it is a dynamic manifestation of an unstable and restless process, half-way between style and language, between individual expression and codified structure.<sup>13</sup> It is through this

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<sup>8</sup> M. De Marinis, *In cerca dell'attore. Un bilancio del Novecento teatrale*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1999, p. 215. For a more in-depth account of the notion of body-mind we refer the reader to the theoretical writings by E. Barba and F. Ruffini, 'Precisione and corpo-mente. Sul valore del teatro', *Teatro e Storia*, no. 2 (October, 1993). The notion itself of body-mind can in any case be referred in primis to Grotowski if not even to Meyerhold.

<sup>9</sup> 'At a moment of psychic shock, a moment of terror, of mortal danger or tremendous joy, a man does not behave "naturally". A man in an elevated spiritual state uses rhythmically articulated signs, begins to dance, to sing'. J. Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, in *Towards a Poor Theatre*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1968, p. 17.

<sup>10</sup> See E. Barba, *La canoa di carta*, p. 159.

<sup>11</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>12</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Cf. R. Barthes, *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture*, Paris, ed. du Seuil, 1953.

writing – which is not an interpretative writing but an absolute one, in the sense that it refers to signs belonging to a dimension that precedes the production of meaning – that the actor intervenes on the total writing of the play. ‘The study of pre-expressivity is a means to activate the apparently pre-established meaning of the work of an author, of a story that has already been told in the song of a poet, in the interpretation of a director, in a choreographic score, which had been fixed by tradition’.<sup>14</sup>

The theory of the pre-expressive elaborated by Barba (with its operative interface represented by training and by the study of acting traditions that dedicate special attention to training: oriental theatrical traditions, the *commedia dell’arte*, the great twentieth-century innovators, including Meyerhold, Grotowsky, Decroux but also Stanislavski) is probably the one that best expresses the idea of acting as stage writing in a non-reductive fashion, in terms of the identification of a specific and essential quality of the art of acting. Barba’s theory is therefore the complex theoretical synthesis of an ideal tension and practical tendency which surface repeatedly throughout the twentieth century resulting in a shift from the expressive level of acting towards the material concreteness of the physical and scenic presence of the actor. A presence that influences, as an autonomous sign, as writing, the overall writing of the performance. This position translates into an actual obsession with Form (again in Barba’s words), typical of most twentieth-century theatre. While this obsession is crucial to the birth of modern directing, it also has a crucial influence on the role of the actor.<sup>15</sup> It is precisely in response to the need to make theatre recover its ‘lost form’, that Craig, according to Barba, elaborated his *Übermarionette* theory. The same was done by great reformers, each one in his specific area, from Appia to Reinhardt to Copeau. The problem is, evidently, that once the theatre adopts a new system of linguistic codes based on stage writing, it cannot avoid including the role of the actor in this transformation. If meaning resides in vision – as Craig maintains – then the meaning of the actor must be visual, it must correspond to what happens on stage and not in the page or in the soul of the character. The art of the actor must be renovated with movement as its foundation. Rethinking the actor as a theatrical form means conceiving the actor’s stage presence as an organism that acts, thus encouraging a singular but significant encounter between mime and dance.

What is the meeting ground of these two performance arts? Precisely, the “forming” of the body. At the beginning of the twentieth century, theories of mime and dance were also being revolutionized. In contrast with traditional theory, there was an interest in a new expressive grammar of movement based on the body as a moving form, a living organic form. In dance, for example, the tendency was to abandon the codified structure of ballet to recover the integrity of pure movement. The emergence of artists like Isadora Duncan, Loie Fuller or Ruth Saint-Denis determined a decisive turn in this direction and a rethinking of the very notion of dancing. Dance as the manifestation of a rhythmic body, educated in movement, but also free from the academic codification of gesture. It is precisely in this sense that the protagonists of modern dancing became a precious source of inspiration for experimental theatre in its search of a new linguistic identity of the actor. The words

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<sup>14</sup> E. Barba, *La canoa di carta*, p. 182.

<sup>15</sup> On the question of Form in twentieth-century theatre I take the liberty to refer the reader to my own ‘Il problema della forma nel teatro moderno’, *Scena <e>*, no. 5-6 (October, 2000).

with which Gordon Craig remembers his first meeting as spectator with Duncan are particularly significant:

She came through some small curtains which were not much taller than she was herself: she came through them and walked down to where a musician, his back turned to us, was seated at a grand piano [...] The one step back or sideways, and the music began again as she went moving on before or after it. Only just moving – not pirouetting or doing any of those things which we expect to see.<sup>16</sup>

Craig was struck, on this occasion, by the expressive possibilities of an absolute movement, incisive in its essentiality and free in its potential. A movement that is a language in itself and, as such, allows one to conceive the body as writing.<sup>17</sup>

After all, the notion of the writing by the moving body as the only “authorized” form of writing in theatre besides the text, had been already suggested by Mallarmé, when he had described dance as the sole credible form of performance, indicating instead the armchair (that is, the reader’s imagination) as the ideal stage for poetical drama, in what had to evidently be a totally abstract and mental projection. This because dance can be a form of stage writing free of mediations, rather than functioning as a necessarily degrading filter in the transition from the text to the action on stage. When Mallarmé speaks of dancing he actually has in mind Loie Fuller’s performances, a choreography of pure movement, a writing of a body in action.<sup>18</sup>

There is therefore at the roots of modern views of theatre a process of re-founding of linguistic codes in many ways similar to what was happening in those years in contemporary dance. One could even say – considering for example the importance for Appia of his collaboration with Jacques Dalcroze – that contemporary dance was a source of inspiration and a stimulus to the search for new forms of acting. More specifically, using Barba’s terminology, for the search of a *form* for the actor.

The common ground, the exchange between dance and theatre appears to revolve around the body in movement, the construction of a language based on a dialectic between human body, gesture, space and movement. While this dialectic in dance serves to break away from certain traditional formal schemes, in theatre it orients the linguistic aspects of acting in the direction of the stage, turning the actor – as in the case of Craig and Appia, albeit in different forms – into an element of stage writing.

Even the third area, that of mime, presents significant analogies with our perspective. In the 1930s, Etienne Decroux initiated what is known as corporeal mime. It included the elaboration of a technique, of a study of the work done on the body, but also a rejection of descriptive mime and pantomime. A study of the pure form of movement, of the expressive potential that Barba was later to call the ‘pre-expressive’. Decroux’s interests, as De Marinis correctly notes, went far beyond a

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<sup>16</sup> F. Steegmuller, “*Your Isadora*”. *The love story of Isadora Duncan and Gordon Craig*, London, Ed. Mac Millan, 1974, p. 360.

<sup>17</sup> ‘She was speaking in her own language [Do you understand? Her own language: have you got it?], not echoing any ballet master’, Craig specifies shortly thereafter. *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> See S. Mallarmé, *Ballets and Another Dance Study: Setting and the Ballet*, in *Mallarmé in prose*, ed. by M. A. Caws, New York, New Directions Books, 2001.

simple reforming of the codes used in mime, the ‘minor theatre’. By revolutionizing the acting codes and the scenic role of actors, Decroux was in fact proposing a new type of theatre, in line with, and based on, the positions of Craig, one of his theoretical references, and Copeau, who had been his teacher.<sup>19</sup> At the root of Decroux’s theory, lies the idea of theatre as a language that communicates through the expressive potential of the body in movement, in the absence of any textual reference, in the absence of any illustrative realism and in relation, instead, with the physical space where the action takes place. Decroux’s teachings, besides giving rise to a specific form of theatre, had also a decisive influence on many innovative movements of the second half of the twentieth century, starting from Barba.

This quick survey in the areas of dancing and mime allows us, despite its conciseness, to grasp the centrality of movement as an essential linguistic aspect of acting. This centrality entails an exchange both in terms of techniques (as in Decroux’s case) and of actual language codes among theatre, dance and mime, which, in the second half of the twentieth century, are often present together in the same performances. This exchange is particularly intense between theatre and dance, in terms of both the adoption of a more theatrical score in dancing – as in “dance theatre” – and in the inclusion of dancing in theatrical performances as a specific linguistic material. This inclusion is generally based either on the actual participation of dancers in a performance or on the adoption of choreographic codes. Wilson is a typical example of the first approach. In *Einstein on the beach*, for example, a good deal of the action is entrusted to the choreography of Andy de Groat. Even more interesting, however, is the presence in the play of Luchinda Childs, one of the most significant representatives of new North-American dance, with whom Wilson was to establish a long and profitable collaboration.<sup>20</sup> The body that dances, following precise choreographic lines, the body that reveals, even in its most elementary gestures, an extremely formalized technique and approach, this body is the instrument that Wilson needs to position the human figure in the patterns of spatial and luminous writing that characterize his directing. Dance, in Wilson’s productions, expresses the forming of the body according to a specific code. What we have is therefore a subsuming into the theatrical code (and specifically into stage writing) of a codified language that functions on two levels, as a structural element of the production and as a citation of sorts.

A different case is that of the inclusion of dance techniques in what remains a fundamentally actorial work, a work, in other words, that does not incorporate linguistic signs from a different albeit contiguous art form. In this case, there is not a use of dancers, dance fragments or entire dance sequences, but rather a tendency to choreographically arrange acting itself. We could speak in this case of a sort of dance/non-dance, that is, a type of movement in which the non-technical body of the actor has to express itself in pure action, in danced action. This is the case for

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<sup>19</sup> ‘The corporeal mime represents, in the twentieth century, the utopia of a pure theatre, which has rediscovered its actorial essence, with at its center the actor as *creator*, or the actor as *artist*, adequately equipped with both corporeal awareness and corporeal knowledge’. M. De Marinis, *In cerca dell’attore*, p. 145. On this topic see also M. De Marinis, *Mimo e mimi. Parole e immagini per un genere teatrale del Novecento*, Firenze, La Casa Usher, 1980 and *Mimo e teatro nel Novecento*, Firenze, La Casa Usher, 1993.

<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, Wilson’s actors are often dancers and Wilson has often collaborated with choreographers.

example of the Italian director Barberio Corsetti. Since the time of the *Postavanguardia* movement, Corsetti has been exploring the possibility of contaminating the actor's performance with elements taken from post-modern dance and, in particular, from Steve Paxton's contact improvisation. If the revolution in modern dance consists in the assumption of pure movement as a linguistic foundation, in postmodern dance this tendency is taken to the extreme and dance is theorized as "pure happening" of body and movement. It is a work done on gestures and on the materiality of the body itself. These are the aspects that Barberio Corsetti is interested in: not the expressive potential of a well-trained body capable of supple movements, but the sensitivity of an actor's body that writes movements based on its precariousness, weakness, technical ineffectiveness. Only in this way do gestures avoid the danger of mechanical choreography and transform themselves into authentic writing. Corsetti writes: 'dance, especially Anglo-Saxon dance, seeks an absolute, intact body, a body that is as pure as possible; I am interested in a theatrical, broken body; a body permeated by all the elements of the stage', a body that can be integrated into stage writing.<sup>21</sup> Corsetti speaks of actors as 'mental acrobats, persons capable, thanks first and foremost to their concentration and intelligence, to transform themselves into works of art', capable in other words, of integrating themselves with their bodies, their minds, their sensitivity into the director's construction.<sup>22</sup> A geometric precision in the construction of the action is necessary to achieve this, but, on the other hand, this precision must come from a somewhat fluid and undefined score, a score made of "rough" gestures and movements, dictated by the physical presence of the actors more than their technical ability, and by their capacity to transform everyday gestures into a form without modifying their structure, but only by exasperating them, by taking them to the extreme, and, obviously, by depriving them of any representative import. In reminiscing about the performances staged with the Gaia Scienza, Corsetti states: 'They said we walked continuously: for us walking was a way to trace signs in space', and adds, 'walking was followed by collisions, which engendered a basic primary conflict, or by our relating to the floor, by running'.<sup>23</sup> Corsetti's choreographic score was therefore a result of the dislocation of simple actions in space and of the reciprocal exchange between the bodies of the actors, of their touching, clashing, rising, avoiding each other; an approach that has continued to characterize his productions in the following years. Common to all these actions, almost a stylistic trademark, is the search for a point of unbalance, where the actor loses control and gestures, movements, actions occur as the natural consequence of the shifting of the centre of gravity. It is this linguistic element that "choreographs" the gesture and formalizes it, in ways and according to a theory that is evidently very different from those of institutional dance, including modern and postmodern dance. Whereas 'the dancer's leap knows its point of departure and point of arrival', the fall – which is the most evident result of the loss of balance – does not, it is a staged act that can be controlled only in its initial phase, not in its outcome.<sup>24</sup> It is, in fact, a metaphor of an unstable writing, which is also always "losing its balance", and

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<sup>21</sup> G. Barberio Corsetti, *L'attore mentale*, Milano, Ubulibri, 1992, p. 100.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20. Behind the definition of mental acrobat one perceives the Artaudian metaphor of the actor as athlete of the heart.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.



therefore is always open to a special dialectic between mathematical preciseness and emotional variation.

The above evidences how important and complex the exchange between theatre and dance is for Barberio Corsetti. But there is more. In many sections of Corsetti's productions, the actors seem to follow a more evidently choreographic arrangement. In other words, their physical exuberance, their dyslectic gestures, seem to converge, at times, towards a common score, in which all actors make simultaneously the same gesture or step. Corsetti speaks of these as actual 'choreographic passages'. These passages function in the structure of the play as moments of estrangement, as pauses in the action, as choreographic gestural redundancies that distance the performance from any representational temptation and expand the already ample borders of Corsetti's dramaturgy, underlining the abstract autonomy of gesture.<sup>25</sup>

The interference and contamination among the roles of dancer, actor and mime, is therefore one of the possible responses of modern theatre to the problem of integrating the human body into stage writing. A complex problem that has led to a radical rethinking of the role and technique of the actor. The human body as it is and the actor, with his or her experience and knowledge, do not seem at first glance capable of satisfying the new formal requirements. The body must first become a form among others. To achieve this it must betray the materiality of the *human thing* and develop new expressive techniques. It must, in other words, get out of its skin. This, at the beginning of the century, was the position of Craig and Schlemmer, who affirmed the need to completely replace the human figure with an inorganic analogue.<sup>26</sup> This is also the premise behind the search for a total expressiveness of the body (the pre-expressive), which lead actors to adopt mime and dance as techniques for formalizing the body.<sup>27</sup> Both art forms provide an answer to the problem of making actors themselves a source of stage writing, capable of integrating itself into the score of the play and expressing themselves through a form of acting mostly based on scenic and visual codes. This conception of the human figure as a body on stage can correspond to three different functions that actors can be called upon to perform: a performative function, a choreographic function, an iconic function.

