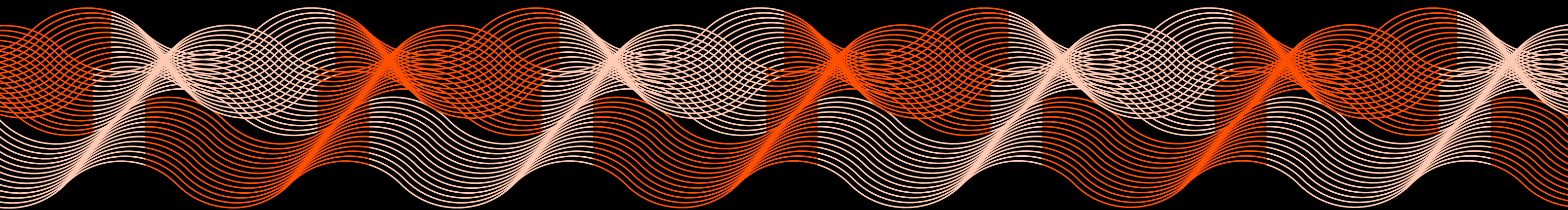


Process and Product in Italian Conceptual Theatre



MIMMA VALENTINO

Summary

Between the mid-seventies and early eighties the Italian experimental scene was crossed by a profound artistic ferment and by the proliferation of "trends", events (festivals, shows) and theatrical formations.

In 1976, in particular, the New Italian Theatre experienced its most "utopian" phase: the artists of the third generation of the avant-garde undertake, in fact, a radical refoundation of the scenic code. What emerges in many theoretical statements as well as through the proposed stage shows is the idea of a "zero degree" of the scenic language, which is disrupted in its pre-semantic signs. Following on from the lesson of Conceptual Art, theatre undergoes therefore a self-reflexive research and is broken down, in an analytical way, in its phonemic units.

The present essay aims to analyse the creative processes and the deconstruction that characterise the Conceptual Theatre, also through the narration of some of the most important experiences that emerged in those years.

Author

MIMMA VALENTINO

Has a PhD in "History of Modern and Contemporary Theatre" at the University of Naples "L'Orientale", where she has also worked as a postdoctoral researcher. She participates in different research projects coordinated by Lorenzo Mango and she is Editor of *Acting Archives Review*. Her research interests focus on modern and contemporary theatre, acting theory, Performance Studies. She has authored several articles ("Toni Servillo rilegge *Les Fausses confidences*", *Annali de "L'Orientale"*, 2008; "Un'inchiesta di Sipario", *Acting Archives Review*, maggio 2012; "Le 'isole galleggianti' del Terzo Teatro, Culture teatrali, 2018) and has published *Il Nuovo Teatro in Italia. 1976-1985* (2015).

Riepilogo

Tra la metà degli anni Settanta e i primi anni Ottanta la scena sperimentale italiana è attraversata da un profondo fermento artistico e dalla proliferazione di "tendenze", manifestazioni (festival, rassegne) e formazioni teatrali.

Nel 1976, in particolare, il Nuovo Teatro italiano si trova a vivere la sua fase più "utopistica": gli artisti della terza generazione dell'avanguardia intraprendono, infatti, una radicale rifondazione del codice scenico. Ciò che emerge in tanti enunciati teorici così come attraverso i lavori proposti è l'idea di un "grado zero" del linguaggio scenico, che viene disarticolato nei suoi segni pre-semanticici.

Sulla scia della lezione dell'Arte Concettuale, lo specifico teatrale viene sottoposto, dunque, ad un'indagine metariflessiva e scomposto, in maniera analitica, nelle sue unità fonematiche.

Il presente saggio si propone di analizzare i processi creativi e la destrutturazione che caratterizzano il Teatro Concettuale, anche attraverso il racconto di alcune delle esperienze più significative emerse in quegli anni.

KEYWORDS

Refoundation, conceptual theatre, deconstruction, metalinguistic investigation, process and product

PAROLE CHIAVE

Rifondazione, teatro concettuale, decostruzione, analisi metalinguistica, processo e prodotto



Introduction

Between the mid-seventies and early eighties, the Italian experimental scene was crossed by a profound artistic and cultural ferment and by the proliferation of a series of 'trends' (Image Theatre, Analytical-Existential Theatre, *Spettacolarità metropolitana*), events (festivals, shows), and theatrical formations. The seventies, in particular, were dominated by the rapid succession of theatrical experiences marked by a spasmodic search for the 'new', by a constant and incessant moving on from the past. With this mind, the dialectic between creative process and product/show that has characterised theatrical research since the sixties finds, in the experimental scene of these years, a particular declination. In fact, between the end of the fifties and the sixties a redefinition of the relationship between life and art, between physical performativity and work, was underway; we can think, for example, of the lesson of Jerzy Grotowski who, placing himself along the line of the twentieth-century masters' reforms, emphasized above all the centrality of the stage event. His research on the expressive modalities of the theatrical code always focuses on an accurate investigation of the art of the actor and his techniques; in fact, he conceives of the theatre as an instrument of knowledge that passes primarily through the performer's body, as well as through the contact, proximity, and uniqueness of the exchange between actor and spectator.

The experimenters active in the second half of the seventies, on the other hand, focused fundamentally on the relationship between language deconstruction and work, to the extent that the product is questioned as a finished object, and objective, of artistic creation; while the process is conceived as a mental act of reflecting on, and dismantling, linguistic codes. The relationship between product and process is reversed: the product is entrusted with the task of witnessing, in the *hic et nunc* of performance, a mental process that has an autonomous existence.

Post-avant-garde vs Conceptual Theatre

It is a clear and absolute break, based on criticism not only of traditional theatre, but also of the results of the most recent stage research (not least the so-called Image Theatre). In 1976 in particular, not only the official scene, but also the avant-garde itself, was questioned. In reference to the most radical experiences of theatrical experimentation that emerged in the theatrical season 1975-1976, Giuseppe Bartolucci — militant critic, supporter, and critical mirror in which the main events of the New Theatre are reflected — began to speak of a ‘post avant-garde’, ‘as offers of “betrayals”, of “self-defamation”, of “sentimental journeys”, of “revolts of objects” [...] as use of the negative, and yet in terms of *extreme* re-establishment of theatre production’.¹

