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PERFORMING DANTE: A CONCISE HISTORY OF THE PERFORMATIVE EUROPEAN AND ITALIAN RECEPTION AND AN ANALYSIS OF TWO CENTURIES OF CONTEMPORARY PERFORMATIVE FORTUNE.

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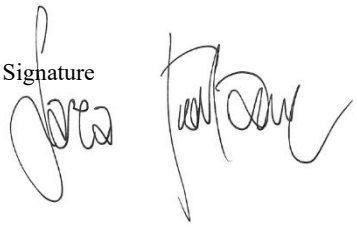

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For the *Commedia*, it was decided to opt for the edition DANTE ALIGHIERI, *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata*, a cura di Giorgio Petrocchi, 4 voll., Firenze, Le Lettere, 1994 [DANTE ALIGHIERI, *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata*, a cura di Giorgio Petrocchi, 3 voll., Milano, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1966-1967].

Here we have chosen to adopt the English translations offered in the *DanteOnline* site directed and managed by the Scientific Committee of the Società Dantesca Italiana (danteonline.it/opere/index.php, last accessed 22/05/2025). Of these translations we only provide here the reference to the work on the *DanteOnline* site, which will not be repeated within the note.

For the works of Dante, as for the rest of the sources, it was chosen to report the quotations in the original, followed by the English translation. Given the diverse nature of the successive sources adopted, for the quotations we have chosen to report in the text the language in which the work was written (e.g. Latin, German, Italian, etc.) followed by the English translation. For lesser-used languages, we will assess the need to also offer the Italian translation of the text in a footnote. Unless otherwise indicated, the English translation is always by the author of the thesis.

Abbreviations

Opere	DANTE ALIGHIERI, *Le Opere*, 7 voll., Roma, Salerno, 2012-.
Commedia	DANTE ALIGHIERI, *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata*, a cura di Giorgio Petrocchi, 4 voll., Firenze, Le Lettere, 1994 [3 voll., Milano, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1966-1967[1]].
Opere/DOL	danteonline.it/opere/index.php (last accessed 22/05/2025)
Botterill/DOL	DANTE ALIGHIERI, *De vulgari eloquentia*, edited and traslated by Steven Botterill, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, versione online: https://www.danteonline.it/opere/index.php?opera=De%20vulgari%20eloquentia%20-%20tr.%20Botterill (last accessed 22/05/2025).
Hollander/DOL	DANTE ALIGHIERI, *The Divine Comedy, Inferno, Purgatorio, Paradiso*, a verse translation by Robert and Jean Hollander, introduction and notes by Robert

	Hollander, 3 voll., New York, Anchor Books, 2007 [New York, Doubleday & Co., 2000[1]], versione online: https://www.danteonline.it/opere/index.php?opera=The%20Divine%20Commedy%20-%20tr.%20Hollander (last accessed 22/05/2025).
Musa/DOL	DANTE ALIGHIERI, *Dante's Vita Nuova*, a translation and an essay by Mark L. Musa, Bloomington & London, Indiana University Press, 1973, versione online:https://www.danteonline.it/opere/index.php?opera=Dante%27s%20Vita%20Nuova%20-%20tr.%20Musa (last accessed 22/05/2025).
Toynbee/DOL	DANTE ALIGHIERI, *The Letters of Dante*, emended text with introduction, translation, notes, and indices and appendix on the cursus by Paget Toynbee, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1966 [1920[1]], versione online: https://www.danteonline.it/opere/index.php?opera=The%20Letters%20of%20Dante%20-%20tr.%20Toynbee (last accessed 22/05/2025).
Foster-Boyde/DOL	DANTE ALIGHIERI, *Dante's Lyric Poetry*, translated from Kenelm Foster and Patrick Boyde, 2 voll., Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1967 [*Rime*, a cura di Michele Barbi, Firenze, Società Dantesca Italiana, 1960], versione online: https://www.danteonline.it/opere/index.php?opera=Dante%27s%20Lyric%20Poetry%20-%20tr.%20Foster-Boyde (last accessed 22/05/2025).
CI	LUIGI RASI, *I Comici Italiani. Biografia, Bibliografia, Iconografia*, 3 voll., Firenze, Fratelli Bocca, 1897.
DBdI	*Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 100 voll., Roma, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 1960-2020, versione online: https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/elenco-opere/Dizionario_Biografico (last accessed 22/05/2025).
ED	*Enciclopedia dantesca*, 6 voll., Roma, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 1970, versione online: https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/elenco-opere/Enciclopedia_Dantesca/V (last accessed 22/05/2025).