### ***The Performative Function***

The first of these functions, which I call the performative function, is tied to the notion that the actor must be considered, first of all, as a physical presence on the stage, that is, as the executor of an actorial performance. It concerns, in other words, the role played by acted action independently of any precise representational

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<sup>25</sup> 'In this fashion, one can use the body to narrate what cannot be narrated in any other fashion: the perspective is shifted towards the sphere of repetition, iteration, and extreme stylization, in which emotion is liberated without need for words or immediate narrative justifications'. Ibid., p.101.

<sup>26</sup> In the case of Craig I am naturally referring to E. Gordon Craig, *The Actor and the Übermarionette*, in *On the Art of the Theatre*, London and New York, Routledge, 2009 (first edition London, Heinemann, 1911); for Schlemmer see his 'Man and Art Figure', in *The Theatre of the Bauhaus*, ed. by W. Gropius and A. Wensinger, Middletown, Wesleyan University Press, 1961 (English translation of the monographical issue that Bauhaus dedicated to theatre in 1924).

<sup>27</sup> De Marinis in *In cerca dell'attore* correctly contextualizes these studies in a more general twentieth-century Körperkultur, which does not express itself only through performance arts but influences a wider, richer and more variegated cultural scene.

function. It has to do, one could say, with the practical and non-referential “tasks” assigned to actors on the stage. Tasks that are no longer masked behind a representational pretense, but blatantly exposed. Actions that deliberately do not refer to anything else. It is obvious how this performative function becomes most evident in “non-representational” types of theatre, the ones, that is, in which stage writing does not refer to anything other than itself. When Kirby talks about the absence of a matrix as one of the qualities of happening it is precisely this aspect he is referring to.<sup>28</sup> An action without a matrix is one that corresponds only to itself, does not refer to something else and is not motivated by something else. Kirby gives the example of an actor that must sweep the floor. In representational theatre, says Kirby, this action functions on two levels. The actor, on a material level, will execute a task but at the same time he or she will be offering an interpretation that raises a number of questions. Who is the character that is sweeping the floor? Why is the character doing it? What is his or her state of mind? These elements represent a secondary level of the action, which influences the material one determining its form and characteristics. In a happening instead, Kirby points out, this would not be the case, because the action of the actor represents nothing but itself. It has no ulterior motivations, no connections to a fictitious level. A similar situation occurs every time we watch plays that are rigorously limited to the here and now of the scenic event. The closer the play gets to pure performance, that is the enactment of a (more or less theatrical) behavior, the more acting will be limited to its performative aspect. This, for Kirby, is the most important legacy of happening to theatre: the incorporation of performative qualities, which Kirby calls ‘not-acting’, among the elements that characterize the acting and presence of actors.<sup>29</sup> More specifically, Kirby identifies a scale in the actor’s role that has a one extreme ‘not-acting’ (what I call the performative function) and at the other extreme acting, in the sense of executing complex acts (acts, that is, involving multiple levels: psychological, physical, emotional, etc.). Between not-acting and acting there is a gradation in the “quantity” of acting: non-matrixed performing, *received* acting, simple acting. The first corresponds to the qualification of a scenic presence (which, in itself, is inert, that is, not oriented to action) as actorial through a simple formal sign, such as a costume. The second, instead, is the perception of a behavior as “acted” by the public though in fact it is an authentic action.<sup>30</sup> The third case, is the introduction of deliberately and consciously acted elements, which however remain simple elements, that is they are not part of the interpretation of a character. The novelty of happening, which was appropriated by all the new theatre, was, according to Kirby, the integration of the purely performative practices of ‘not-acting’ into regular actorial performances. This, for example, is the case of Open Theater and Living Theatre, who incorporate training exercises in their plays, or of Schechner, who, in *Dionysus in 69*, makes actors use their real names. Kirby, somewhat stretching the category, includes in this tendency towards ‘non-acting’ even the theatre of Peter Handke, referring to those

<sup>28</sup> Cf. M. Kirby, *Happenings, an illustrated anthology*, New York, Dutton, 1965.

<sup>29</sup> M. Kirby, ‘On acting and not-acting’, *The Drama Review*, 16 (March, 1972). Also reedited in *Acting (Re) considered. Theories and practices*, ed. by P. Zarrilli, London and New York, Routledge, 1995.

<sup>30</sup> Kirby uses the example of a group of actors who, in an interiors scene, are playing cards in the background. They are really playing, winning and losing money, but as of the play, they are also actual characters “acted” by actors.

cases in which the actors play themselves *a la* Pirandello. A more appropriate example, in my view, would be Jan Fabre's experimenting with actions in which actors become physically exhausted, through a series of exasperated and repeated actions that gradually modify their scenic presence. Independently of the appropriateness of his examples, what Kirby justly evidences is the tendency in contemporary theatre towards a purely performative form of acting, in which the elements of the scenic reality and elements of represented fiction continuously exchange place.<sup>31</sup>

*Cottimisti* by Remondi and Caporossi is a singular example of this trend. Antonio Pizzo describes their performance as a 'bricklaying marathon'.<sup>32</sup> The suggestive expression is entirely appropriate, since the performance consists, basically, in the construction by two actors, of an actual brick wall. The wall is real, the bricks are real, the toil of the actors-bricklayers is also real. A happening of sorts, one could say. However, the *matrix* that qualifies the actors as actors is not completely erased. Beyond the event there is the presence of theatre, signaled by the presence of the proscenium and a series of micro-actions, of gags that accompany the building process. But in the dramatic texture of the action, the scenic text is created precisely by the act of building, a neutral act, apparently devoid of any secondary meaning. However, this action does in fact incorporate other significations. There is first of all the rather obvious metaphorical level (which Remondi and Caporossi wisely downplay): the wall as a barrier between actors and public, certainly, but also between the two protagonists, who find themselves, at one point, on the two opposite sides of the barrier. Then there is the pattern of vocal cries, gags, brief improvised jokes revolving on the building process, which in the meantime proceeds ceaselessly, relentlessly, silently till the wall is complete and a ladder falls *a la* Beckett from above allowing the two actors to climb over it. But the play does not end here. In the final epilogue, a gigantic wrecking ball appears. On the one hand, the ball seems a response to the need to knock down that barrier, to go beyond it, to see. But at the same time, it suggests that all this work has been useless, that after the wall is knocked down it will have to be rebuilt again, and again, forever, absurdly, a cycle that ultimately evokes the absurd and infinitely repetitive nature of theatre itself.

The purely performative function therefore seems to indicate a type of action that counts for what it is, as a literal action. This function can serve to completely determine the score of the actor, or it can, instead, create limited interferences with the structure of acting or of the entire show. This is what happens in what Carmelo Bene calls *distraxioni di scena*, or 'stage distractions'. In what sense can one speak, in this case, of a performative function? In terms of a almost obsessive, presence of things, objects, stage props that condition Bene's acting, inserting it in an entirely theatrical and self-referential landscape. It is a world that does not refer to the representational world of a text but rather to the purely scenic aspect of the play, and operating according to a deconstructing perspective. As Bene recites his part he

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<sup>31</sup> It is interesting that Kaprow, in speaking of his choice of actors for his happenings, states that he could not use professionals (not even the ones who worked in avant-garde groups like Living Theatre) because they seemed to remain trapped in an interpretative and mediated form. They seem incapable, in other words, of limiting themselves to pure performance, to complete 'not-acting'.

<sup>32</sup> A. Pizzo, *Materiali e Macchine nel teatro di Remondi e Caporossi*, Napoli, Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1992, p. 66.

continuously moves on stage. He searches among things, empties drawers, tries on clothes, observes objects, stumbles over them, throws them away. In short he concentrates on the material consistency of what surrounds him, treating the stage as a real thing and not as dependent on the illusion of theatrical pretense. He gets out of his role and becomes the actor interpreting it. If the objects suggest their theatrical nature, Bene manipulates them as an actor who is acting, while (and notwithstanding the fact of) representing a character. The manipulation of props can be interpreted literally, as a purely performative action (though obviously different from the previously mentioned examples), because they are actual actions (if taken literally) yet they are still not *authentic*, since they are determined by the artificial context of the stage. The revolt of the objects, the ‘hindering’ work on objects and gestures mentioned by Deleuze, offers the actor the possibility of detaching himself from the character showing, in an almost Pirandellian fashion, that he can become an object of the stage just as much as he can be, through his or her voice, a poetical object.<sup>33</sup> If we consider the performative function as a sort of dual visibility of the actor on stage – as character but even more as actor – a common technique, so common that we can talk about it generic terms, is having the actors, rather than stage hands, modify the scene. It is evidently a trick, a solution to the practical necessity of rearranging the scene without interrupting the play, but the fact that this job is entrusted to actors who continue to act as the characters they represent, turns it into an integral part of the acting score. The change of scene is evidently conceived as a moment in the play. The fact that the public sees it is not an accident but a choice. Just as it is a deliberate choice to have the actors do it. In other words, the action takes place on two levels: the fictional one and that of the real action on stage. On the first level, the action is perceived as a metaphor, whereas on the second it is taken literally. It is what it is. The action of an actor who changes the scene in view of the spectators is a non-matrixed action, a moment of ‘not-acting’, singularly and paradoxically inserted in a representational context.

### ***The Choreographic Function***

The second function we have attributed to the actor in stage writing is the choreographic one. The term attests, evidently, to the interest in pure movement that has characterized modern theatre since its origin and is at the root of its relation with dance. The term, however, must not be taken literally, in the sense that it does not necessarily indicate a direct influence or contamination with dance, as much as a particular articulation of the scenic presence of actor as a form of writing, involving the formalization of movement and of movement’s relation to space.

To begin the analysis of this particular aspect of acting we must return to the notion of the autonomy of gesture and movement discussed at the beginning of this essay in relation to Meyerhold. Obviously, even at the start of the twentieth century, this position was not limited to Meyerhold. We find it, for example, in Craig and also in Artaud, who theorized, based on his experience of Bali theatre, a hieroglyph of the gesture, which was to be conceived as a writing of the body, free and autonomous from both the representation of reality and the illustration of a text. On the other

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<sup>33</sup> G. Deleuze, ‘Un manifesto di meno’, in C. Bene and G. Deleuze (eds.), *Sovrapposizioni*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1978.

hand, a similar notion is implicit in Brecht's indications to his actors, when he asks them to be "critical" of the character they act, rather than adopting an illustrative approach. Even more curious, from this perspective, is a text by Marinetti, *Manifesto della declamazione dinamica e sinottica*, in which the author, with his usual apodictic verve, describes the gestural code of orators during futurist soirées. It is evidently a sort of self-portrait, which, however, contains some indications that are important for our perspective: do not limit gestures to the arms; act mechanically, so that the various parts of the body will appear to have a life of their own, independently from one another; actively interact with objects; move freely and dynamically through space. In short, the notion that movement can (or even must) have an autonomous expressive dimension is one of the distinctive traits of the new theatre in all its varieties.

In the second half of the twentieth century, this notion figures prominently in theoretical reflections on acting. Barba's notion of the pre-expressive, examined above, is a particularly evident example. Movements, gestures are a form of writing. This is also Louis Aragon's position in regards to Wilson's *Deafman Glance*, as found in a posthumous letter to his friend Breton, where speaks of the play as a magical and surreal universe, in which communication is entirely entrusted to movement.<sup>34</sup> Movement, therefore, speaks, it has a language of its own, which consists in the transformation into form of the human body in space. 'Music – says Wilson – lights, gestures, are separate from acting. Sometimes, on stage, one may grab a phone before it rings, before it actually emits a sound. Movements are separate and independent of the text: a series of internal or external impressions, a sort of x-ray of the mind'.<sup>35</sup> There is therefore a special relation between the play and the gestural score, which evolves following its own direction and interferes with the action required by the text, without illustrating it or commenting on it. This score is characterized by two principles: the abstract formalization of gestures and the action/space relation. Wilson constructs gestures according to a precise rhythm which he achieves by having actors count silently, so that each action and each gesture has a specific duration, its own personal, abstract, precise length. The use of movement as autonomous writing translates, therefore, in a "transformation into a form" realized through an unnatural rhythm that gives gestures a mathematical precision that blatantly exposes their staged character. Slow motion (the solution preferred by Wilson for gestures) and repetition (different rhythms or also ostentatiously identical rhythms of identical gestures or actions) are the more common examples of this linguistic strategy, whose explicit goal is *to make gestures visible*. But what does making gesture visible mean, given that gestures and facial expressions are obviously a form of visual language? In Wilson's performances gestures are presented, even in the context of complex actions, as special formal elements, as signs that acquire mathematical precision and rhythm by being purified of all incidental contingency. In this way, gestures are freed of any ties with everyday life and take on an abstract precision that turns them into one of the "visible" forms of the performance.

Federico Tiezzi adopted a similar position at the time of his experience with conceptual theatre. 'The signifying gesture', Tiezzi writes, 'disappears and is replaced by an irregular displacement (fragmentation, repetition, acceleration, doubling)' and

<sup>34</sup> See L. Aragon, 'Lettre ouverte à André Breton', in *Les Lettres Françaises*, 2-8 giugno 1971.

<sup>35</sup> F. Quadri, *Colloquio con Robert Wilson*, in *Invenzione di un teatro diverso*, Torino, Einaudi, 1984, p. 154.

shortly thereafter speaks of its ‘expressive replacement with the “purely nominal” one (see Duchamp)’.<sup>36</sup> An analytic attitude characterizes the entire performance to the point of denying its status as a unitary object, highlighting instead the various languages that compose it. This attitude conditions also the role of the actor which expresses itself through in purely performative terms, limiting acting to rigorously non-referential actions: pure actions in a circumscribed time and space. These pure actions, on the other hand, are never spontaneous, but are inserted in a highly formalized grid. They are the result, in other words, of a process that involves extrapolating gestures from their context (gestures such as, in *Vedute di Porto Said*, getting up from a chair, putting on a dress, drinking from a cup), sectioning them in their structural components, and re-assembling them according to a rhythm that changes every time, and through a technique that does not hide the sectioning and reassembling process but on the contrary draws attention to it. If the action consists in getting up from a chair, for example, the actor will concentrate each time on a small section of the action, returning to the initial position and adding at each stage another movement. When confronted with scenes like these, spectators are not only led to “see” the gesture but, at least in the above case, to see nothing but the gesture. This process of abstraction which, in Wilson’s case occurs in a iconic frame, in Tiezzi’s play becomes absolute.