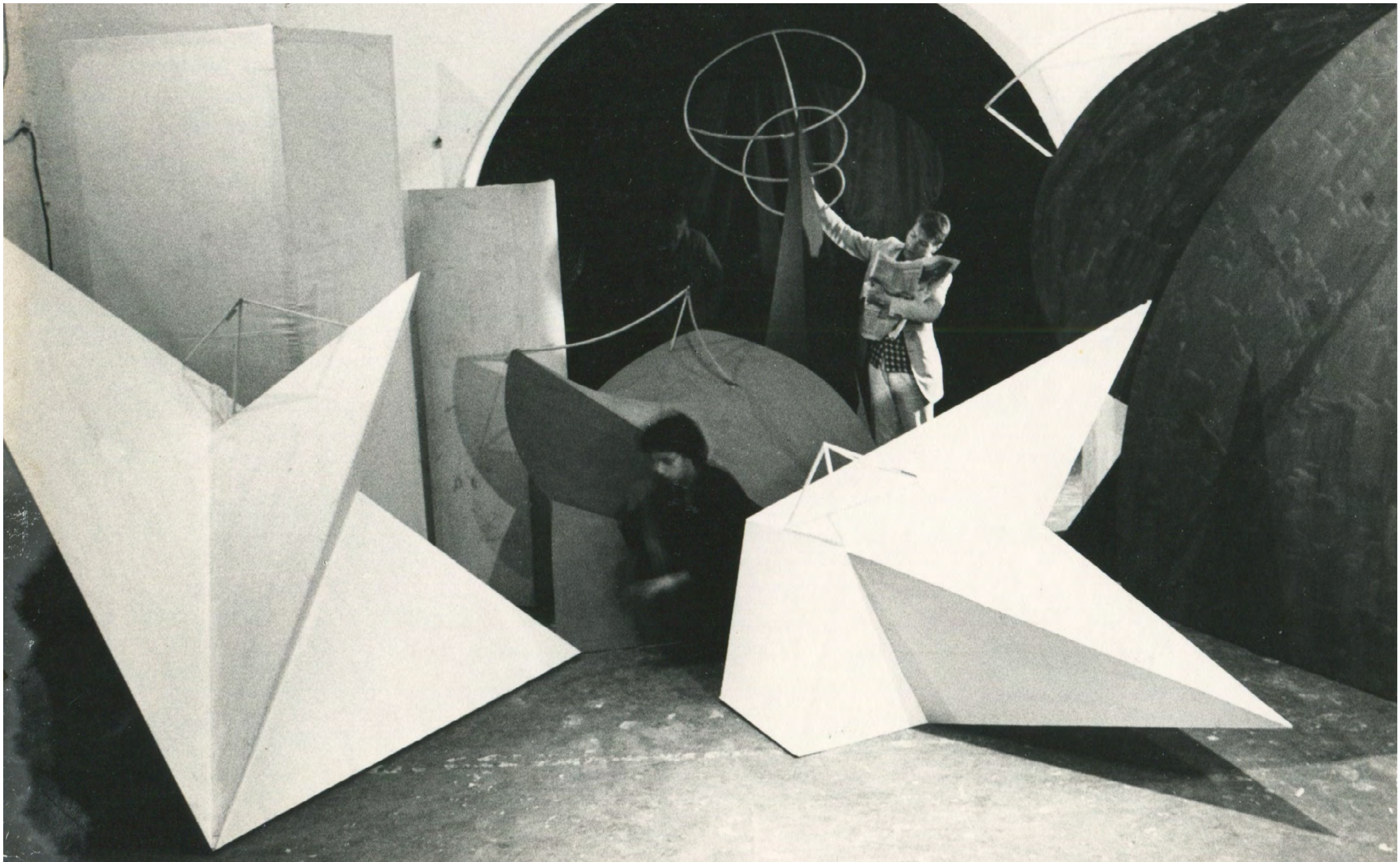
1. Giuseppe Bartolucci, ‘Dove va l'avanguardia’, *La scrittura scenica*, 14 (1976), 87-92 (p. 89, my translation). In fact, the term *Postavanguardia*, in a broader meaning than the technically relevant one, can refer to the research that emerged between the mid-seventies and the early eighties and to its internal evolution. Thus we can speak of the ‘cold’ phase and of the ‘hot’ phase of the *Postavanguardia*, referring respectively to the season of conceptual theatre and to the so-called *Spettacolarità metropolitana*, a trend that takes shape at the beginning of the 1980s. How the ‘Post-avant-garde’ concept is historically ductile is testified by the book of Gabriella Giannachi and Nick Kaye, *Staging the Post-Avant-Garde: Italian Experimental Performance after 1970* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2002). The two scholars observe that, in the 1970s and early 1980s, the emergence of the Italian theatrical post-avant-garde marked a watershed in the development of experimental performance. Further more, they underline the influence and the proximity of North American art, performance, and popular culture and the post-avant-garde’s engagement with concepts of *the real*, contemporary urban experience, the nature of mass media, and visual and performance art.

‘From the ashes of an avant-garde that has become bourgeois, another negative flow is revived’:² the new trend was officially consecrated in Salerno, in 1976, during the ‘Theatre/New Trends’ Exhibition, organised by Bartolucci himself, together with Filiberto Menna. Compared to the theoretical framework of these new artistic proposals, however, the definition of post avant-garde is also accompanied by that of ‘Conceptual theatre’ and ‘Analytical-existential theatre’. Franco Quadri, for example, writes:

In Italy, conceptual theatre is baptised post avant-garde by Giuseppe Bartolucci and holds its first exhibitions in Salerno, where it is compared to Leo and Perla's latest work, and in Cosenza in November. The trend brings together the Stranamore Group of Simone Carella who, divorced from his former actors, investigates the space and time of the historical avant-gardes (*Viaggio sentimentale e oltre*), the Gaia Scienza that debuted (always at the headquarters of Beat 72 in Rome) with a meditation on Mayakovsky mediated through the wanderings of the Grand Union (*La rivolta degli oggetti*), and the Carrozzone of Florence that, after a last tormented visual show, breaks with the fathers in the *Giardino dei sentieri biforcati* and heads for an analytic-pathological-existential theatre.³

2. Franco Quadri, ‘Avanguardia e materialismo’, *La scrittura scenica*, 16 (1977), 108-11 (p. 108, my translation). As Quadri observes, the three groups that somehow inaugurate the *Postavanguardia* season are the Carrozzone, the Stranamore and the Gaia Scienza. The story of the Carrozzone dates back to 1972, the year in which Federico Tiezzi, Sandro Lombardi and Marion D'Amburgo debuted with the show *Morte di Francesco*. Three years later, in 1975, *La morte di Danton* by Simone Carella, leader of the Stranamore and animator of the Beat 72, a fundamental space for the experimental research of these years, comes to light. Precisely at the Beat 72 debuts, with *La rivolta degli oggetti* (March 20, 1976), the Gaia Scienza, a formation founded by Giorgio Barberio Corsetti, Marso Solari and Alessandra Vanzì in 1975.

3. F. Quadri, ‘Il teatro nel 1976’, in *La Biennale – Annuario 1978. Eventi del 1976-78*, (Venezia: Archivio storico delle arti contemporanee, 1979), pp. 1287-1297 (p. 1294, my translation).