INTRODUCTION

We know that the text is not a line of words releasing a single theological meaning (the 'message' of an Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of questions drawn from innumerable centres of culture.
Roland Barthes[1]

Research purposes

The idea for this research project stems from the desire to investigate the national and international reception of Dante Alighieri's *Commedia* and possibly, to a lesser extent, of his other writings in the performing arts.

From the 19th century onwards, there was an unprecedented flowering of reworking of the works of the Florentine poet in the theatrical context, of which we will mention here, by way of example only, the *Dantate*, created by the actor Gustavo Modena, the drama *Francesca da Rimini*, written by Silvio Pellico, and the dance *Dante. Azione coreografica fantastica in 5 atti e 12 quadri*, by Gioacchino Coluzzi. The idea of staging the poetic text for the stage, either in its entirety or in a fragmented manner, was also to be a prerogative of the following two centuries. The 19th century also saw the institutionalisation of the celebration of significant anniversaries, coinciding with the anniversaries of the birth (1265) and death of the Poet (1321), which became occasions to reflect on his thought, adapting it through the customs and cultures of different European countries[2]. To crown this celebratory practice, within which more and more collateral events are created, marking the whole of the 20th century, in 2021, the Italian Ministero della Cultura also instituted the *Dantedì* (25 March), which offers new opportunities for the practice of re-elaborations and spectacular adaptations[3].

In the face of these constantly growing manifestations of interest, historical-critical studies show a certain delay and a rather circumscribed look at the phenomenon, generally concentrating on a particular work, while hardly managing to give an account of its breadth and complexity in the

[1] ROLAND BARTHES, *The Death of the Author*, in ROLAND BARTHES, *Image, Music, Text*, essays selected and translated by Stephen Heath, London, Fontana Press, 1977, pp. 142-148, quotation at p. 146.
[2] See STEFANO JOSSA, *Dantisti, dantofili, dantologi, dantomani e dantofobi nel dibattito estetico (e politico) nell'Italia del primo Novecento*, in GIUSEPPE SANGIRARDI, JEAN MARIE FRITZ (dir.), *Dantesque. Sur les traces du modèle*, Paris, Garnier, 2019, p. 249-266; FULVIO CONTI, *Il Sommo Italiano. Dante e l'identità della nazione*, Roma, Carocci, 2021.
[3] See the relevant page on the Ministry of Culture's website, entitled *Dantedì, il 25 marzo di ogni anno. Una giornata nazionale, già approvata dal Consiglio dei Ministri, dedicata al viaggio nell'aldilà che il Sommo Poeta intraprese colla Divina Commedia. In attesa del 2021 e dei 700 anni dalla morte*, available at: https://biblioteche.cultura.gov.it/it/notizie/notizia/Dantedi-il-25-marzo-di-ogni-anno/ (last accessed 30/04/2025).

historical and geographical frame of reference. In this study, an attempt has been made first to offer a precise examination of the existing literature, also in the European sphere, on Dante's reception in the spectacular sphere, trying to trace the connections of this practice from the fourteenth century to the present day.

Secondly, a number of significant case studies realised between the end of the 20th and the first decades of the 21st century were selected, which testify to the constant reformulation of this artistic operation linked to Dante Alighieri and the different ways in which it is realised by local artists and European realities. Thus, a constellation of performances and events on Dante emerges, the result of a deep bond uniting the different companies or individual artists. On the one hand, there were performances in unusual places and at unusual times, representing a specific link with the history of the Florentine poet; on the other hand, what might seem to be an anomaly, a *unicum* with respect to the calendar system of centenaries and anniversaries, turned out instead to be the key to a framework of reception of Dante's classic poem that is more interested in its own context, regardless of place and time.

If the ultimate aim of this thesis is to give an account of a phenomenon that shows no sign of stopping and that is always articulating itself in a new form, the perspective offered by reception studies and intermedial-transmedial studies (i.e. a constant analysis of the contexts and relations between the parts that are renegotiated and redefined in order to elaborate a new vision of the object), allows us to understand how the message of Dante's work continues to persist despite the passage from one art to another. The continuous interrogation of the classic in function of a re-semanticisation necessitated by the present thus creates a bridge between the past and the future, «a game played according to certain rules»[4]:

> Texts communicate something to readers, and are themselves communicated across time and space. It is appropriate then that the term "reception" is drawn from the lexicon of communications theory, invoking a sender, a message, a receiver- and, crucially, a system of communication, which pre-exists the activities of sender and receiver. Such a system both enables and constrains the possibilities of communication according to its particular social semiotic-technical features or affordances. In fact, acts of reception are shaped not just by readers, not just by texts, but by a complexly interlocking and historically variable set of systems -semiotic, interpretative, technological, material, physiological-cognitive-affective, institutional, ideological, and socio-cultural-which position readers and texts in relation to one another before any encounter, any response, even takes place[5].