The formalization of gestures and movement through a process of segmentation and assembling can be considered one of the linguistic techniques that more clearly allows acting to function as autonomous writing. De Marinis goes as far positing it as the foundation of the techniques and “forms” of twentieth-century acting. ‘In the work of the leading figures’, writes De Marinis, ‘one observes the recurring tendency to segment the behavior on stage in its smallest elements (atoms or cells of action) and then re-assemble it either according to an horizontal chronological axis, but also and more importantly according to a vertical axis of simultaneity’.<sup>37</sup> De Marinis is referring to all the great reformers of twentieth-century theatre, none excluded. He adds that ‘it is never a case – not even for Stanislavski, despite appearances – of following the logic of realism and imitation, but rather the very different one that aims at preserving the scenic quality of action, namely, what allows it to be real but not realistic for the spectator’.<sup>38</sup> For De Marinis, we are dealing, in short, with nothing less than a twentieth-century gestural code based on the transformation into a form of the human body through a process of segmentation and re-assembling.

I call ‘first articulation’ the segmentation work done on the human body, and on that of the actor in particular, through which the body is divided into various parts (sort of like a puppet or machine) and then re-assembled according to a secondary, artificial anatomy, whose purpose is to transform the living, biological, everyday body into a ‘body-in-life’ (Barba), that is, a fictitious, non-ordinary body.<sup>39</sup>

De Marinis’s position is generally convincing. The writing by the body (or, with our expression of choice, the body as stage writing) in twentieth-century theatre is

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<sup>36</sup> F. Tiezzi, ‘L’ipotesi materialista’, in G. Bartolucci, A. and L. Mango (eds.), *Per un teatro analitico esistenziale*, Torino, Studio Forma, 1980, p. 87.

<sup>37</sup> M. De Marinis, *In cerca dell’attore. Un bilancio del Novecento teatrale*, p. 207.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 201.

tied to the elaboration of non-ordinary structure of gestures and movements, fundamentally based on an abstract formalization process. The 'secondary anatomic combination' mentioned by De Marinis fully corresponds to Wilson's rhythmic measure, to Tiezzi's analytic procedure or to Barberio Corsetti's 'choreographic drift'. It can therefore be defined as the primary condition for that visibility of gesture and movement of which the actor is responsible in the theatre of stage writing. To conclude, it is interesting to note the similarities of the above with Gilles Deleuze's analysis of Carmelo Bene's work. In elaborating his notion of the 'distraction' of acting from the character through the adoption of a gestural score, which we have repeatedly referred to, Deleuze mentions the specific quality of those gestures. 'The fact is', writes Deleuze, 'that, being continuously hindered, gestures and movements are subject to continuous variation', and specifies: 'In the variation, what counts is the relations of speed and slowness and the modification of those relations, insofar as they lead gestures and enunciations along a line of transformation, according to variable coefficients'.<sup>40</sup> The evident quality of Bene's gestures is their unstable nature, dependent on the rhythm and modes of their execution. Thus the gesture takes on the same rhythmic and musical timing they have in Wilson, although in a non-analytic sense. The gestural code, in this case, is determined by a formalization of the modalities of everyday behavior. It is the writing of time through gestures.

This is the first characterizing element of the actor's choreographic function. The second, instead, concerns the relation between body and space. While in the case of the first element, its most relevant quality, as noted above, is that of making gestures and movements visible, in the case of the body-space relation, it is possible to state that its most relevant quality is that of *making visible space itself*. In this case too, before proceeding in our analysis, it is useful to clarify the sense of the above statement. The notion that space, the dominion of visibility par excellence in theatre, must be visualized through the actor may seem paradoxical. Yet, it is what Adolphe Appia declared at the dawn of Modernity. Theatrical space, for Appia, had to be a solid, architectural, accessible and essential structure. It was not supposed to be the representation of an imaginary place but rather an independent construction of spaces and planes. A purely potential space, in its pristine condition of linguistic material, capable of assuming countless configurations, but incapable, on the other hand, of doing it on its own. Something that awaits life and, till then, remains inert. In order for space to come to life, the actor's intervention was necessary, or, more precisely, the intervention of the actor's body, the living body. But in order to express its inner life in all its complexity, rather than through superficial indications, the body had to modify its everyday configuration, it had to betray its normality.<sup>41</sup> We remain, therefore in the same context: the artistic potential of the human body is closely dependent on the actor's capacity to distance it from everyday life and this distancing is made possible by the rhythmic transfiguration of movement, that is, by turning the body into music.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> G. Deleuze, 'Un manifesto di meno', pp. 82-83.

<sup>41</sup> See A. Appia, *L'oeuvre d'art vivant*, Genève, Édition Atar, 1921. Also in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. by M.-L. Bablet, 4 vols., Lausanne, L'Âge d'homme, 1983-1992, I.

<sup>42</sup> 'If one voluntarily accepts the modifications that music dictates, the human body acquires, in art, the status of a means of expression'. Ibid.

In this way, the transfigured body establishes a relation with inert space. It is a relation of opposition between a soft, pulsating, active substance and a solid, rigid, passive one. For Appia, theatre is based on the dialectic between these two principles. ‘In order to receive from the living body its part of life’, writes Appia, ‘space must resist it. If instead it adapts itself to the body’s form it increases its inertia. On the other hand, the body’s resistance is what animates the forms of space. The *living* space represents the victory of corporeal forms over inanimate forms. The reciprocity is perfect’. Appia proceeds to illustrate this notion with an example. Imagine a body that, during an action on stage, deliberately bumps into a column (a real, solid, one, not the fake one common in painted scenes). The contact, or even the mere vicinity of the two, suffices to create an ‘expressive life’ that the two lack when separated. Then the body touches the column: ‘the column resists. *It acts!* The opposition has injected life in the inanimate form: space has come to life!’.<sup>43</sup> Thus, it is not solely the scene, as a plastic and architectural element, that offers a fundamental support to the actor’s performance: it is also the actor’s action that injects life, that is, expressiveness in the scene. Using our own terminology: it makes it visible. It allows us to see its potential realized (as expressive matter, that is, as writing) and to perceive its structure. A part, at times even an important part, of the actor’s work on stage has this specific function. Stage action takes place in a given space and acts on that space.<sup>44</sup> The above is a common condition in late twentieth-century theatre, but it is particularly prominent in currents based on the notion of analytic writing, including those more directly associated with conceptual theatre and those of authors like Wilson.

Tiezzi “studies for environments”, for example, are based on the particular effect that derives from the encounter between an analytic approach to space (of deconstructive orientation) and the work on the gesture based on segmentation and re-assembling. The gestuality of a performance originates from a spatialized gesture, that is, a gesture that is related to an *environment* in a way that allows the action to conform to the characteristics of the theatrical space. The actress that, in *Vedute di Porto Said*, enters into and exits from a dress, does it following the directrix indicated by a rope that corresponds to the diagonal of the stage. The action of getting up from a chair according to a broken rhythm – the same rhythm of the play – is performed parallel to the wall at the back (to some extent dematerialized by a slide with a black and white grid); the actor who at one point jumps up from an armchair and starts running (serially repeating his action) is blocked by a rope that takes his jacket off and leaves him tied up along the vertical axis of the stage (or horizontal one, depending on the play). It is my impression that Tiezzi’s approach, notwithstanding the obvious differences, recalls in many ways Appia’s positions. The body is a dynamic action, space is the principle of resistance: the writing of the performance is the product of the interaction between these two elements. The choreographic function, in this case, is expressed by both elements: as a

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Barberio Corsetti for example writes: ‘Now, in my opinion, the stage is the place where everything is possible, really, not in the sense of a machinery, of a Baroque possibility, but as a mental capacity to interpret the space; I am therefore very interested in placing actors in very particular conditions, in regards to space, which is not seen solely as a surface that one must move on, but as a mentally and physically rough terrain’ (G. Barberio Corsetti, *L’attore mentale*, p. 20).



transformation into form of gestures and movements, and, at the same time, as a transformation into form of space. The bare *environments* of the analytic phase – simple rooms without connotations or stages consisting in simple architectural spaces (without wings or backdrops hiding their shape, in other words) – through the actions of actors, little by little, reveal to the public their nature of plastic geometric shapes, of volumes sectioned into their primary elements. It is obvious that this aspect becomes particularly prominent in those plays in which the *dramatic meaning* is entirely channeled through pure acted action, but it is significant that this relation between actor and space has remained an underlining principle of stage action also in later years, including Tiezzi's most recent plays. For Tiezzi, the actors that move in a space, or even, more conventionally, in a scene, cannot do it casually or spontaneously (basing their actions, for example, only on the fictitious locality in which the character's action takes place). They must instead act and move in relation to the concrete space of the stage and the forms it contains in order to make them visible, suggesting, for example, to cite one of the simplest actions, with movements or gestures the orthogonal structure of vertical, horizontal and diagonal lines.

A particularly evident example of this is found in *Crollo nervoso*. In the absence of a well-defined representational and narrative context, the actions in the performance seem the result of the assembling of codified and iterative gestures, which are given a musical quality through serial and rhythmic repetitions. In this fashion, actions turn into something that borders on dance, evidencing a choreographic matrix both in terms of gestures and in the disposition of the actors on stage. This is because each actor is assigned a particular area to perform his action thus participating in the collective definition of a precise spatial grid. Within this area actions are the result of simple gestures, which are made “exemplary” but also abstract by decontextualizing the situation, but also, if not more, by adopting a process of schematization (and, to some extent, of deconstruction), which consists in evidencing the spatial vectors of gestures, of any gesture, which always represent a form of spatialization of the body. This creates a choreographic *writing* both in terms of gestures and of the relation between actors and space. This tendency is particularly prominent in the choral scenes that alternate with the scenes with one, two or three actors. In these scenes, and especially in the one in which the group of “space explorers” perform “military attacks”, Tiezzi arranges the actions along the vertical and horizontal axes of the stage, making actors do knee bends, then leap forward as if running and then return to the initial position. The “dramatic” tension of the situation emerges thus through a structure of movements whose main purpose seems to outline the “optic box” represented by the stage in its various dimensions.

The choreographic function, in cases such as these, is remindful of the *choreographic drift* already discussed in relation to Barberio Corsetti's work. It is not an adoption of a formalized artistic model, especially on a technical level, as much as a response to a specific interest in writing movements as signs and incorporating those signs in the more general writing of space. In Wilson's case, instead, dance is present as a specific linguistic code (with its characteristic techniques) in the context of a writing based on citations, contaminations and syntheses between different languages. While this contamination is used by Wilson to formalize the actors' presence, it is also used to establish an equally formalized relation between body and space. Let us once again use *Einstein on the beach* as an example. The base element Andy de Goat's

choreography is the act of turning, of moving along simple circular lines, an action that is apparently devoid of any particular expressive function. The circle and the circular arrangement of the action are nothing but an element that connects the actors to the space. They are, even more than a choreographic solution, a writing *of* space and *in* space. The spatialization of action, however, is not limited to this action; all scenic movements are organized so as to make actors move along precise and easily perceived spatial lines, using their bodies as ideal instruments for the Cartesian measuring of the stage.

There are then two moments in the performance in which the relation between choreography and space seems almost to invert. The minimal structures of movement identified by de Groat, in these moments, are translated into scenic images, becoming part of the visual writing of the scene. The first moment occurs after the third curtain. The ‘light-bulbs turn on in groups, creating various network of lines, dominated by oblique parallel lines, intersecting horizontal and oblique lines, perpendicular lines, concentric or intersecting circles’, as Quadri’s writes, adding: ‘There are four fundamental movements in the play. After having explored the space, the piece falls back unto itself.’<sup>45</sup> What we have here, in short, is the graphic transcription of the choreographic principles that inspired de Groat. The second moment occurs in the fourth and final act. The structure of light-bulbs returns multiplied at the back of the scene, which now consists in a scaffolding (as in Living Theatre’s *Frankenstein* and before that in Piscator’s *Hoppla wir leben!*). Positioned at various levels, actors turn towards the luminous signs and begin to act as if they were themselves lighting up in turns.

It is a curious articulations of signs. At the beginning there is a minimal choreographic structure that appears as a writing of the space through the body. Then this writing of the action is translated into a visual structure, a structure of light, turning into writing in the literal meaning of the term. In turn, at the end of the fourth act, this structure transforms again into movement, through a score of gestures that simulates the lighting of the light-bulbs.

The structure of correspondences between scenic elements, spatial elements, gestures, and movements, besides further clarifying how the true “dramatic argument” of *Einstein on the beach* is the writing of time and space, functions also as a sort of paradigm of the choreographic function of the actor, allowing us to clearly grasp the web of various forms of writing connecting the space, the actions of the bodies and the overall structure of the play, a web which is at the base of the play’s stage writing.

It is evident that the choreographic function is more clearly legible in those forms of theatre that experiment with abstract codes, and structure performances as analytic constructions. However, significant traces of the characteristics associated with the new theatre are found also in performances where they are less programmatically evident. The role of actors in Kantor’s pieces, for example, cannot certainly be described in terms of those principles of abstraction and choreographic precision that characterize Wilson’s work, being rather determined by a deconstructive process of expressionist origin. Kantor sections the body according to mechanical movement schemes inspired by puppets and automatons, following the

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<sup>45</sup> F. Quadri, *Viaggio attraverso cinque dimensioni*, in *Il teatro di Robert Wilson*, Venezia, La Biennale di Venezia, 1976, p. 14.

teachings of Craig and Schulz.<sup>46</sup> Gestures are disassembled and re-assembled in a manner that contradicts the organic character of the human figure. It is as if there was no firm structuring principle, as if individual limbs tended to act on their own, each according to its rhythm. This mechanical quality becomes expressive when it begins to signify the body beyond life, the dead body that goes on living, in the space delimited by the theatre, as actorial body. This dislocation of gesture and movement in a uncommon context already corresponds to the notion of the body as stage writing. However, there are other elements more immediately associated with the problem of writing in space. Kantor's "catwalks", for example, have a circular arrangement which, while corresponding to a tradition of the genre, also serves to define what Allegri calls 'the opacity of Kantor's space'.<sup>47</sup> It is a way of organizing the action based on the presence of multiple focal points on stage, each one corresponding to an individual micro-action. The "catwalk", besides synthesizing through a sort of dramaturgical ostension the fragmentary existence of the characters, is, in short, a way of organizing the movement of actors on stage according to a formal rhythm that highlights the "material nature" of the stage, preventing any possible representational temptation.