Simone Carella, *Feux d'artifice* (da *Viaggio sentimentale e oltre*), 1976.
Archivio Simone Carella.
© Giorgio Piredda



Simone Carella, *Iperurania*, 1980.
Archivio Simone Carella.
© Giorgio Piredda

Metalinguistic investigation

The three definitions, used by Quadri in rapid succession, precisely reflect some fundamental aspects of the emerging phenomenon: on the one hand, the declared will to start from scratch, to make a *tabula rasa* of avant-garde experiences; on the other, the intention to adopt linguistic procedures based on ‘scientific’ analysis and investigation, taking into account the essential lesson of the figurative arts and, above all, of conceptual art. The choices of poetics and language made by artists such as Federico Tiezzi, Giorgio Barberio Corsetti, and Simone Carella are deeply influenced by the world of visual arts and its criticism; in particular, *La linea analitica dell’arte moderna*, by Filiberto Menna,

has always been declared as fundamental reading by Tiezzi, who was among the founders of *Postavanguardia*, but unquestionably the zeroing choices of Simone Carella, and also those of Gaia Scienza, apparently more lyric than the latter, are at least on the same wavelength with the organisation of the critical view of Menna who, besides, had with the New Italian Theatre a remarkable familiarity, nearness and contamination[.]⁴

In the wake of conceptual art, the experimenters who were active in these years proposed, therefore, a minimalist, anti-representative, mental theatre, but above all a theatre that analyses itself as a language. In the artistic field, as in the theatre, the mechanism that affects conceptuality translates first of all into a metalinguistic investigation, into a conscious reflection and self-reflection on the formal and grammatical procedures which are implemented.⁵ If conceptual art, in Kosuth’s words, ‘is such because it is based on an investigation into the nature of art’, the same point of view also affects the conceptual scene.⁶

Thus, the theatre presents itself as a real argument on its making, on its being, on its becoming, through the dissection of basic linguistic units. The conceptual investigation translates into a process of deconstruction of the scenic code, through a process of reduction to atomic components, and in a sort of logical analysis on the theatrical signs, on the relationship between them — and not between the sign and the thing. The setting in which the conceptual matrix takes shape finds its position precisely in the investigation of the minimal elements of the theatrical fact, which are displaced, caused to lose their original

⁴. Lorenzo Mango, ‘La decostruzione del nuovo’, in Mimma Valentino, *Il nuovo teatro in Italia: 1976–1985* (Corazzano: Titivillus, 2015), pp. 11–19 (p. 16, my translation).

⁵. The theatre as well as the conceptual art accompanies the specific practice with self-reflection: ‘The artist—wrote Filiberto Menna, referring to the conceptual experience—takes on an analytical attitude, moves the procedures from the immediately expressive or representative level to a reflective level, of metalinguistic order, engaging in an argument on art in the very moment when it concretely creates art’. *La linea analitica dell’arte moderna* (Torino: Einaudi, 2001), p. 4 (my translation).

⁶. Joseph Kosuth, *L’arte dopo la filosofia. Il significato dell’arte concettuale*, trans. and intro. by G. Guercio (Genova: Edizioni Costa & Nolan, 1989), p. 43 (my translation).

meaning, and thus reduced to the degree of pure sign, of ‘phonemes’.⁷ The linguistic mechanisms of the analysis are based on the fragmentation, addition-subtraction, and iteration of the verbal element — where it is still present — of the gesture, of the object. The *body* (in the sense of physics) of the word is investigated, reduced to pure sound devoid of meaning, of the actor, understood as a person and no longer as a character, of space, conceived as a Schechnerian ‘found *environment*’ and not as simple décor.⁸

The investigation starts from the planes and volumes of the physical place, from the height, width and length of the space that is questioned through the beams of light. It is measured through the gesture, vivisected through the physical presence (of the performer or of the object). The same ‘disassembly’ also affects the other scenic elements: the gesture, the movement, the action of the actor, as well as the duration of time are broken down and reassembled according to a mathematical procedure.

7. The procedure adopted by the artists of the conceptual scene tends to the definition of those indivisible units which, in the linguistic field, are called ‘phonemes’, and which, in the semiological study of painting, Filiberto Menna has defined ‘figures’.

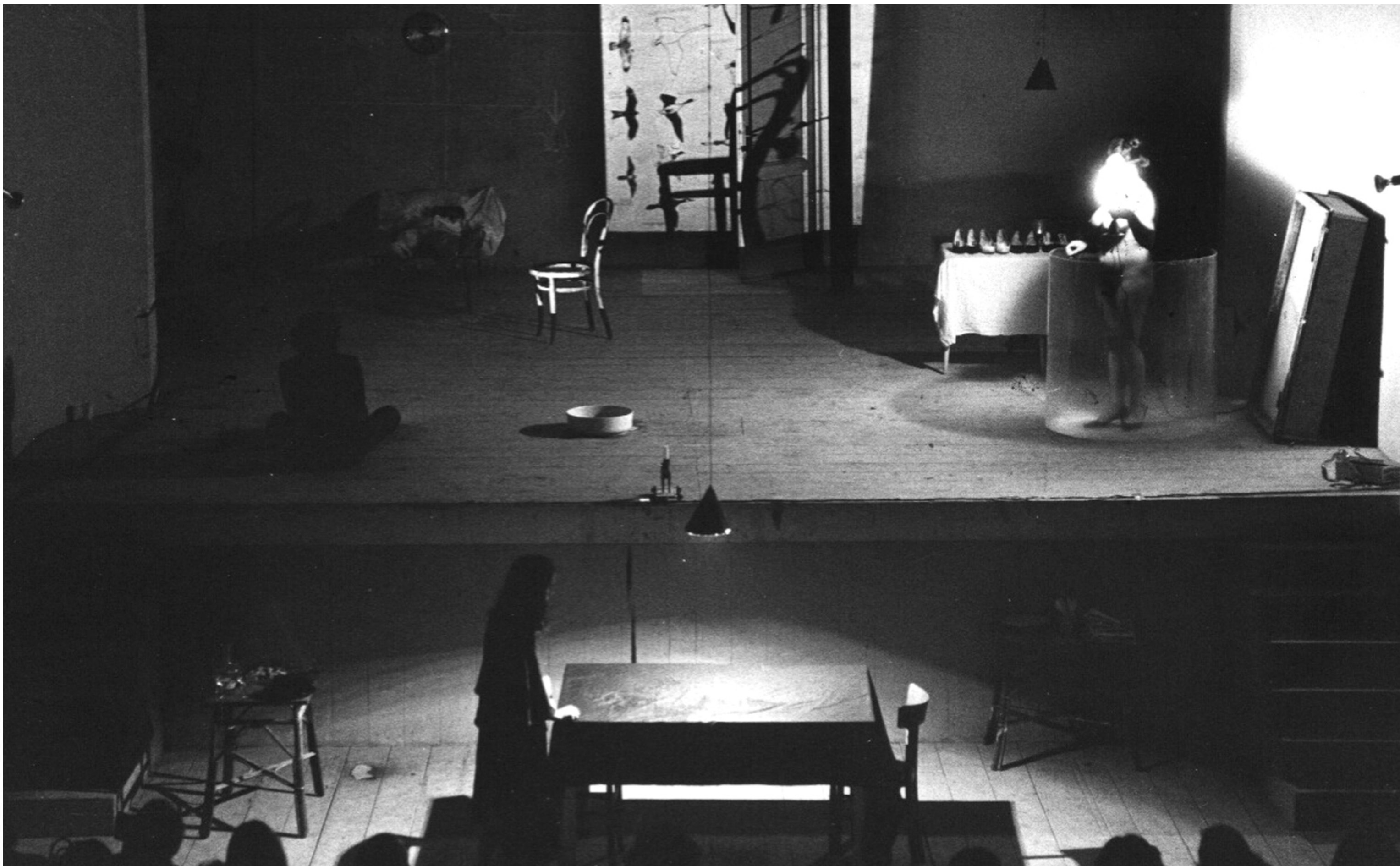
8. Richard Schechner, *Environmental Theatre* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1973). The artists of Conceptual Theatre, when they proceed to a zeroing of the theatrical code traditionally interpreted, go so far as to divest—sometimes almost entirely—the literary work, divest the actor of the conventional role of interpreter of a text, conceive the space not as a sort of background or set design, but as a real place with which to start a scenic dialogue.