The action in Grotowski's performances follows similar criteria. The rigorous spatial dramaturgy leads, or even forces, the action to arrange itself along well-defined and clearly legible paths. In *Akropolis* these directions are suggested by the grid of metallic wires from which stove pipes are hung (which impose a predetermined route on the actors) and even more by the particular network of relations established between the public and the actors, who move exclusively along the corridors that separate the various areas assigned to the spectators. In *The Constant Prince*, instead, the action develops in space in relation to the ritual behavior and atmosphere that characterize the acting and the play in general. The anatomy table of the Prince represents the centre, the focus, and the vertex of the scene, which is separated and isolated from the public by a high wooden barrier that entirely surrounds it. Within this bare and almost ascetic space, the movement of the actors develops around a centre as a sort of vertigo, at times taking on the character of a continuously moving procession, which is often quick and disorderly, turning at times into a grotesque parody. Even the exchanges between actors in the secondary duos (the one between Muley and Fenice for example), which Grotowsky retains from the original text while deforming their communicative message, are arranged along precise spatial lines, with rhythmic, spatially defined movements, which have nothing to do with the lines that are spoken.

We could summarize by saying that the presence of the actor as body on stage seems characterized by two main features: a) the estranging of the gesture according to an autonomous and non-representational (or even abstract) score, with its own special expressivity, and b) a relation with space based on writing. Both these elements are associated with what we have called the choreographic function. Before proceeding, however, there is another example of "choreographic" relation between body and space, which, because of its peculiar characteristics, is worth examining. In

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<sup>46</sup> One of the most significant and original Polish writers, Bruno Schulz, is the author of a stimulating short treatise on marionettes, which Kantor is particularly interested in.

<sup>47</sup> L. Allegri, 'Lo spazio medievale di "Wielopole-Wielopole"', in *Kantor. Protagonismo registico and spazio memoriale*, ed. by L. Gedda, Firenze, Liberoscambio, 1984.

their version of *Antigone*, Julian Beck and Judith Malina decided to eliminate all scenographic elements. The play can be staged in an empty hall or on a completely bare stage, and the substance of the performance revolves entirely around the relation between word and body. ‘The goal was’, in Malina’s words, ‘to use our bodies to precisely communicate the subtext of the words’.<sup>48</sup> In other words, a search for the total expressivity of the body, used to write a dramaturgy of the actor that flows under, over and around words, producing a score based on parallel layers of meaning. The gestural score, however, is not solely individual. It does not concern, that is, only the relation between the actor and his character, but determines the more general organization of stage movements. Since the rehearsals, Malina reminisces, ‘actors began to create miraculous formations, diverging when ideas diverged and adhering to one another when the ideas adhered’.<sup>49</sup> As a result, mass movements began to emerge, collective actions endowed with an intensiveness and intentionality as dramaturgical as those associated with individual scores. ‘In the complexity of the first part, a leit-motif is the creation of various groups (in opposition to Antigone, isolated next to Polyneices) – the elders, the people – or more often of a single group that clusters and reclusters around Creon’, as Franco Quadri observes.<sup>50</sup> These actions serve to signify the dynamics of power relations that connect the tyrant to his people and isolate the young rebel. But this symbolical meaning is expressed through an arrangement of the groups of actors that forms actual body architectures. During the fall of the house of Labdaco, Quadri remembers ‘the enormous magma, the compact mass of human limbs, is simultaneously the plastic image of the falling house, of the sea that shatters everything, of a shapeless dragon’.<sup>51</sup> In other words, the purpose of the group scene is first and foremost the construction of an image. This image is also a way to provide architectural substance to the actors’ action. In the void of the stage ‘new scenic elements are created by the interaction of bodies, by the plasticity of gestures and by the gathering into groups’, movements whose main purpose is evidently that of becoming a scene, a space.<sup>52</sup> This is the case of the example cited by Quadri above, but the same is true of the sea of arms that transport Polyneices’s body, of the prison of bodies that closely confines Antigone in her obstinate solitude, or in the construction of Creon’s repressive machine, a sort of phalanx that accompanies and supports the tyrant like a throne. More than a relation between body and space, what we have, in this case, is a transformation of the body itself into a space, through a writing of the scenic presence of the actor that merges the choreographic dimension of acting with the performative one. From this perspective, the actors of *Antigone* are first of all real presences: they do not simulate a life different from their own, but concretely act on stage in the name of that literal level in which every action is, beyond and before anything else, an actual event. In the second place, this presence serves to signify a particular writing of the gesture and of the movement (performed in a non-ordinary context), which contributes to the definition of a scenographic space realized through the bodies of the actors. This spatial construction, however,

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<sup>48</sup> C. Valenti, *Conversazioni con Judith Malina*, Milano, Elèuthera, 1995, p. 173.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>50</sup> F. Quadri, ‘Nota ad Antigone’, *Teatro*, no. 1 (Spring, 1967), p. 56.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

has also an extremely marked iconic aspect. In other words, it makes it possible to associate the actor and his character in the name of the image they share. Creon, for example, for long periods during the play assumes a very peculiar posture that makes him resemble a bird or, even more, a totemic symbol.<sup>53</sup> This image synthesizes in an icon the dramatic meaning of the character, orienting in a symbolic direction the presence of the actor, even before he begins acting. This iconic aspect has, in *Antigone*, a specific figurative origin, derived from tribal art, so that it is not solely the single character who corresponds to an image but the scene in its totality. If for example an object is needed for the scene – Tiresias’s throne, war-machines or Antigone’s prison – no props are used; it is always the actors who represent it with their bodies. In this fashion, the body becomes an object and even more a symbolic image, as in the case of the totem pole created by the combined bodies of Polyneices, Antigone and Haemon.<sup>54</sup>

### ***The Iconic Function***

Our analysis of the *Antigone* provides a first example of what I intend by iconic function: a way of treating the actor (and the character she or he impersonates) as first and foremost a visual quality, an image that turns into an icon, insofar as it takes on a scenic form that has symbolic as well as dramaturgical qualities.<sup>55</sup>

This “iconism” become evident, first of all, in the relation that develops, on a visual level, between actor and stage, when the human presence becomes a *sign among the signs* of the performance. This tendency is part of the more general problem of Form, which, as noted above, had characterized much of the theoretical discussion on the role of the actor already in the early twentieth century. Craig’s notion of *Übermarionette*, for example, is largely motivated by the desire to allow actors to overcome their separation from the scene and become one of its organic functions. In this regards a significant passage is found in Craig’s *The Art of the Theatre* published 1905, where Craig speaks of theatre directing as a “craft”, insofar as still tied to the staging of a text, and goes as far as conceiving actors as visual signs of the performance. Craig cites as an example the entrance on stage of Romeo after the riots of Verona. The actor who plays Romeo must integrate himself in the general design of the director. This in itself of course is nothing new in modern director’s theatre. But the fashion in which the actor must relate himself to the whole is different and original: ‘He must move across our sight in a certain way, passing to a certain point, in a certain light, his head at a certain angle, his eyes, his feet, his whole body in tune with the play’.<sup>56</sup> Integrating oneself in the whole, for Craig, means

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<sup>53</sup> Creon/Beck stands with his legs wide apart and his hips lowered so that his thigh and leg form a right angle. His torso is erect, his arms open and flexed, so that arm and forearm also form a right angle. His mouth is gaping and his eyes are wide open.

<sup>54</sup> Biner reconstructs the situation as following: ‘When a triumphal arch is called for, to mark the so-called triumph of Thebes, a phantom column is contrived in the back of the stage, to indicate the illusory character of the triumph. The column was composed of three dead bodies; thus not only the “triumphs” but their commemoration as well were built on the dead’ (P. Biner, *The Living Theatre*, New York, Horizon Press, 1972, p. 155).

<sup>55</sup> I am using the term “icon” in the semiotic acceptance of visual sign endowed with a precise semantic value.

<sup>56</sup> E. Gordon Craig, *The Art of the Theatre*, in *On the Art of the Theatre*, p. 85.

organically participating in the overall form of the play, becoming a sign among the other visual signs of the scene.<sup>57</sup>

Craig's approach is at the root of many of the theories of acting that characterize early twentieth-century avant-gardes, in which the problem of the actor's body as Form becomes central, leading to the necessity for a complete transformation of the human figure, in order for it to acquire an artistic quality. Even in more recent theatre, however, we find significant echoes of this approach, especially in the experiences associated in one way or another with the so-called theatre of images. The choice of orienting communication entirely towards vision necessarily entails a different conception of the human figure and of the actor's role, which ultimately derives from Craig's teachings. What is new and original is the fact that the human figure is no longer necessarily associated with a dramaturgically and literarily codified character. In image theatre the search for an organic relation between scene and actor tends to transform the presence of the actor into a purely visual sign. Which can be completely performative, as in the case of certain conceptual performances, but can also take on an iconic character, as in the case of Wilson, Kantor or Perlini. In this case, what we have is a double reduction of the semantic stratification of the actor's presence. The first reduction obviously concerns the interpretation of a character, which is completely eliminated; the second concerns the departure from what, till then, had been the dominant view of the actor's function: making the body the central element of theatrical communication, as in the work of the Living Theatre and Grotowski. Instead of the living body ('the mind-body' using Barba's terminology), which acts in the name of its materiality, of its organic quality enriched and shaped by an emotional study, image theatre proposes a visible body, whose theatrical qualities are mainly, when not exclusively, associated with its scenic value. Disregarding, or using only in a subaltern role, all emotional and physical qualities. The above is of course only true in general. In Kantor's case, for example, the presence of the actors (which, for Kantor, are, significantly, not professional actors) is contaminated with a material weight, which provides substance to the image and refers to a past experience of sorts. Wilson, on the other hand, when working with Christopher Knowles or Cindy Lubar, people affected by strong personality and relational disorders, involves them in ways that go beyond the purely visual level. A certain expressive tension (which at the time he called 'pathological') characterizes Tiezzi's more coldly analytical plays. The notion that the actor can or must be pure image seems, therefore, more a theoretical principle than an actual praxis. Nevertheless the notion remains important to understand the role of the actor in the second half of the twentieth century.

But what are the salient traits of role of the actor conceived as scenic image? A particular way to use gestures and act, certainly. An ability to integrate oneself in the writing of space, also. There is a third element, however, which is more strictly visual.

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<sup>57</sup> It is to this conception of the role of the actor that we owe the problems between Craig and the Moscow Art Theatre in the staging of *Hamlet*. Craig arrived with his Model Stage in which he positioned carved wooden shapes, which represented the characters. Having established this geometry of the action, he seemed to have no further interest in the work of the actors. Notwithstanding his invaluable theoretical insights, Craig seems to have been never actually capable of working with actors with all that it entails.

This element is costume. By costume I do not mean the dress worn on scene, but that ensemble of signs that characterize the external appearance of the actors.

Costumes are, I would say by antonomasia, an accessory of the *mise-en-scène*. They are usually considered, in other words, a sort of corollary of the scenery, a sign with its importance, certainly, which remains however a decorative element more than a semantic one. Yet, if we examine the factors that influenced the theatrical revolution at the end of the nineteenth century, we discover that an important role was played by the historical study of costume, which significantly contributed to elaborate the new representational frame of theatre. In the *commedia dell'arte*, costume is an actual “semantic machine”, with a function very similar to the one it has in modern theatre, namely that of visually defining the identity of the character. It is necessary, however, to consider twentieth-century theatrical strategies from a different perspective. Costume, up to that period, could be used, as in the *commedia dell'arte*, as an instrument for identifying a dramatic function; in other cases, it could serve to support the historical credibility of the character. It could also serve, however, as in much of the nineteenth century, as a professional tool used by actors or even as a sign of status, as in the case of the *toilettes* of the prima donnas. It had thus an important role in regards to the purely aesthetic quality of the play, but it was scarcely considered from the perspective of theatrical communication. In this sense it was an accessory, associated with the more ephemeral and superficial aspects of the theatrical experience. At the beginning of the twentieth century, instead, costume was aggressively adopted as an important linguistic element that helped shaped the Form of the new theatre. ‘The transformation of the human body, its metamorphosis, is made possible by the costume, the disguise. Costume and mask emphasize the body’s identity or they change it; they express its nature or they are purposely misleading about it; they stress its conformity to organic or mechanical laws or they invalidate this conformity’, states Oscar Schlemmer in his reflection on the new linguistic code of theatre.<sup>58</sup> They are, that is, a necessary precondition for the human figure to be cleansed of its organicity (inevitably present when the figure is used to represent a character) and rendered capable of accessing the Form. ‘Costume can develop from the internal organism of the body and manifest this invisible aspect, the metaphysical anatomy’, writes Schlemmer in ‘Der Theatralische Kostümtanz’:

Or it can be derived from the external aspect of the human figure and from its individual forms, manifesting them in a precise fashion, elevating them from casualness to typicality. Costume can furthermore absorb its own rules of space and become itself a spatial structure – a space within a space – or it can be derived from movement and conformed to the elements of motion of the organic-biological or technical-mechanical world.<sup>59</sup>

In Schlemmer’s theatrical project, costume has, therefore, a role that is far from accessory, it is a formal construction arising from the encounter of two different principles: the human body and space. It has nothing to do with the actor’s dress,

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<sup>58</sup> O. Schlemmer, ‘Man and Art Figure’, p. 25.