Three examples of analytical deconstruction: Carrozzone, Stranamore and Gaia Scienza

Particularly meaningful, in this sense, are some works of the Carrozzone in which Tiezzi pursues the declared will of ‘dealing with theatre as if dealing with a keyboard: to explore the possibilities, to venture to know its means’.⁹ For example, in a sequence of *Presagi del vampiro* (1976)¹⁰ a performer sets and clears the table with white crockery, adding an object from time to time, and then removing it; they then replicate the same operation, but using black crockery. Dramaturgical writing — setting and clearing the table — is the result of the conceptual process of breaking down and recomposing an action: the product ‘tells’ the process, where the process is the mental project. In particular, the modular and serial repetition of the same action, the fragmentation of the gesture, adding and subtracting a segment of action from time to time,

9. Federico Tiezzi, ‘L’avventura analitica’, in Giuseppe Bartolucci, Lorenzo e Achille Mango, *Per un teatro analitico-esistenziale: materiali del teatro di ricerca*, (Torino: Studio Forma, 1980), pp. 78-83 (p. 83, my translation).

10. *Presagi del vampiro* (*Studi per ambiente*) is presented in Cosenza (Palestra dello Spirito Santo) on November 13th 1976, within the ‘Postavanguardia/Didactic Intervention’ Exhibition. For this performance, the Carrozzone strays from the intention to create a show on the theme of the vampire, inspired by Murnau and Dryer; of the original idea, however, only the title remains as any symbolic-narrative intentionality fails. The work is, in fact, structured as a series of autonomous and interchangeable sequences, focused on the physical and temporal succession of actions without any expressive connotation.



Carrozzone, *Presagi del vampiro*, 1976.
 Archivio Compagnia Lombardi-Tiezzi.
 © Gianni Melotti

makes the flow of time and the millimetric measurement of space noticeable. Through the addition-subtraction of single elements and subsequent iteration of the same process, the functioning of the language is examined from within; the investigation of the lexical components of the stage writing is precisely what allows the reasoning on the nature of the theatrical code, so interesting to the stage experimentation in these years, Carrozzone *in primis*, to continue. For Federico Tiezzi in particular, the microscopic analysis of theatrical grammar takes the form of a series of ‘studies by environment’, in the disarticulation of the show in independent sections, detached from each other and then reassembled according to combinatorial effects that may vary each evening. As Tiezzi clarifies, these ‘studies by environment’ are conceived as autonomous units — and not as fragments of a unitary doing — as ‘detached pieces, but not in the sense of “sketches” for a hypothetical final “canvas”, not means to an end, but ends in themselves, that is, analytical tools’ (Giuseppe Bartolucci, Lorenzo and Achille Mango: 1980, p. 79).¹¹

Each of these sequences is, in turn, based on further sectioning of the individual actions proposed; for example, in *Vedute di Porto Said* (1977),¹² a series of autonomous studies follow each other, essentially focusing on the analysis of the relationship of a body within a spatial dimension: a performer gradually rises from a chair, splitting the movement into many small segments; two women, one naked and the other dressed, sitting facing each other, slowly pull a rubber band until it splashes away. In the two ‘studies’ actors become performers of the creative process, of a construction idea in itself resolved prior to, and regardless of,

¹¹. Tiezzi also underlines how the succession of studies, from evening to evening, is determined by precise factors: the physical space in which one acts, the socio-cultural situation of reference and the existential relationship that is established with the ‘place’ in which the work is proposed.

¹². *Vedute di Porto Said* is presented in Florence, at the Teatro Rondò di Bacco, on 3 February 1977.

the product: the physicality of the actor — the body movement tied to a rubber band — has the precise function of dissecting and modifying the space, going beyond its own geometries. In this sense, Federico Tiezzi states: ‘my elements are the bodies of the actors, the distance between the bodies of the actors, the looks that cross the actors, the concrete relationship with the props, with the walls, with the measure of space’.¹³

A similar argument can be found in the early works of Gaia Scienza, from *La rivolta degli oggetti* (1976)¹⁴ to *Luci della città* (1976)¹⁵ to *Cronache marziane* (1977),¹⁶ where the intensity of physical fatigue performed by the Corsetti-Solari-Vanzi trio, rising from the ground, running wildly or abandoning themselves to acrobatic vaults, seems to determine a lengthening or shrinking of the scenic place.