<sup>59</sup> O. Schlemmer, ‘Der Theatralische Kostümtanz’, *Europa-Almanach*, Potsdam, G. Kiepenheuer, 1925, 189-191.

therefore, being an exclusively theatrical form.<sup>60</sup> It is a form that responds, as a language, to a series of different stimuli, which can be the form of the human body, movement, or space itself. Each of these elements, placed in a non-ordinary situation, undergoes a process of stylization, which refers it to an abstract scheme. It is projected, that is, beyond what it is, so that it can become form. Costume has precisely the role of fixing this form in an image. Costume, for Schlemmer, is a liminal entity positioned halfway between body and space, human figure and form, between the figure's appearance and what that appearance can become. The costumes of *Triadic Ballet*, for example, visually synthesize all these possibilities. Each costume iconically designates an abstract character, conceived as a dynamic figure. Even the choreographic structure of the whole is nothing but the musical composition of all the bodies/costumes/movements. Similarly, in the "dances of the materials", the costumes, each characterized by a specific quality (wood, glass, metal), become an actual linguistic structure that the dancer must endow with movement.

Schlemmer's theory of costume is probably the most articulated and complex one of the entire twentieth century, but similar, though less complex, tendencies can be found in Futurism. In the Futurist Pantomime, for example Prampolini addresses the problem of turning the human presence on stage into an artistic element through the use of costumes which play a structural and communicative role. An outstanding example of the same tendency is Picasso's collaborations with the Ballets Russes, which resulted in the extraordinary performance of *Parade*. Another significant case was Depero's own collaboration with the Ballets Russes, despite the fact that it had to be interrupted because the costumes designed by Depero were so complex and elaborated that they excessively limited the movements of dancers. In all these cases, costumes are clearly conceived as a form of writing. They are, in other words, capable of participating in the overall construction of the play, performing not only an essential function but even a dominant one.<sup>61</sup>

On the other hand, in the transition from early to late twentieth-century theatre, the use of costume for formal and abstract purposes is one of things that tends to disappear, at least in the forms discussed above. There are, it is true, some experiments in this direction, such as the ones carried out by Barberio Corsetti in the 1980s with the Gaia Scienza group (along with Alessandra Vanzi and Marco Solari). In *Gli insetti preferiscono le ortiche* and, even more, in *Cuori strappati*, costumes, although they are clothes, are endowed with a particular plasticity and an autonomous form. They are things that the actors wear to transform their human figure into something else, into a formal substance, a painted fragment that seems to detach itself from the scene and become autonomous. This is the case, for example, of "stecco" (stick) and "vetro" (glass), two characters/costumes interpreted respectively by Solari and Corsetti. The first costume was a tight-fitting grey dress, which imposed on the actor a sharp, neurotic, jerky gestuality, which culminated in the scene where the tool-bag caught fire. The second was a dress covered with glass shards, which required a more

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<sup>60</sup> Significantly, he refers to the *commedia dell'arte* as the only moment in history in which costume has had an exclusively theatrical status.

<sup>61</sup> On the specific subject of the use of costume in twentieth-century poetics, see S. Sinisi, *Cambi di scena*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1995. On the more general question of costume in theatrical languages, in various historical moments and artistic currents, see P. Bignami (ed.), *Mascheramenti*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1999.



fragmented and irregular gestuality. The two performed a long improvised sequence largely dictated by the nature of their costumes. In *Il ladro di anime*, and even more in the solo performance *Animali sorpresi distratti*, the visual relation between backdrop, costume and actor was literally treated as a single thing, so that in many instances costumes became part of paintings that came to life thanks to the actors.

On the other hand, the creative use of costume is also found in more commercial theatre, as in the case of the Momix, who playfully translate into pure spectacle the linguistic experiments of the avant-gardes, focusing especially on the contaminations between bodies, spaces and costumes. Thus, while the use of costume as a signifying form is not common in the late twentieth century, it remains one of the possible elements of stage writing.<sup>62</sup>

Costume, too, in short, must be viewed as a sign. At times a secondary one, but nevertheless a sign, as indeed was already the case in Meyerhold's *Le cocu magnifique*. The overalls, for example, connoted by a few signs that identify the character, have the specific function of integrating the actors in a scenic mechanism, of which they become a cog, and estranging them from any representational context. On the other hand, the function of costumes in the play is certainly different from that of other signs and much more limited than the one proposed by Schlemmer. In the second half of the twentieth century, a similar tendency can be detected. Costume is an accompanying sign. It is a dependent sign, though it provides an important contribution to the iconic definition of the character. Let us consider the case of Kantor. It is evident that the sense of concrete substance, of memory, of the past, which permeates his plays is largely due, on a visual level, to costumes. Clothes from a bygone era, uniforms at times or everyday clothes. Always the same type: black, out of fashion, threadbare. By re-appearing without any changes in all his plays they acquire a precise iconic function. They define the horizon of Kantor's memory, outlining the visible world of his imagination. They give his characters a returning connotation, transforming them into modern "masks" of sorts. Could those characters exist without those clothes or are not those clothes glued to them as a form of writing? This, for me, is the key feature of the iconic dimension of the actor's presence on stage: the transformation of the character into a "dramatic image". Endowing the character with a form, even if it is not the abstract form that Schlemmer aspired to.

The elements we have examined till now allow us to grasp the role the iconic function has in actorial writing. However, its dramaturgical role goes obviously much

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<sup>62</sup> In much of the experimental work done in the 1960s, costume not only has no particular role, but tends to be replaced by everyday clothes, by the clothes that actors are used to wearing and represent, to some extent, a manifestation of their personality. Sally Jacobs, the stage designer of many of Brook's plays, significantly remembers how, in the case of *U.S.*, they decided that the only costumes would be the clothes normally worn by the actors. The basic idea of that play – a dramatic, "cruel", meditation on the Vietnam war – was that of establishing a direct and immediate contact with the public, which the adoption of ad hoc costumes, by visually underlying the difference between actors and spectators, would have hindered. One should note, however, that the use of everyday clothes in the case of Brook and of the Living Theatre does possess an ulterior significance, being a highly characteristic form way of dressing, associated with an alternative life-style, and, as such, already expressive of a certain way of life. Wearing their own clothes was for the actors a way to stress their belonging to an antagonist culture. Cf. A. Hunt and G. Reeves (eds.), *Peter Brook*, Cambridge; New York, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 104.

beyond the special attention dedicated to costumes. Indeed, the iconic function is instead one of the linguistic tools that makes it possible to define the character in a theatre based on stage writing. It is therefore something different from the reduction of the actor to a visual sign. This is certainly one of its aspects, but it applies, as we have seen, to a specific poetic sphere. The iconic definition of the character instead has a more general function, which comes into play in those areas where literary dramaturgy and the psychology of the character can no longer affirm the theatrical identity of the character. In the moment in which dramaturgy moves from the word to the scene, in the moment when it rejects a referential approach and deconstructs the structure of the text, how can the dramatic identification of the character be achieved? The iconic dimension is of help precisely in this direction. The character takes on a visible configuration, it exists as a construction made of various types of signs – iconic, kinetic, proxemic – which establish a tight network of relations between the scenic presence of the actor and the dramatic role of the character. Basically what makes a character a character? We have already examined the structure of elements that orient dramaturgy towards a scenic type of language. The iconic dimension of the character is another step in this direction. In the case of Kantor, in fact, it becomes the actual grammar through which the language of the *mise-en-scène* is spoken; in other cases, instead, it becomes a quality among others. Let us consider a few examples to clarify the above, starting once again with Wilson. If we consider his earlier shows, those based on the free montage of scenic situations free of any narrative import, what allows us to identify its characters and reconstruct a structure of dramaturgical references, albeit unstable and contradictory, is precisely the appearance of the characters. In the initial scene of *Deafman Glance*, for example, we find a frail, thin black woman, wearing an ash-grey dress with long gloves. An almost Victorian, austere image. The woman first pours some milk for a child, then delicately kills him. It is a suspended image, like other images in the play, and it is the bearer of a rarefied narrativity. But what is it that establishes a narrative, albeit a limited and rarefied one, if not the visual aspect of the character, the combination of costume, colour (including the colour of the skin) and movement? These, and nothing else, are the dramatic signals of the character that endow the action on stage with a possible, although never fully expressed, meaning. The case of *Einstein on the Beach* is different, though perhaps even more explicit. In this play the scientist impersonated by the actor is indicated through the citation of some of his more characteristic traits: the white dash of hair, the violin, but, especially, the white shirt and the grey trousers held up by suspenders.<sup>63</sup> Wilson's procedure here is the same one adopted by Andy Warhol in his silkscreen prints, say the famous Marilyn Monroe portrait. The more typical traits of the icon (the lips, in Marylyn Monroe's case) are extrapolated from the image and used to identify the character, even though other signs, the colours for example, distance the image from the original. Wilson's Einstein is constructed through a similar procedure: a few visual signs serve to identify the character and endow the actions – which have little or nothing to do with that character – with a meaning or at least with a particular aura. And what about Barba's characters, those fragmented beings that arrive on stage from incoherent and

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<sup>63</sup> Kirby sees precisely in costumes, worn without the actors doing anything that can be associated with acting, the element that makes it possible to speak of a "symbolic matrix" of acting. Cf. M. Kirby, 'On acting and not-acting', p. 44.

distant stories? How does one identify them? Through their acting, certainly, through the particular score that the actor constructs for them. But is not that score in part determined by the aspect of the character? Is not Iben Rasmussen's rabbi in *The Gospel According to Oxyrhincus* first and foremost an icon? What is it then that makes us perceive him as an icon? Is it the story, the dramatic situation, or is it not his characterization as image? I am not saying that the character is identified solely by his external appearance. This might be true, at times, of Wilson but certainly not of Barba. What happens instead is the following: we first see a character to whom we attribute a possible identity based on signs that are basically formal and visual. Then we see the character in action, in relation to other characters and situations that do not seem related to his subjective identity. This interaction establishes a dramatic situation whose matrix is basically scenic (in the sense that it does not correspond to a narration) and connoted by the presence of characters whose identity emerges mostly, if not exclusively, through iconic denotations.

This model corresponds to the process of production and communication of meaning discussed above and is based on the centrality of signifiers over signifieds. The visual quality of the character has, in this context, an extraordinary importance. Let us consider two visual solutions taken from Tiezzi's *Scene di Amleto*. In the play, Polonius is very clearly connoted through visual signs. He is wearing a Pantaloon mask, but his costume and gestuality (including his appearance in mid-air) associate it him more with an Indian divinity. This image is highly estranging in its contrast with the appearance of Ophelia, dressed in normal sixteenth-century clothes and has also no equivalent in the costumes of the rest of the court. The image on the other hand seems to lack any precise symbolical meaning. If we consider, however, the semantic shift from one linguistic level to the other what we have is: Polonius as grotesque father of the *commedia dell'arte* and at the same time Polonius as threatening idol. It is a semantic space, the one determined by this shifting and drifting of signifiers, that offers the character (which in Shakespeare's text seems more elusive than complex) a possible horizon of meaning through his contamination with grotesque and evil elements. In this fashion, one produces a characterization of Polonius, if not an actual interpretation of the character, which does not modify the dramatic intension of the action and does not, ultimately, distort the meaning of the whole structure, but rather provides a particular nuance to the scenic reality of the character. The same can be said of the appearance on stage of Hamlet dressed as a woman in mourning, specularly opposed to his mother wearing a wedding dress. The image evidently affects the relations between the two characters and allows us to speak of Hamlet as a "widow of the reign", without having to resort to mysterious psychoanalytic explanations for his feminine travesty, which, in Tiezzi's case, would be out of place.

Let us consider one last use of the iconic function. In the *Oresteia* staged by the Societas Raffaello Sanzio there is an incongruous character, a festive and childish, yet disquieting, presence: a rabbit (an actor dressed as a rabbit). An absurd, paradoxical image. A visual sign that does not seem to signify anything other than its own paradoxical presence. As the play goes on however we gradually realize that his lines are the lines of the chorus. In fact, the actor is a coryphaeus, a rabbit who leads a train of plaster rabbits. A chorus of rabbits, in short. A paradoxical way of suggesting a chorus of cowards, who watch and distance themselves from the tragedy, without

participating and without taking sides.<sup>64</sup> But the rabbit, as Romeo Castellucci notes, returns also, as an ominous premonition, in the hunt that precedes the tragedy of the Atreids. The rabbit is therefore present in more than one way in the dramatic stratification of the *Oresteia*. It is also associated with the rabbit in *Alice in Wonderland*, which guides Alice towards her fantastic adventure. Thus a symbolical short-circuit occurs: “The vertical ascension of Iphigenia is contrasted by the fall of Alice, from the superior order to the inferior one: in both cases, a kidnapping. Through this Iphigenia-Alice, *Oresteia* seeks to activate a childish movement of katabasi’.<sup>65</sup> But what remains of Castellucci’s observations in terms of scenic outcome? Is his interpretation meant to offer a key to a hermetic symbolism, or is it not rather a means to activate, or at least accelerate, a process of semiosis that begins as autonomous iconic sign in the play? Obviously, if we watch the *Oresteia* after having read the director’s notes, the image of the rabbit becomes endowed with a different and more specific signification. It is equally true however that the presence of the rabbit is not meant to signify “the chorus are cowards” or to suggest that the Carroll’s Alice is the key to the interpretation of the play. In itself, it remains an ambiguous and ambivalent sign, which lends itself to many possible readings. We cannot accept it as a thing in itself (devoid, that is, of any reference to the symbolic sphere), precisely because it is ambiguous, because it is clearly trying to say something. But its presence is not clarified in any way by the play, where it emerges as a provocative icon. It acquires its sense, its meaning – as often in Raffaello Sanzio’s plays – in a different, immaterial theatre, the theatre present in the minds of the spectators.<sup>66</sup>

Up to here, we have discussed the iconic function of the actor as a character building technique. We must also consider, however, the opposite case, the one in which iconicity serves to construct an image of the actor that is independent of the character and, therefore, imparts a specific quality to all the characters the actor must play. The image, in this case, has an estranging function, it affects the coherence of the whole, associating the multiple scenic incarnations of the actor to a single common referent. This referent has a series of denotations that are independent of the representational context and make the actor recognizable by transforming him into an actual mask. Since the actor is always visible as an autonomous icon, one could say that the actor *visits* the character: he interferes with it but does not become one with it. This linguistic choice is part of a second degree theatre, a meta-theatre, in which the artifice of the stage is highlighted through the mask of the actor.

In the project that Tiezzi and Lombardi dedicate to Giovanni Testori a similar solution is adopted as the director’s interpretation of that dramaturgy. Sandro Lombardi constructs an actual icon of the *scarrozzante* (the “caravaneer”): bowler hat, face painted with white lead, exaggerated and lively gestures, an uncertain carriage, a

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<sup>64</sup> ‘The Choir of the ancient tragedy has no guts. As such it is the castrated and civil counterpoint to the hero. Therefore the image of cowardice: the rabbit’. R. Castellucci, ‘L’Oresteia attraverso lo specchio’, in R. Castellucci, C. Guidi, C. Castellucci (eds.), *Epopea della polvere. Il teatro della Societas Raffaello Sanzio 1992-1999*, Milano, Ubulibri, 2001, p. 156.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> A particular iconic function, provocative and tragic, is assumed, in many of Castellucci’s plays, by the bodies of the actors themselves, when they are obese, anorexic or disfigured. The body, in this case, becomes a sign of diversity, an icon of the impossibility of homologation, of the exceptionality (as excess compared to the norm) of the character.

hesitant, almost coy, gait.<sup>67</sup> A hybrid between clown and variety show actor, this character is the interpreter of *Edipus*, *Cleopatràs*, *Erodiàs* but also of *Mater strangosciàs*. Testori, with his intensely dramatic stories, based on a metatheatrical approach, in which tragedy is reflected in the deforming mirror of the variety theatre of the province of Milan, offers Tiezzi and Lombardi a great opportunity of playing on the fracture line that separates everyday reality and the stage, actor and character. But their interpretation goes beyond this.<sup>68</sup> The actor, which in Testori's play still transpires behind the character, in Tiezzi and Lombardi's version is not a known face but an actual mask. There is no need, thus, to have *out of character* asides in the text to recognize the actor playing the part, since the actor is not only always visible *as such* but is actually brought to the fore. Indeed, at the beginning of *Edipus*, the arrival with the suitcase and the playing with the curtain (which, in a Beckettian gag, mysteriously rises when the actor raises his hat) explicitly underlines how the actor *approaches* the character but does not merge with it. This detachment is a fundamental aspect of the play which is made evident from the very first appearance of the actor on stage.

The actorial presence of Carmelo Bene has a similar and possibly even more evident iconic quality. The transformation of the actor into an image of himself, into a mask, is even more marked, in this case, because it is independent of the specific dramaturgical context. It is not, that is, something tied to a particular dramatic reference as much as actual characterizing trait of the actor as actor. The white shirt with wide puff sleeves open at the neck, the black trousers, possibly a tailcoat now and then as finishing touch, this is the typical dress of Carmelo Bene the actor. They characterize him as much as his voice, his mimicry, his gestuality. They concur, along with the evenly-cut fringe and the black mascara around his eyes, to define his mask.<sup>69</sup> This is not a casual choice but the result of a precise strategy through which Carmelo Bene transforms himself into C.B., a pre-eminent "actorial machine". The choice of using his initials, which serves to underline the character's uniqueness (as in the case of B.B. or J.F.K.), expresses the materialization of the sign as image, as actorial appearance. If we consider Bene's characteristic strategy for interpreting the text and the character, which he calls 'removing from the stage', it is evident that Bene's mask serves an important function. The iconic foregrounding of the actor, in relation to the character, draws our attention to the actor as actor, it makes him visible. While Lombardi's clown mask is temporary, in Bene's case the mask is always present, it is a constant: the iconic constant of Carmelo Bene the actor while he is on stage. What does this icon allow us to see? The first thing is that instead of the actor resembling the character it is the character that resembles the actor. Furthermore, the

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<sup>67</sup> *Scarozzante* (caravaneer) is the term used by Testori for those wandering actors, with little means and skills, who go from town to town on their cart with their lively, naïve, 'rough' as Brook would say, but 'living' theatre. The scarozzante is the protagonist of *Ambleto*, *Macbetto*, *Edipus*, but also of the later *Cleopatràs*, *Erodiàs* and *Mater strangosciàs*.

<sup>68</sup> It is no chance that we combine the names of the director and the actor. The collaboration between the two was from the start extremely close. In the case of the "progetto Testori", however, this collaboration translated into an actual joint writing in which the work of the director and of the actor can be distinguished only on a technical level. In the case of *Ambleto* it resulted in an actual explicit joint direction.

<sup>69</sup> Carmelo Bene's constructed his image throughout the years, as part of a process of rarefaction and depuration of language, which can be analytically described as a transition from a theatre of stage writing to one dominated by the "actorial machine".

iconic sign chosen by Bene echoes a particular milieu, the nineteenth century of melodramas, decadent, dreamlike and vaguely alcoholic. In short, the actorial icon has its own personal horizon of meaning. It functions as a filter towards the character (and towards the text as a whole, given Bene's particular form of writing) detaching it from any representational tendency and highlighting, even on a visual level, its poetic and musical qualities. To this Bene at times adds characterizing signs, say Macbeth's armor or the deformed hand that Richard III wears as a glove, which construct an iconic bridge between character and actor.

Finally, there is yet another trend in actorial iconicity. It is very specific and still in its early stages so that only some early examples can be described.

This trend is a result of new technologies which raise the entirely novel and paradoxical question of the possibility of an immaterial actor. A human presence, that is, without a body, not in the material and physical sense of the term. In the fields of television, videogames and, to a more limited extent, of cinema this possibility has been the object of a certain interest. In these contexts, the immaterial actor is an electronically generated body, a character/actor (consider for example Lara Croft), with its own recognizable aspect, a name, a *past*, capable of electronically acting in different situations and contexts. Of course, these simulations are graphically still close to cartoons, yet the processes of collective identification and the attitude of the fans have made these figures something more than cartoon heroes, something more similar to an real-life actor. There is already some talk of advanced techniques that could allow us to electronically replicate human bodies, or even actors of the past, both for scientific and commercial purposes. The question of the immaterial actor is therefore much less abstract than could seem at first glance and involves the theatre in a very particular fashion. This is of course highly paradoxical, given that the physical presence of the actor's body, the direct interaction with the public, are among, if not the, essential characteristics of theatre. In what way then can we talk about an immaterial actor in theatre and why should we be interested in this possibility? Because there is indeed an experimental trend that goes in this direction, which in some cases has produced interesting results. There have been plays, for example, in which actors have acted via internet creating an interaction between real and virtual presences. In this case, we are dealing with an experiment more than an actual new language, all we have is the presence of an *absent* actor thanks to his or her image projected on a screen. The distance remains purely mental, it has no significant impact on the play. A different and more expressively and linguistically mature approach is found in the work of Barberio Corsetti and the Studio Azzurro group of video-makers, which together have staged two very interesting plays, *Prologo a diario segreto contraffatto* and *La camera astratta*, and elaborated a strategy for the use of visual technology in theatre that Corsetti has continued to use in a very intelligent fashion. The central theme of these two plays is an immaterial stage, which interacts with the real one, creating effects of estrangement and linguistic aperture. Technically this is obtained through the use of a hidden video set from which the actions of the actors are broadcasted live on the traditional stage. The bridge between these two worlds consists in a series of monitors on the stage, which are not used as static presences but as moving structures capable of producing actual actions. The result is a very interesting use of the theatrical space, which avoids both the material substance of the *environment* and the illusionistic tendencies of

representation. A virtual space, a meeting ground between two “here and now” associated with the theatrical stage and the video set. This process of contamination and transfiguration involves also the actors, which are half-way between real presence and broadcasted image. The monitors, as composite and movable structures on stage – are “inhabited” in different ways by the actors, who go through them as if through a virtual tunnel, or fill them with their bodies: in the first case the action takes place entirely on the video set, while in the second the action takes place in the stage and it is only the body that is transformed into a virtual shadow. The human figure, then, is inserted in a three-monitor column, which obviously divides it into three parts. The moving column, at this point, is no longer only a connection to a virtual space, but also in itself a body, a body of light, as Corsetti calls it, distinct from and opposed to the real one.<sup>70</sup> A body whose characteristic is that of configuring the human presence as pure image and form, eliminating its solidity, its weight, its flesh. This actor’s body becomes a diaphanous body, it dematerializes and turns into a shadow, fully integrating itself with the other languages of the stage.<sup>71</sup> This creates a very interesting exchange of roles between machines and humans: ‘the monitors become alive as active organisms thanks to the actors, which turn them into living parts of the play, while the actors are offered the possibility of concentrating on the least perceptible aspects of their expressivity thanks to the close-up filming of details’.<sup>72</sup> The meeting ground, as well as the synthesis, between these two elements is the image of the body, a body depurated of its organic life but enriched with a new formal existence, which allows it to be divided into several parts, to get inside and outside itself, to contaminate its presence with that of other bodies, acquiring an extraordinary lightness and transparency.<sup>73</sup> The shadow leitmotiv returns, almost literally cited, also in later plays, even in the absence of any explicit experimenting with theatrical writing and video installations. In these cases, with the collaboration of Fabio Iaquone, the video is directly projected on stage, eliminating the presence of TV monitors, which could otherwise risk becoming obtrusive. What is projected are the outlines of the actors’ bodies, shadows that at times are in sync with the bodies, albeit in a blatantly imprecise way, and at times become absolutely independent and wild. The impression, in both cases, is that of a second body, a double, which detaches itself from the main one, as in the novel of von Chamisso, and begins an independent life of its own.<sup>74</sup> The shadow becomes thus an autonomous actor, which exists only as electronic image, yet can actively integrate itself with the other writings of the stage.

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<sup>70</sup> See A. Sapienza, *Intervista a Giorgio Barberio Corsetti*, in *La tecnologia nella sperimentazione italiana degli anni ottanta. Tre esempi*, Napoli, Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1992, p. 124.

<sup>71</sup> See V. Valentini, ‘Prologo elettronico: fluidità and trasparenza’, in Studio Azzurro and G. Barberio Corsetti (eds.), *La camera astratta, tre spettacoli tra teatro e video*, Milano, Ubulibri, 1988, pp. 18-19.

<sup>72</sup> A. Sapienza, *La tecnologia nella sperimentazione italiana degli anni ottanta. Tre esempi*, p. 63.

<sup>73</sup> ‘One lives in a state of internal separation, in which the body is without organs, it follows the mechanical laws that characterize the abstracts relations it has with the cameras’. G. Barberio Corsetti, ‘Drammaturgia ed elettronica. Spazio, tempo, attore’, in Studio Azzurro and G. Barberio Corsetti (eds.), *La camera astratta, tre spettacoli tra teatro e video*, p. 12.

<sup>74</sup> I am referring to *Peter Schlemibl’s wunderbare Geschichte*, by Adalbert von Chamisso, one of the more curiously innovative texts of German Romanticism.

*Notes for a Portrait of an Actor*

To conclude, I would like to test our theory of the actor as body on stage by examining one of the greatest actorial performances of the twentieth century: Cieslak in *The Constant Prince*. That play, as Taviani notes, turned Cieslak into one of the most important and recognizable icons of contemporary theatre, to the point of becoming almost a trap for the Polish actor, imprisoning him in a role, as if, the only possible Cieslak was the one seen in that memorable production of Calderon's play.<sup>75</sup>

The strategies adopted for constructing that character and technically and expressively conveying it represent a precious field of inquiry, almost an implicit *manifesto* of a certain way of conceiving acting and the role of the actor. This indeed is how it has been interpreted, by both the public and critics, to the point of becoming the most typical and identifiable image of a specific phase in Grotowski's career, i.e., that of the Laboratory Theatre. One question that remains open is the the paternity of this formidable interpretation. Should it be attributed to Cieslak or to Grotowski, to the actor or the director? If Cieslak's performance is so intimately connected to the deepest core of the play, if indeed the entire play is constructed around his interpretation, is it possible and correct to examine his performance independently of the rest? A difficult question. A number of indications suggest in fact that the performance is the result of a relation between actor and director that is so intimate, close, exclusive, that it is impossible to say what belongs to Cieslak and what to Grotowski. And this too is typical of a current in twentieth-century director's theatre in which the director's presence remains discrete, a maieutic presence that supports the actor's study (as a mirror, following Stanislavski).

This is also what emerges from Grotowski's testimony, in which he remembers the creative itineraries that led him and Cieslak to decide the emotional-substantial and formal characteristics of their interpretation of the character of Don Fernando.

The text talks about torture, pain, of an agony. The text talks about a martyr that refuses to submit to laws he does not accept. Therefore the text, and along with the text the *mise-en-scène*, revolves around something dark, something falsely sad. But in my work as director with Ryszard Cieslak we never touched upon anything remotely sad. The entire interpretation was based on a precise moment of his personal memory (one could say on physical actions, in the Stanislavskian sense), the period in his adolescence of his first, great, enormous love affair. Everything was tied to that experience. The experience centred on a type of love, possible only during adolescence, which is fully charged with sensuality, with all that is carnal, yet, at the same time, beyond this, with something that is completely different, which is not carnal, or is carnal in a different kind of way, which is much more like a prayer. It is as if a bridge was established between these two aspects, a carnal bridge.<sup>76</sup>

This passage by Grotowski is a extremely valuable document that offers us an insight into the various steps in the process of character building. The director, in the first and fundamental initial phase of his creative work, accompanies the actor in his introspective journey, helping him move on a terrain that seems to have no contact whatsoever with the text. This is the first stage in the elaboration of the character: the

<sup>75</sup> F. Taviani, 'In Memory of Ryszard Cieslak', in *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, ed. by R. Schechner and L. Wolford, London and New York, Routledge, 1997, p. 190.