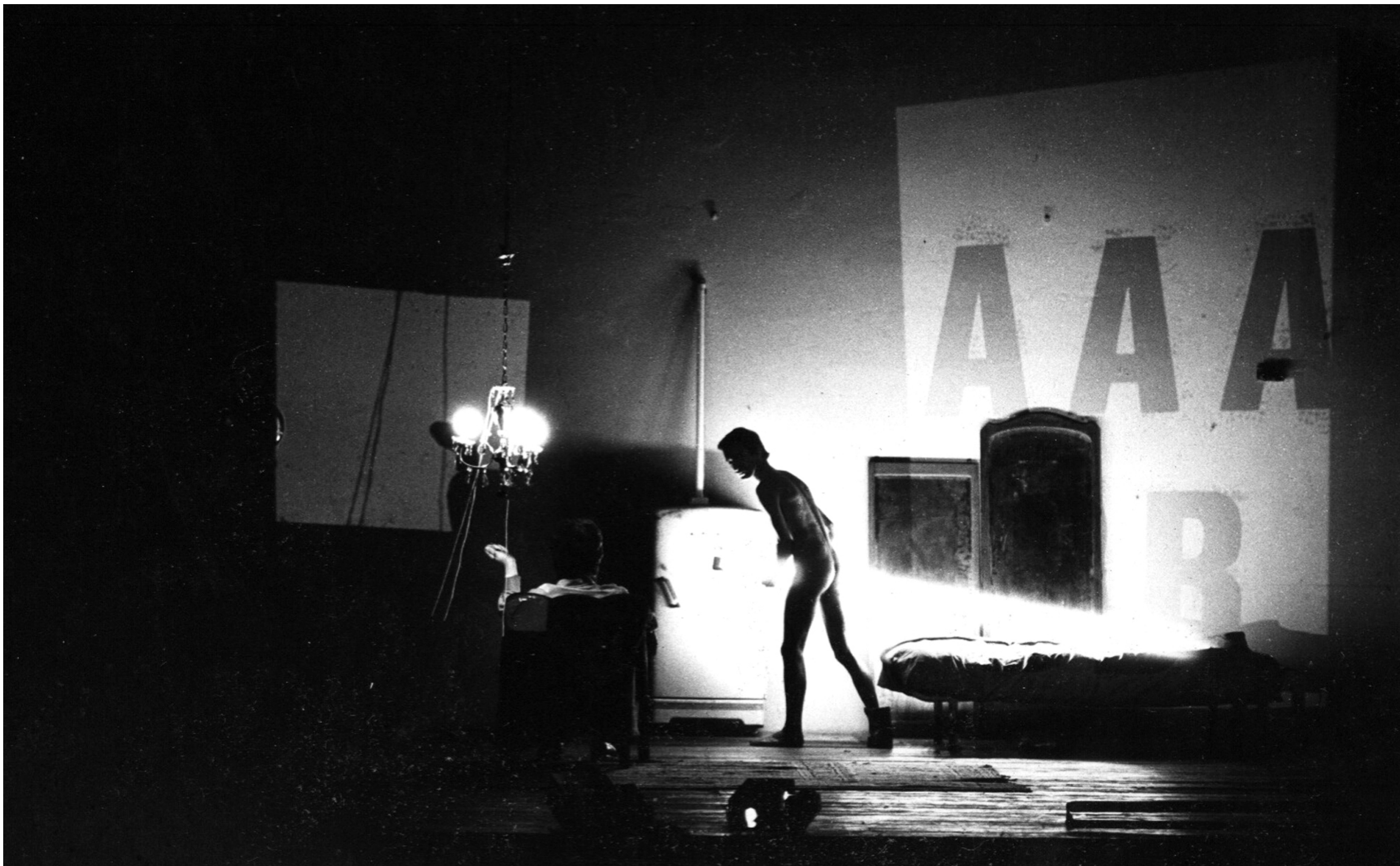
La rivolta degli oggetti in particular constitutes, as mentioned above, the debut work of Gaia Scienza that, for this first show, decides to begin

¹³. Mimma Valentino, *Interview with Federico Tiezzi*, Napoli. 29 January 2008 (unpublished, my translation).

¹⁴. In October 2019 this performance was the subject of a re-enactment with other actors: an experiment of remote reworking a performative event, in tune with what Abramović did.

¹⁵. *Luci della città* is presented in Cosenza (Palestra dello Spirito Santo) on 11 November 1976, in the context of the ‘Postavanguardia/Educational intervention’ exhibition. The performance is the result of the joint work of the Corsetti-Solari-Vanzi trio and Simone Carella’s Stranamore that work respectively on the body and on space, giving life to ‘a sort of successful attempt at occupation. Object, the gym with the floor and the peeling walls, the weak fixtures like milk teeth, the graffiti that are more erotic than politicians of unknown hands’, in Italo Moscati, *La miseria creativa. Cronache del teatro ‘non garantito’* (Bologna: Cappelletti, 1978), p. 24 (my translation).

¹⁶. *Cronache marziane* debuts in Rome, at Beat 72, on 22 March 1977. The title of the work is taken from the homonymous sci-fi novel by Ray Bradbury; integral to the text, centred on the theme of the exploration and colonization of the planet Mars, remains the idea of travel. The performance, in fact, is entrusted to the physical work of five actors who, running, jumping, staging an alleged guerrilla, materially take possession of the scenic space, divided into three portions.



Carrozzone, *Vedute di Porto Said*, 1977.
 Archivio Compagnia Lombardi-Tiezzi.
 © Giuseppe Pino

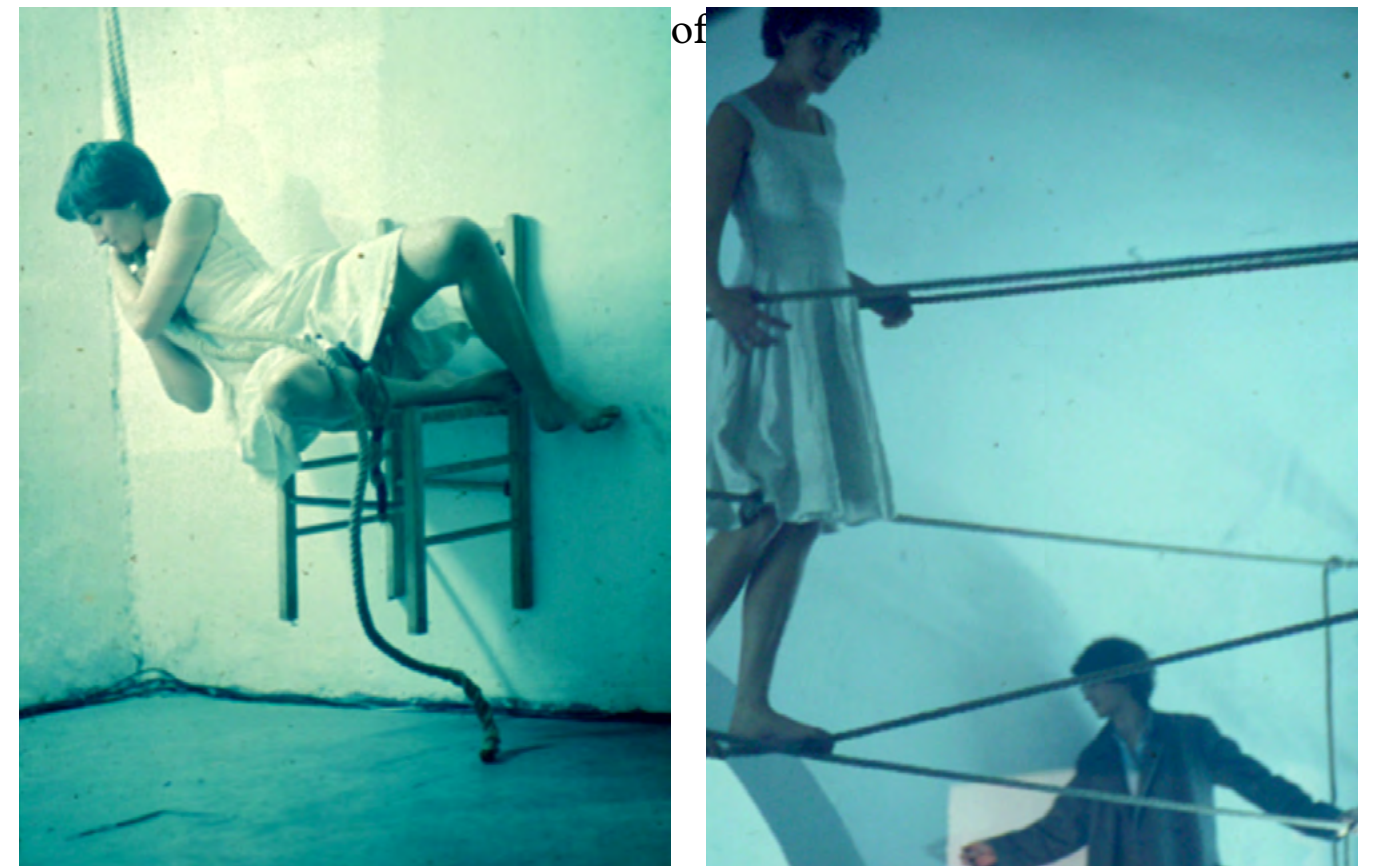
from the homonymous work by Mayakovsky; ‘this text was realised in a very free interpretation where performers were invited to improvise in such a way that each performance might be different from any other’.¹⁷ In fact, the text is used as fragments while the stage writing is substantially determined by the broken gestures of the actors, the discontinuous movements, marked by sharp falls and loss of balance that seem to recover the experiences of post-modern dance and contact improvisation. In this sense, the interrogation of theatrical language first emerges through the presence of the performer that traces signs in space, through the materiality of the body itself that writes movement based on its precariousness.¹⁸ These physical actions, which sometimes push the body to its extreme possibilities, go deliberately beyond the existing connotation, becoming moments of reconnaissance and occupation of a portion of space and time; the choreographic score, in particular, based on the dislocation of simple actions in space and on the relationship between each actor, as well as with the objects, distance the performance from any representational intention.

In this performance — as in the subsequent productions — the process of analysis and dramaturgical writing takes place in a more lyrical way than in Carrozzone’s work: they are ‘sentimental’ actors to the extent that they transfer the discourse of execution on a more exquisitely emotional level.

In both cases, these are actions devoid of any referentiality or narrative glue, addressed only to the investigation of the phonemic dimension of theatrical syntax and to the exhibition of the same language. Eradicated

¹⁷ Gabriella Giannachi and Nick Kaye, *Staging the Post-Avant-Garde: Italian Experimental Performance after 1970* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2002), pp. 108-109.

¹⁸ Giorgio Barberio Corsetti isn’t interested in the dancer’s technical ability or in the mechanical choreography; ‘I’m interested – he stressed – in a theatrical, broken body, a body permeated by all the elements of the stage’, in Giorgio Barberio Corsetti, *L’attore mentale* (Milano: Ubulibri, 1999), p. 100 (my translation).



Gaia Scienza, *La rivolta degli oggetti*, 1976. Archivio Marco Solari.
© Andrea Fiorentino

any denotative depth, it is possible to proceed in a surgical way to the materialistic and dialectical exploration of language: given a time, x , and a real space, there is nothing but that space and that time, studied by a body that does not refer to anything other than itself. As Lorenzo Mango puts it, referring to this phase of research of the Carrozzone (the argument could also be extended to other experiences established in these years), ‘the narrative element [...] completely disappears to be replaced by the exasperated attention towards the concrete reality of the scenic action, removed from its destiny of fiction, while the theatrical language is faced head on as a real event, as scenic “happening”’.¹⁹

¹⁹ Lorenzo Mango, *Teatro di poesia: saggio su Federico Tiezzi* (Roma, Bulzoni, 1994), p. 62 (my translation). In this sense the lesson of the *Happening*, for which many artists linked to the *Postavanguardia* show some interest, is quite strong.



Simone Carella-Gaia Scienza, *Luci della città*, 1976.
Archivio Simone Carella.
© Giorgio Piredda

A similar course can also be found in Simone Carella's shows, which further radicalise the argument, reaching, in some performances, a total rejection of the performer, focusing his investigation instead on light and sound. In *Autodiffamazione* (1976),²⁰ for instance, 'the actor is lost, non-existent [...]. What lives inside the scene is a design illuminated with scans of lights and objects, of measured and exact segments; leading to a transparency, a breath for elusive and concrete variations of luminous movements'.²¹ The Stranamore's leader, after having definitively abolished the literary text and the physical presence of the performer, uses the luminous flux and the sound intervention as tools to make the scenic place a 'pure scan';²² as Silvana Sinisi observes:

The action, devoid of content values and narrative support, does not refer to anything other than itself, to the immanence of its presentification, imposing itself as an ephemeral, self-meaningful presence. With the elimination of any concrete physical presence, with the exception of an empty chair placed on a platform, the real protagonist of the stage happening becomes the light, analysed in all its possible ways of use as a measure of time and an active element that modifies and decomposes the space.²³

Focusing his attention on the *hic et nunc* of the stage reality, Carella uses, therefore, the luminous projections, of slides and films in an analytical way, to 'deconstruct' the representative machine, to sift through a space on the threshold of the void. At the same time the light of a reflector



Gaia Scienza, *Cronache marziane*, 1977. Archivio Marco Solari.
© Andrea Fiorentino

frames and defines, with the range of its variations in tone and intensity, the only true physical presence of the show, the chair placed at the centre of the scene and then reproduced — almost like a Kosuth quote — in its photographic image projected onto the wall. Another fundamental element in the script of the action is the sound that actively intervenes in the construction of the scenic happening, providing 'a continuous flow, autonomous and parallel to the flow of the images, that fixes and freezes time in an atmosphere of absorbed concentration'.²⁴

²⁰. *Autodiffamazione* is presented in Rome, at Beat 72, on January 31, 1976.

²¹. Giuseppe Bartolucci, 'Tra Carella e Leo', *La scrittura scenica*, 16 (1977), 112-116 (p. 112, my translation).