<sup>76</sup> J. Grotowski, 'Le Prince Constant de Ryszard Cieslak', in *Ryszard Cieslak, acteur-emblème des années soixant*, ed. by G. Banu, Paris, Actes Sud-Papiers, 1992, pp. 16-17.



exploration of an emotional territory that not only serves to illustrate or clarify the character's nature, but exists also as a world of its own, autonomous, endowed with its own emotions, with an absolutely personal memory and imagination. Yet notwithstanding this lack of negative emotions, the first impression spectators had of Cieslak's interpretation was one of extraordinary tragic intensity, of absolute pain. Evidently, his performance is the result of a complex creative procedure, which is not based on an analogy between the emotional world of the character and the emotional world of the actor (which Stanislavski still insisted on). Cieslak instead had to engage in a journey through his memory in order to reconstruct not only the emotions and sensations, but even more the gestures, the behaviors, the movements, the vibrations that his body had experienced in that distant period of his adolescence. This type of work is not an abstract and mental operation but something that is immediately applied to acting and translated into stage action. Grotowski stimulated Cieslak to work on "physical actions", a system based on the latest teachings of Stanislavski, in which the emotional texture of the actor is reconstructed by placing the actor in an operative context through physical actions. "Physical actions" are, in Grotowski's acceptance, the actions and gestures that convey an intention, an expressive and semantic quality. They must not be confused, therefore, with other activities the actor might perform on stage, nor with gestures, when these are used to express an habitual behavior, or with movement. "Physical actions" can start from an activity, a gesture, a movement, when these become charged with a dramatic intention, becoming an instrument for digging up and reconstructing emotional memories. When, in short, they are used by actors to creatively access the world that they wish to create.<sup>77</sup>

The work done by Cieslak on his adolescence, on the emotional upheavals of that season of his life, halfway between the sensations of the body and the sensations of the soul is, properly speaking, a work on "physical" actions. Therefore, it is theatrically already a staged action, the elaboration of an attitude that originates in the actor's internal universe as well as the expressive actions of his body. It exists, from the beginning, as a writing of the body in relation to the paths of the mind, of the imagination and of emotions.<sup>78</sup>

While this is the central moment in Cieslak and Grotowski's study, there are also another two stages: the first is the training aimed at activating the actor's creativity; the second is the actor's relation with the text. The first phase of this work is associated with the technique Grotowski calls the 'via negativa'.<sup>79</sup> It is a form of training whose purpose is to remove as much as possible the emotional and physical blocks that prevent emotions from translating into action. Grotowski's technique allows actor to master the mental mechanisms that allow emotional impulses and the

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<sup>77</sup> On the concept of physical action in Grotowski see T. Richards, *At work with Grotowski on physical actions*, London; New York, Routledge, 1995.

<sup>78</sup> It is interesting that Taviani believed that in the case of the exercises proposed by Grotowski at the time of his Theatre Laboratory, it was more correct to speak of a theatre of the mind than a theatre of the body: 'People who still use the inadequate expression "theatre of the body" ought to sit down and watch this film, until they realize that what is going on is the exact opposite: this is "theatre of the mind" – mental processes made visible and tangible', (F. Taviani, 'In Memory of Ryszard Cieslak', p. 199).

<sup>79</sup> On the notion of negative way see J. Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, specifically pp. 17-19, pp. 34-39 and pp. 205-215.

body to function on the same wavelength. It does not consist in learning abilities to use on stage (expressive, acrobatic, mimic, gestural, diction skills), but is rather of a form of knowledge that must be continuously regenerated. Part of the work on character building in the case of the *Constant Prince*, consisted at the time, but this is always the case according to Grotowski, in keeping the actor's creative options open and spontaneous every time the text was used.

While in the case of Cieslak's investigation of adolescent memories, the work went in parallel with the dramatic and textual reality of the character, and, in the case of training, the effort was to keep open the creative options of the actor, the question of the relation to the text poses a different set of problems. In this case too Grotowski's testimony is essential.

The first step in our work was to have Ryszard completely master the text. The learned it by heart, he absorbed it to the point that he could start in the middle of any sentence, of any fragment, maintaining the original syntax. At this point, the first thing we did was establish the conditions that would allow him to insert, as literally as possible, this flow of words into the stream of his memory, of his memory of the impulses of his body, his memory of the little actions, and to take flight with the two, as in his first experience, I say first in the sense of fundamental experience.<sup>80</sup>

It is a very particular working method. Grotowski did not ask his actor to interpret the character or to explore the possible meanings of the text. Cieslak limited himself (if 'limit' is the appropriate term) to memorizing the words to a degree of perfection that bordered on virtuosity. This approach had two results: it gave Cieslak the self-confidence needed to overcome his psychological blocks and at the same time it enabled him to follow the score of the words and the score of the body simultaneously. It is as if, up to this point, Cieslak had been working simultaneously on different and basically non-communicating levels. Each level had different motivations and, moreover, required different techniques. The idea, already mentioned, of *The Constant Prince* as a play whose dramaturgy is not the result of the mise-en-scène of the text by Calderon/Slowacki, is further attested by the characteristics of the actors' work. Let us try to summarize. There is stage in the process of character building that is generally focused on Cieslak's training and serves to keep him in a reactive, attentive and sensitive state. There is a second stage consisting in the investigation of the emotional (and physical) memory of a love experience that occurred during his adolescence. During this stage Cieslak developed and refined a series of "physical actions", of structures and modes of behavior, of gesture, of movement, and of recitation that provided the live material on which his actorial score was constructed. There is then a third level that has to do with the mastering of the text, the incorporation of the text as a second nature of the actor, indeed, as an integral part of his memory as a human being as well as an actor. These three levels seem unrelated; at the moment we see no common element, no meeting ground, in Grotowski's words. This is especially true for the gestural and verbal score that Cieslak is creating. What is the relation between the two? What is the dramaturgical intention that determines this relation? And, finally, who determines this intention? Not the actor evidently. At least in the beginning. This does not mean that Cieslak was not responsible for providing an emotional memory that allowed

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<sup>80</sup> J. Grotowski, 'Le Prince Constant de Ryszard Cieslak', p. 18.

him to relate to the character. This memory, which, let us not forget, was stimulated by the director, was used to help the actor come into contact with himself, with his emotional universe, but also, if not especially, to provide expressive actions on which the actor could construct his score for the stage. Grotowski's role on the other hand seems increasingly central. Not only because he functioned, *a la* Stanivslavski, as a mirror for Cieslak's work, but also because it is Grotowski who provided the link among the various levels of the actor's work. Taviani summarizes this dynamic very well:

When the score was shaped, when it had a clear, stable form – and therefore an objective form – references to the character of the Constant Prince were very carefully inserted within it. The words of the text were placed into the vocal score. And all those signs which the audience recognized as hope, bitterness, despair, torment, ice in the soul, pain, and death were interwoven through the physical score.<sup>81</sup>

The gestural score, therefore, is constructed as an autonomous entity, on the side, starting from the work done on the erotic turmoil of the actor's adolescence. No sadness or drama or angst, but wonder, amazement in discovering the internal workings of his body, a sense of excitement but also of transfiguration. Then the text – to the point of becoming a thing of its own – is introduced into the score. Not in a mechanical fashion, through the simple juxtaposition of different codes, but by finding apertures, niches, places for resting and for acting. The result that Grotowski strives for, and that Cieslak experiments on his own person, is that of making words be (not seem) the natural result of that behavioral and emotional state and, vice versa, of allowing gestures, mimicry and movement to define the natural substratum of the emotional and poetical dynamics of the text. Taviani's conclusion is very specific: confronted with the dialectics of codes enacted by Cieslak the public perceives, literally sees, what has never been properly acted: pain, desperation, angst, sense of sacrifice. What do we mean? That Cieslak's score means something different from what we, as public, perceive? That Grotowski is responsible for a blatant simulation? Certainly not. What it means is that the semantic mechanism does not arise from a univocal correspondence between stimulus, emotion and dramatic sense, but rather from a more complex process. Let us consider more closely Cieslak's interpretation (anticipating somewhat future conclusions). Angst, pain, suffering, are these the dominant notes of the text or is there also something else? Is Cieslak's Don Fernando a tragic character in the classic sense of the term (a bearer of absolute pain and suffering) or do we perceive also a different element? And is not precisely this other element the result of Cieslak's extraordinary interpretation, one that allows us to approach Calderon's character in a particularly original and enlightening way? It is undeniable that in many parts of the play, in the three monologues of the Prince and especially in the third, one perceives an extremely intense transfiguring tension running through Cieslak's body, the force of an internal vision that translates and transforms the sense of tragic suffering. Something that borders on beatitude, that finds in sacrifice and death the necessary threshold towards a new light. The work done on the erotic upheavals of adolescence – the amazement towards the new, the agitation provoked by an unknown self, but also the opening towards a new world of

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<sup>81</sup> F. Taviani, 'In Memory of Ryszard Cieslak', p. 202.

sensations, the state Grotowski defines as one of carnal prayer – has been used to construct precisely a “physical action”, whose goal is to visually depict a condition that combines suffering and transfiguration. When this score encounters Calderon’s poetic structure, it almost naturally highlights the redeeming and transfiguring matrix of the Prince’s martyrdom. The actorial construction, therefore, is not externally juxtaposed on the text, but rather constructs for it a scenic context that makes it possible to extract from it a thematic quality that is entirely subsumed in its dramaturgy and possibly represents its most authentic and profound element.

There is another element, from this perspective, that we must take into account and that we are particularly interested in because it more directly illustrates the iconic aspect of Cieslak’s score. Let us resort, once more, to Grotowski’s testimony: “This basic experience was luminous in an indescribable way. And from this luminous thing, in elaborating the text, with the costumes that refer to Christ and the surrounding iconographic compositions that refer to Christ, the story of a martyr emerged, but we did not work with him starting from a martyr, it was the contrary”.<sup>82</sup> Calderon’s text already suggests the possibility of an *imitatio Christi* and Grotowski develops it further connecting Cieslak’s score to a series of precise iconographic indicators. Costume, first of all. From his first entrance on stage, the Prince is visually differentiated from other characters. He wears a white open shirt, has legs and feet bare, and a loincloth wrapped around his sides, which is also white and soon becomes his only garment. The same costume was worn by the first prisoner, Don Enrique, before being castrated and assimilated to the King of Fez and his court also in terms of his clothing (black trousers over long boots, white shirt and black mantel over it all). The Prince’s costume, therefore, has a double meaning: it suggests his diversity from others and, at the same time, defines, in iconic terms, Don Fernando as a new Christ. Obviously, what he is wearing is the loincloth of crucifixion.

There is more, however, as Grotowski tells us. During the play, Cieslak performed a series of actions unquestionably associated with the passion of Christ. One clearly recognizes a flagellation, a Pietà, a derision and then, symbolically, a Eucharist, all performed in almost excessively explicit terms.<sup>83</sup> These clues are placed by Grotowski in precise moments of the play as iconic signs for the spectators. It is as if the director was telling the public: yes, it is true, the sense of martyrdom and of Calvary you perceive in the play is really there; it is attested by these unmistakable images I offer you as fragments that explain the whole. The fact they are fragments or iconic signs, rather than a complete representational structure, is essential. Cieslak does not interpret the transformation of the Prince into Christ, but rather shows a general process of transfiguration of the body (and of his being). The Christ-like signs, however, remain essential, because they help the spectators’ understanding.

The construction of the character assumes, therefore, in *The Constant Prince* (but, by extension, in all of Grotowski’s theatre) a peculiar character: it is not so much the goal and result of the actor’s work, as much as a process controlled by the director, who assembles different materials, which coalesce in the perception of the

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<sup>82</sup> J. Grotowski, ‘Le Prince Constant de Ryszard Cieslak’, p. 28.

<sup>83</sup> The torturers approach one by one the prone body of the Prince and simulate a ritual bite through which they partake of his body.

spectator.<sup>84</sup> The character is the result of the “work” of the spectator and not of the actor, thanks to a semantic mechanism in which actor and director organize a score of signs, clues, symbolic traces that become a “thing”, on an interpretational level, only when the spectator’s interpretation reassembles everything into a whole. From this perspective, the result seems very close to the notion of open work as theorized by Umberto Eco.

Yet, while open on a semantic level, the process of character building remains extremely closed on a formal one, the result of an extremely rigorous, if not rigid, score governing the acting and the interpretation of the character. From this perspective, too, Grotowski bases himself on Stanislavski, specifically to the notion that the fluid and dialectic process through which the character is constructed must be followed by the formalization of a stable structure, from which the term ‘score’, which must be always executed in the same fashion, with an almost obsessive precision, albeit continuously regenerating its motivations. The concept of score, in Grotowski’s language, places the same emphasis on precision and formal definition. The form, after all, as a system for controlling, for organizing signs in a well-defined (as well as artificial) system has a crucial role in preventing the work of psychological introspection from degenerating into chaos and approximation.<sup>85</sup> The score is, therefore, a solid, formally defined, and infinitely replicable construction. A particularly suggestive image of the score is offered by Cieslak himself in this statement reported by Schechner: ‘The score is like a glass inside which a candle is burning. The glass is solid; it is there, you can depend on it. It contains and guides the flame. But it is not the flame. The flame is my inner process each night. The flame is what illuminates the score, what the spectators see through the score’.<sup>86</sup> In Cieslak’s perspective, the score is what welcomes, protects and makes visible the living spirit of the interpretation. A container, therefore, but an essential container because it makes possible the contact between actor and spectator. A guarantee that expresses itself on a basically formal level. Cieslak’s image reminds one of a famous Tao passage which says that a vase does not consist so much of the earth it contains as much as the void that makes it concave. It is this invisible centre that provides meaning to the perceptible matter. The essence of the vase is its emptiness.<sup>87</sup> The emptiness, however, is what it is only because it is circumscribed by matter; its visibility depends on the form of the vase. The potter, basically, while sculpting the emptiness, is in fact shaping the soil. A form that should be precise and stable, whose characteristics depend on the style, the taste, the aesthetic goal of the author. For this

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<sup>84</sup> Richards writes about the difference between Stanislavski and Grotowski. ‘Stanislavsky centers his work on the development of a character. In the case of Grotowski, for example in the work done at the Theatre Laboratory, the actors never searched for their characters. The characters emerged in the mind of the spectators only thanks to the montage done by Grotowski as director’ (T. Richards, *At work with Grotowski on physical actions*).

<sup>85</sup> ‘An essential factor in this process is the elaboration of a guiding rein for the form, the artificiality. The actor who accomplishes an act of self-penetration is setting out on a journey which is recorded through various sound and gestures reflexes, formulating a sort of invitation to the spectator. [...] Undisciplined self-penetration is no liberation, but is perceived as a form of biological chaos’. J. Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>86</sup> Cited in F. Taviani, ‘In Memory of Ryszard Cieslak’, p. 201.

<sup>87</sup> ‘We turn clay to make a vessel; But it is on the space where there is nothing that the usefulness of the vessel depends’. *Tao tê ching* (chap. XI).

reason, ideally there is only one vase, vases are in fact infinite. Indeed we could say that the vase, the vase in its essence, exists only by virtue of the infinite forms it can take.

This digression is useful to understand the importance that the score has in the definition of the character: it represents its formal consistency whereas self-penetration defines its flame. We could even go as far as saying that perhaps the character functions as a formal score that organizes the living quality of the actor in his or her search for the human element; a search that goes beyond any theatrical solution, any character, and, as such, establishes a relation with the spectator based on a direct exchange between human beings.