²². Mimma Valentino, *Interview with Simone Carella*, Roma, 25 May 2007 (unpublished, my translation).

²³. Silvana Sinisi, *Dalla parte dell'occhio: esperienze teatrali in Italia 1972-1982* (Roma: Kappa, 1983), p. 42 (my translation).

²⁴. Sinisi, p. 158.

Project, process and product

Light, sound, and space are also the protagonists of Carella's subsequent works; we think, in particular, of *Esempi di lucidità*, a performance based essentially on a single action: the growth of a long cellophane tube which, by gradually inflating, eventually occupies the entire stage. The huge snake is crossed and segmented by beams of light while the recorded sounds of telescopic radio signals are heard. It is an apparently simple stage writing, determined by the study of the real place of action through the luminous movement and the flow of sound; these three elements (light, sound, space) 'speak' an alogical language, resulting in a life of their own, self-referential and independent of the other components.

Similarly, *Morte funesta* (1979) appears as a work of extreme deconstruction, as a structural landslide of the stage code: Carella empties the theatre of the theatre itself, disassembles it through a game of spotlights — the only stage presence.²⁵ In the performance there is no apparent action, at least not in the terms in which we usually find it; a story is missing, actors are missing, a relational dimension or contact is missing. The formal act is merely a demonstration of a mental hypothesis, but, above all, it is the testimony of an absence. It is a programmatic denunciation of the impossibility to represent itself through the reduction of the show itself to the mental dimension of a project of analytic disarticulation of language.

²⁵ The performance is inspired by a text by Dario Bellezza of which only ephemeral traces remain; in fact, the poetic word is reduced to the letters of the alphabet placed on twenty-one light projectors.

The choices Carella made in these works, as well as in the other performances, seem to move in the direction of an abstract theatre, where what matters is not the performance or the realisation of a show, traditionally conceived, but rather the idea that is behind the operation. Moreover, the leader of Stranamore, like the other protagonists of this theatrical season, aims to remove the scene from the representative dimension, eliminating any metaphorical or symbolic halo, denying any reference to fiction or possibility of commodification. The concept of entertainment itself is challenged to the extent that it is rethought according to a modular structure, a series of 'studies' aimed at disintegrating the unity of the work in favour of an assembly of possible constructive solutions. At the same time, the traditional relations of production and use are being eroded; the genetic process of conceptual theatre, in fact, cancels the productive dimension to the extent that it coincides with the show itself, or rather with the performance.²⁶ Putting aside any interest in the aesthetic nature of the scene, the construction of the show is not conceived as an *a priori*, as a process inside or behind the show, but as a real process/show.²⁷ Metaphorically, we could perhaps speak of a 'loud' process because, instead of being brought back to a before or an elsewhere, it is directly exposed for what it is. The process is what the viewer listens to.

²⁶ The works of conceptual theatre do not take into account any mimetic postulate, placing emphasis on the performative dimension and on the materiality of the scenic action with compared to the representative fiction; thus it seems more correct to speak of performance (and not of entertainment or staging).

²⁷ The process/product relationship, understood as a factor in the dismantling of the concept of work that arises within a given cultural context and in a precise historical phase, has its own specificity that does not concern so much the human dynamics of creation but rather an idea of language.



Carrozzone, *Punto di rottura*, 1979.
Archivio Compagnia Lombardi-Tiezzi.
© Antonio Sferlazzo

Having lost its practical purpose and its status as a finished product, the artistic object becomes first and foremost the epiphenomenon of a mental process, the manifestation of an idea already completed and resolved. From this point of view the show is conceived as a trace of the mental processes that preside over the creation of art, revealing itself as a way to transcribe an artistic intuition.

Once again, the reference to the artistic side is quite evident; the conceptual artist, in fact, 'does not produce objects but uses the object as a testimony of his work, the object [...] is the written manifesto of an internal idea, it is the means of communication where instead the design is what concerns him on his own personal level'.²⁸ The focus therefore shifts from objectivity to the mental process, through a process of dematerialisation and abstraction that passes through the systematic analysis of language. In this sense a Duchampian suspension of the functional moment takes place, with an overcoming of the content-meaning pair in favour of a conceptual operation; the show, having lost its mythical aura,²⁹ proposes itself as a 'non-object', as a 'non-show', as the 'witness' who somehow rereads the design data.

On the artistic and theatrical fronts, the artistic value is all contained in the *project*, in the mental dimension, and takes material form through the *process*, that is, the act of doing. Compared to this second moment which, in theatrical terms, coincides with the construction of the show, the language is central, an object-language,³⁰ that talks about itself. This meta-reflection process uses a fundamental mechanism: tautology. A similar procedure is not new to conceptual art; think, for example,

of the famous work by Kosuth, *One and Three Chairs*, in which the chair, the photograph and the definition of the chair constitute a tautological statement about the same object. The same mechanism also recurs in the works of conceptual theatre; in the Carrozzone's *Ombra diurna* (1977),³¹ during the first evening, spectators are greeted by a tautological game: a light beam that is reflected in a mirror, a voice on tape that repeats 'six Italian words engraved on tape'. In this case, tautology is expressed, first, through the game of bounce between the light beam and the mirror, then through the recording of a real datum (the six words claim to be what they are). In some shows, the tautological procedure is already in the title: in *Notte sui tetti* (1977),³² by Gaia Scienza, the title perfectly reflects the action performed by the performers. In both cases, the tautology has a precise function with respect to the conceptual operation put in place, representing an exegetical element in the analytical reading of the object-work.

The monosemy guaranteed by the tautological mechanism is, at least, subjected to verification when the user comes into play. The viewer gives the object new values compared to the primary idea of the artist; the show thus acquires an autonomous role to the extent that it is subject to a process of alienation from its 'producer'. To limit the ambiguous and independent nature of the object, however, the artist underlines the irreproducibility of the here and now, the ephemeral nature of the process. The scenic construction, therefore, cannot be destined for

²⁸ Lorenzo Mango, 'Il teatro senza teatro', in Giuseppe Bartolucci, Lorenzo e Achille Mango (1980), pp. 8-25 (p. 16, my translation).

²⁹ Walter Benjamin, *L'opera d'arte nell'epoca della sua riproducibilità tecnica. Arte e società di massa*, trans. by E. Filippini (Torino: Einaudi, 1966).

³⁰ Roman Jakobson, *Saggi di linguistica generale*, ed. by L. Heilmann (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1976).

³¹ *Ombra diurna* is presented on 21 and 22 December 1977 in Rome, at the former Pastificio Cerere, as part of the 'Initiatives of ii' exhibition. 'Also in this case, as in other performances presented during the Roman event, work is subordinated by the occupation of a specific place; the found *environment* thus determines the characteristics and timing of the action in a decisive way'. Valentino 2015, p. 53 (my translation).

³² *Notte sui tetti* is presented on 17 December 1977 in Rome, in a building in Via Flaminia, again during the 'Initiatives of ii' exhibition. The action is based, once again, on the dialogue between the bodies of the performers who move between a closed place (two rooms of a flat) and an open one (the terrace of the building).

a prolonged and varied existence each evening, not least because of the presence of the single user who becomes an active component in this game — premeditated by the artist — of revealing fiction and language.

Moreover, the viewer is entrusted with a fundamental task: to integrate the linguistic process, retracing the constructive logic backwards, almost as if reading its DNA. In this sense, the show is open — as an explanation, ‘pronounced aloud’, of the artistic object as it is formed — but also closed, to the extent that it calls on the spectator to play a ‘mental’ role, functioning as a tool in decoding the metatheatrical dimension.



Bibliography

- ALBERRO, ALEXANDER AND BLAKE, STIMSON (eds.),** *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999)
- ARGAN, GIULIO CARLO,** *L'arte moderna* (Firenze: Sansoni Editore, 1998)
- BENJAMIN, WALTER,** *L'opera d'arte nell'epoca della sua riproducibilità tecnica. Arte e società di massa*, trans. by E. Filippini (Torino: Einaudi, 1966)
- BARSOTTI, ANNA,** *Il teatro di Toni Servillo* (Corazzano: Titivillus, 2016)
- BARTOLUCCI, GIUSEPPE,** *La scrittura scenica* (Roma: Lerici editore, 1968)
- ‘Dove va l'avanguardia’, *La scrittura scenica*, 14 (1976), 87–92
- 1977. ‘Tra Carella e Leo’, *La scrittura scenica*, 16 (1977), 112–116
- Lorenzo Mango and Achille Mango, *Per un teatro analitico-esistenziale: materiali del teatro di ricerca*, (Torino: Studio Forma, 1980)
- 1983. *Teatro Italiano/Italian Theatre* (Salerno: Editrice 10/17, 1983)
- BARBERIO CORSETTI, GIORGIO,** *L'attore mentale* (Milano: Ubulibri, 1999)
- CAPPELLETTI, DANTE,** *La sperimentazione teatrali in Italia tra norma e devianza* (Torino: Eri, 1981)
- DE MARINIS, MARCO,** *Il nuovo teatro 1947–1970* (Milano: Bompiani, 1987)
- *In cerca dell'attore. Un bilancio del Novecento teatrale* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1993)
- FISCHER-LICHTE, ERIKA,** *Asthetik des Performativen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004)
- GIANNACHI, GABRIELLA AND NICK KAYE,** *Staging the Post-Avant-Garde: Italian Experimental Performance after 1970* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2002)
- GRANDE, MAURIZIO,** *La riscossa di Lucifero. Ideologia e prassi del teatro di sperimentazione in Italia (1976-1984)* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1985)
- JAKOBSON, ROMAN,** *Saggi di linguistica generale*, ed. by L. Heilmann (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1976)

KOSTELANETZ, RICHARD, *The Theatre of Mixed-Means*
(New York: RK Editions, 1968)

KOSUTH, JOSEPH, *Art After Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966–1990* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1969)

KOSUTH, JOSEPH, *L'arte dopo la filosofia: Il significato dell'arte concettuale*, trans. and intro. by G. Guercio (Genova: Edizioni Costa & Nolan, 1989)

LEHMANN, HANS-THIES, *Postdramatisches theater*
(Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Autoren, 1999)

LEWITT, SOL, 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art', *Artforum*, 5.10
(June 1967), 79–83

— **1969**. 'Sentences on Conceptual Art', *Art-Language: The Journal of Conceptual Art*, 1 (May 1969), 11–13. Reprinted in Osborne (2002)

MANGO, LORENZO, *La scena della perdita. Il teatro tra avanguardia e postavanguardia* (Roma: Kappa, 1987)

— **1994**. *Teatro di poesia: saggio su Federico Tiezzi*
(Roma, Bulzoni, 1994)

— **2003**. *La scrittura scenica. Un codice e le sue pratiche nel teatro del Novecento* (Roma: Bulzoni, 2003)

— **2019**. *Il Novecento del teatro. Una storia* (Carocci: Roma, 2019)

MARGIOTTA, SALVATORE, *Il nuovo teatro in Italia 1968–1976*
(Corazzano: Titivillus, 2013)

MOSCATI, ITALO, *La miseria creativa: Cronache del teatro 'non garantito'* (Bologna: Cappelletti, 1978)

MELE, RINO, *Modelli di sperimentazione nel teatro italiano degli anni Settanta* (Roma: Ripostes, 1984)

— **1985**. *Falso Movimento 77–82* (Salerno, Edizioni Taide, 1985)

MENNA, FILIBERTO, *La linea analitica dell'arte moderna*
(Torino: Einaudi, 1975)

PONTE DI PINO, OLIVIERO, *Il nuovo teatro italiano 1975–1988. La ricerca dei gruppi: materiali e documenti*
(Firenze: La Casa Usher, 1988)

QUADRI, FRANCO, *L'avanguardia teatrale in Italia*
(materiali 1960–1976) (Torino: Einaudi, 1977a)

— **1977B**. 'Avanguardia e materialismo', *La scrittura scenica*, 16
(1977b), 108–11

— **1979**. 'Il teatro nel 1976', *La Biennale—Annuario 1978. Eventi del 1976–78*, (Venezia: Archivio storico delle arti contemporanee, 1979), 1287–1297

— **1982**. *Il teatro degli anni Settanta. Tradizione e ricerca*
(Torino: Einaudi, 1982)

— **1984**. *Il teatro degli anni Settanta. Invenzione di un teatro diverso* (Torino: Einaudi, 1984)

RICCIARDI, LAURA, *Mario Martone regista teatrale*
(Napoli: Artstudiopaparo, 2014)

SCHECHNER, RICHARD, *Environmental Theatre*
(New York: Hawthorn Books, 1973)

SINISI, SILVANA, *Dalla parte dell'occhio: esperienze teatrali in Italia 1972–1982* (Roma: Kappa, 1983)

VALENTINI, VALENTINA, *Eventi performativi e nuovi media*
(Roma: Bulzoni, 1987a)

— **1987B** *Teatro in immagine: Audiovisivi per il teatro* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1987b)

— **2015** *Nuovo teatro made in Italy, 1963–2013* (Roma: Bulzoni, 2015)

VALENTINO, MIMMA, *Il nuovo teatro in Italia 1976–1985* (Corazzano: Titivillus, 2015)

VISONE, DANIELA, *La nascita del nuovo teatro in Italia: 1959–1967*
(Corazzano: Titivillus, 2010)