The formal qualities of the score – precision, musicality, formal rhythm – have a crucial role in shaping the writing done on the body. Taviani speaks of Cieslak's performance in terms of musical and choreographic transfiguration of the tragic tension,<sup>88</sup> Stefan Brecht, instead, uses the term hieroglyph adding in conclusion that 'there were no gestures *of* a body, only gestures *by* a body: corporeal monologue of spirit itself'.<sup>89</sup> It is a form of writing which results from a series of elements which I quote from the long list provided by Brecht: athleticism of the body as spiritual symbol; use of language as gestural sound; exaggerated and stylized positions; elimination of functional and non-expressive aspects of movement; elimination of gestures that indicate social or subjective characteristics; injection of expressive content into remaining gestures; transposition of conventional gestuality into direct exchanges among characters; transformation of functional gestuality into one highly expressive on an emotional level.<sup>90</sup> The combination of these elements allows us to evidence a series of qualities in Cieslak's score. Terms such as musicality, precision, formalization must be seen in the context of a distancing from everyday gestuality, of a reduction of gestures to expressive signs, emotionally and symbolically charged, in order to experiment the utmost potential of the body in movement as expressive element. Cieslak's score is a score based on exceptionality, in which the deviation from the norm is stabilized into a formal code. In this way, all signs that could be referred to a referential dimension and to the identification of the character as a psychological or social subject are eliminated. Vice versa what is underlined are the gestures that refer to an absolute expression, an archetypal expression one could say; a language of the body as anthropic entity, more than a cultural one.

This referential gesture is absolute, that is, the actors do not refer to anything outside themselves, not only on a representational level (they do not wish to represent a character) but also on the more immediately physical one. On the one hand there is the complete elimination of the use of objects acting props (as a result the space in which Cieslak acts seems not only physically but also symbolically empty). On the other hand, there is the isolation (also highly symbolical) of Cieslak from other actors and of the Prince from other characters. Cieslak's gestuality does

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<sup>88</sup> 'Cieslak's outer self, his "body" looks transparent. His actions are extreme, but controlled like a musical score. His agonies, torture, despair, and death are precise as a dance'. F. Taviani, 'In Memory of Ryszard Cieslak', p. 200.

<sup>89</sup> S. Brecht, 'The Laboratory Theatre in New York, 1969: A set of critiques', in *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 125. Previously he had written: 'He [Grotowski] has increased the precision of the gestures and thus their intensity – giving them considerable hieroglyphic power' (p. 123).

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

not seek to establish a relation with the scene so that it can in turn be reflected in the eyes of the public; it is instead extrapolated from the context and, especially in the monologues, it is almost abstract, framed by a void.

This absolute character of the actor's presence corresponds to Barba's notion of the actor in Grotowski's theatre, when he speaks of the body as the central focus of the scene, or even of the scenography, thanks to an arrangement of movements based on a continuous metamorphosis of gestures, posture, and mimicry.<sup>91</sup> Barba writes:

Actors must find in themselves the talent for the lost magic, the capacity of instant metamorphosis, of altering their physical aspect by altering the form and rhythm of their bodies, of altering their faces by using only facial muscles, of transforming their voice, their character, to incarnate themselves in one character or the other as someone possessed or a shaman, *all in front of the eyes of the spectator*.<sup>92</sup>

The formal aspect of acting, the one that allows one to treat and read the body as writing, appears to consist, for Barba, in a continuously changing construction of movement. The score is not the result of the combination of different psycho-physical attitudes, as much as the merging of different stages and dispositions associated with the various codes used by the body (mimicry, but also gestural and proxemic codes). As a result, the score acquires a fluidity that makes it autonomous from the text, insofar as it has an emotional and formal autonomy.

This model is present throughout Grotowski's play and inspires the formal construction of the character and his reception by the public. It emerges, however, most evidently in the three monologues which represent, both in terms of dramaturgy and directing, three focal points in the structure of the play. Grotowski, while maintaining many of the original secondary events, organizes the penitential journey of the Prince around three axes that represent the key moments in an itinerary of death and rebirth organized as an *imitatio Christi*. The three moments obviously give Cieslak the possibility of fully expressing his potential for writing.

Even the use of the term monologue is indicative of the director's approach. In Calderon's original text the monologues were part of a dialogic structure (albeit expanded according to Baroque codes). In the second monologue, Grotowski goes as far as having the Prince speak using the words through which, in the original text, Muley described the Prince's miserable condition in prison. This adaptation has a very particular dramaturgical function: it is the character himself that describes the lowest and most tragic stage in his gradual loss of human dignity.

Cieslak constructs all three monologues around a gestural score based on a number of fixed elements varyingly emphasized according to the dramatic situation. In the first monologue, the central theme is Don Fernando's refusal to give up Ceuta in return for his freedom. It is the beginning of a process through which Don

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<sup>91</sup> "The body, thanks to its efficient expressive potential and to the costume, which supports the process of metamorphosis, should be the actual "scene" of the play, the place of action, the various particularities of the view, the climactic characteristics, the quality of the soil (sand, gravel, dirt, etc.) and at the same time be the intelligible medium of the reactions of the actors, as concretely and perfectly exemplified by the actor of classic Chinese and Japanese theatre or of the Indian Kathakali". E. Barba, *Alla ricerca del teatro perduto*, Padova, Marsilio, 1965, p. 66.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

Fernando gradually detaches himself from the world: the body no longer belongs to the person once it has been lost in battle and therefore cannot be the object of an exchange in a blasphemous contract. Don Fernando tells Don Enrique and his train of Portuguese nobles (in Grotowski's version the train is absent) that he would rather sacrifice himself than submit to the demands of the King of Fez. In the second monologue, a different note is struck, and Muley's words are used to describe the state of abjection and mortification of the flesh the Prince has reached. This is the lowest point in Don Fernando's abyssal downfall, but his description assimilates him to a Christ-like condition. We arrive thus to the third monologue, which concludes Grotowski's version of the play, entirely cutting out Calderon's celebratory epilogue. The Prince now appeals to the King. Not to be saved but, on the contrary, to complete his vengeance and assuage his anger. Death, gained little by little through a process of expiation and liberation, now represents for the Prince the final goal of his personal salvation. Through the death of the body he acquires the life of the soul. Grotowski finishes the play here leaving the Prince's body on stage lying in the middle of the centre of the table, in a Christ-like position, covered by the red blanket that has accompanied him throughout the play.

Cieslak, therefore, had to design the entire parable of this initiation process through a gestural and vocal score, making visible the Prince's suffering but also presenting it as a series of steps towards a personal liberation.

While the gestuality, as we shall see, follows a very precise score, free of referential elements, the recitation of the text has a very peculiar form. In the case of the love scenes between Muley and Fenixana, the accelerated and to some extent mechanic diction estranges and distances the spectator. In the case of the monologues things are not precisely in these terms. However, here too, Grotowski has Cieslak adopt a very articulated and rhythmic recitation, a rhythm that is independent of the discursive meaning. The lines are abruptly cut by the mouth of the actor, which opens and closes in a face frozen in a mass of muscles, with the incredible effect of something separate from the rest of the body. There is a body that moves and a mouth that speaks. The rhythmic tension of the recitation is then overlaid with the intonation of the voice, which has raucous, profound, harsh, tense reverberations, which provides words with a very strong presence, almost turning them into objects. The gestural score functions independently of the voice, combining with it in a montage that in the end provides the complete character. The common traits, the grammar we could say, that characterizes the gestural score is based on certain recurrent signs: the dialectic between straight and bent position, the continuous fluidity of the movement, the gentleness of the gestures, the compositional play among different plastic postures continuously assumed and abandoned. Furthermore, all three monologues end with the Prince's body on the ground shaken by uncontrollable tremors. In this construction of the action, the body acts in its entirety, both as organic unit and, even more, as a dialogue among its various parts. I would hazard that even respiration has an expressive function in Cieslak's acting, turning into an almost visible material and highlighting the process of physical degeneration that underlies the entire action.

Let us consider now the three monologues more in detail. The first begins with Cieslak standing on the anatomic table with his shirt open on his bare chest. It is in this attitude that he has listened motionlessly to Don Enrique's tirade. The structure



of the action can be divided into three parts, each with its specific character though clearly separate from the others. The first part begins as described above, with the actor on his feet, his face arranged in a strange mask, his traits almost exaggeratedly relaxed, his eyes wide open, a vaguely childish expression. As soon as he begins speaking, Cieslak starts bending his legs, leaning forward with a rotatory movement that ends with him kneeling. At this point, his body bends forward until he touches the floor with his head. Cieslak continues then acting while crouching, his face pressed against the floor (alternating sides) his mouth speaking as it rubs against the wood (as already in previous scenes). His limbs seem frozen in this unnatural position and the only expressive elements are his hands. The fingers drum against the table while the words emerge from his squashed and distorted mouth. When the actor rises from the floor the hands are cupped against his face as if to support him. In the third phase, Cieslak stands up pivoting on his left axis (arm-leg) and takes off his shirt. Having retained only his loincloth he gets up (slowly, fluidly going from one movement to the other) and, once standing, he assumes a posture that returns in all the monologues: his bust erect, the shoulders slightly stooping forwards, arms locked together as a single element, slightly arched and distant from the body, legs slightly open which prevent him from fully standing and are also slightly arched. The act of rising is followed by the act of lowering. Cieslak bends and leans forward more than once before sitting down first and then lying down on his back, his body shaking. This plastic construction is acted with extraordinary fluidity. Cieslak practically never stands still: each movement fades into the other in a slow, continuous, controlled fashion, so that the spectator perceives the force of the manifestation of form as a metamorphic continuum, as a plastic rhythm. Notwithstanding its brevity, this description evidences what we mean by non-referential and yet expressive gestuality. The closeness to the ground, the difficulty of attaining an erect posture, the tension between upward drives and downward ones that burden the body with its weight, the childish innocence on Cieslak's face, all these are signs that indicate the beginning of an initiation process experienced directly by the body.

In the second monologue the symbolic quality is even more evident. The action this time starts in front of the anatomical table on which the Prince is sitting, huddled in a position that suggests a childish body, still imperfectly controlled (crouching, the legs bent and open, the arms open and bent forward for balance) but also the Renaissance iconography of deposition.<sup>93</sup> The scene of the degradation of the Prince is also acted on the ground, with Cieslak lying on his stomach first and then on his side, bending his body back and fro in a sort of alternation between psychological systole and diastole, between opening spasms and his closing himself around his pain.

We arrive thus to the third monologue, the one in which the score is most articulated. The beginning is already highly significant. Cieslak, during Tarudante's tirade, has been crouching, his head and arm resting on the table, motionless. He now begins to move slowly, climbing over the table in a reverse position, pivoting on

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<sup>93</sup> It is the ostension of the dead Christ both alone and in the more traditional form of the Piety, a model found especially in fifteenth-century Northern Italy, as shown by a number of altar pieces by Cosmé Tura, and in particular by the *Pietà* of Muso Correr of Venice and by his *Compianto sul Cristo* at the Louvre.

his head and using his back to get on the table. It is a slow and particularly controlled sequence. He then lies down on the floor on his stomach, speaking in a material and mechanical rhythm that throughout the scene remains particularly tense and accelerated. The entire sequence is marked by breaks. These are mostly outbreaks of hysterical laughing on Cieslak's part; at times however, it can be the derisory applause of the court or a line from one of the other characters. In all cases, the gestural sequence interrupts and a new one begins. The scene continues on the ground, then Cieslak gets up, assuming at first the already described childish position. He then rotates about 90 degrees and stops in the same position. He now begins to get up. He moves his legs, keeping his feet contracted, until he is kneeling on one leg with the other leg at a right angle. He continues his forward torsion with a spiraling movement and finally stands up. Now that he is standing, his position is the same of the first monologue, legs open and bent, arms blocked and arched. His body feels the weight and tends to bend, then an attack of hysterical laughter prevents him from falling. The actor hugs himself closely, straightens up, and almost contracts, minimizing the distance between limbs and trunk. The legs tighten at the knees contracting in a spasm.

From a gestural perspective, the monologue seems like a re-enactment of the previous two. There is, first of all, the same dense dialectic between opposite forces found in the first monologue – the ones that would have the Prince ascend vertically and the ones that press him down – combined, however, with the sense of the decay of the flesh that characterizes the second one. The whole is organized in a construction based on precise formal principles. The transition from an erect position to a crouching one develops through a series of plastic poses that outline a spiral. A spiral that rises in one direction and descends in the opposite one. The movement originates from the rotation of the shoulders, which follows the movement of an arm designing a curve, while the opposite arm serves as a pivot. The legs are similarly arranged. Halfway between the ascending and descending action, Cieslak finds himself kneeling, a position in which the body is divided into left and right. The right part is arranged vertically along the arm-leg axis, while the left leg is set at a 90 degree angle with the left arm drawing an arch above the shoulder.

The plastic precision that organizes the emotional tension of the gesture has a fundamental importance in the iconic characterization of Cieslak's score, which appears as a form of writing not only because of its expressive power but precisely because this quality is inscribed in a highly formalized dynamic continuum. Let us consider, in conclusion, the significance of the final transfiguration, the moment in which Don Fernando's invocation of death becomes an aperture towards a rebirth: Cieslak has his hands open, his fingers stretched out, slightly pressed against his stomach, so that his back arches and his shoulders tend slightly towards the sky, with a tension that is transmitted to the head. The movement culminates in Cieslak's eyes, which are closed, yet seem all the same to tend towards the sky in a blind gaze that by now exceeds the body. Frozen in this position, Cieslak completely transforms into the icon of his character, revealing how his score is based on the dynamic elaboration of a plastic condition based on a sculptural matrix. A Baroque sort of sculpture, rich in formal tension and capable, in the case of flesh as in the case of marble, of suggesting the transfiguration of matter into a matter of light.

In conclusion, the score of *The Constant Prince* offers us a precious testimony on how the various functions associated with the actor as body on scene can be made to interact very closely and how they relate to the more general problem of acting. It also evidences how, when we speak of body on scene, we must not think of it as the reduction of the presence and role of the actor to pure sign, but must rather refer it to a practice that presupposes a technique, a work done on emotions, on the text. The result of this work is a score highly centred on the stage, which combines with other languages to create the “live” dramaturgy of the play.