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[4] ROLAND BARTHES, *Writing Reading*, in ROLAND BARTHES*, The Rustle of Language*, Berkley/Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1989, pp. 29-32, quotation at p. 31. See also UMBERTO ECO, *The poetics of the open work*, in UMBERTO ECO, *The Role of the Reader. Explorations in the semiotics of texts*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1979, pp. 47-66.

[5] Entry *Reception Theory, Reception History, Reception Studies*, edited by Ika Willis, in Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature, 2021, DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.1004, pp. 1-26, quotation at p. 2. See also IRINA RAJEWSKY, *Percorsi transmediali. Appunti sul potenziale euristico della transmedialità nel campo delle letterature comparate*, in «Between», vol. VIII, n. 16 (*Schermi. Rappresentazioni, immagini, transmedialità*, a cura di F.rancesca Agamennoni, Matteo Rima, Stefano Tani), 2018, pp. 1-30; WERNER WOLF, *Selected Essays on Intermediality (1992–2014). Theory and Typology, Literature-Music Relations, Transmedial Narratology, Miscellaneous Transmedial Phenomena*, edited by Walter Bernhart, Leiden, Brill, 2018; IKA WILLIS, *Reception*, New York/London, Routledge, 2018;

As James Machor points out, «a historical hermeneutics needs to reconstruct the shared patterns of interpretation for a specific historical era»[6].

State of the art of European studies on Dante's performative reception

The performative component of Dante's poetics, which is found above all in his capital work, the *Divine Comedy*, has been the subject of interest since its first creation in the 13th century, as it is the form of the poem itself that is under scrutiny[7]. The first to begin this type of investigation into the nature of the poem, which Alighieri circumscribed to the comic genre, were the medieval commentators (among whom his son Pietro stands out), who questioned Dante's form and style in the face of his chosen subject matter.

Slightly later than these, in terms of interest in spiritual and contemplative topics, in the ways and purposes of using a certain literary and rhetorical style in the construction of an imagery of the Hereafter, are the clerics and preachers, who quickly understand the extraordinary impact that Dante's poetry offers, to support the work of evangelisation and the education of souls, and appropriate it. As recent studies in the field of the history of emotions applied to the enjoyment of works of art

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JAN-NOËL THON, *Transmedial Narratology and Contemporary Media Culture*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2016; ANNE ENDERWITZ, IRINA O. RAJEWSKY (Hrsg.), *Fiktion im Vergleich der Künste und Medien*, Berlin/Boston, De Gruyter, 2016; ADRIAN ATHIQUE, *Transnational Audiences: Media Reception on a Global Scale*, Cambridge/Malden, Polity Press, 2016; FABIENNE LIPTAY, BURCU DOGRAMACI (edited by), *Immersion in the Visual Arts and Media*, Leiden, Brill, 2015; IRINA RAJEWSKY, *Border Talks. The Problematic Status of Media Borders in the Current Debate about Intermediality*, in LARS ELLESTRÖM (edited by), *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp. 51-68; SONIA LIVINGSTONE, RANJANA DAS, *Interpretation/Reception*, in PATRICIA MOY (edited by), *Oxford Bibliographies Online: Communication*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, DOI: 10.1093/obo/9780199756841-0134, pp. 1-27; WERNER WOLF, KATHARINA BANTLEON, JEFF THOSS (editors), *Metareference across Media: Theory and Case Studies. Dedicated to Walter Bernhart on the Occasion of his Retirement*, Leiden, Brill, 2009; WERNER WOLF (edited by), *The Metareferential Turn in Contemporary Arts and Media. Forms, Functions, Attempts at Explanation*, Leiden, Brill, 2011; CHIEL KATTENBELT, *Intermediality in Theatre and Performance: Definitions, Perceptions and Medial Relationships*, in: «Cultura, Lenguaje y Representación/Culture, Language and Representation», n. 5, 2008, pp. 19-29; HENRY JENKINS, *Convergence Culture. Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York/London, New York UP, 2008; ANSGAR NÜNNING, ROY SOMMER, *Diegetic and Mimetic Narrativity: Some further Steps towards a Narratology of Drama*, in JOHN PIER, JOSÉ ANGEL GARCIA LANDA (edited by), *Theorizing Narrativity*, Berlin/New York, De Gruyter, 2008, pp. 331-354; IRINA RAJEWSKY, *Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation. A Literary Perspective on Intermediality*, in «Intermédialités/Intermediality», vol. 6, 2005, pp. 43-64; JANET STAIGER, *Media Reception Studies*, New York, NYU Press, 2005; KIM CHRISTIAN SCHRØDER, KIRSTEN DROTNER, STEPHEN KLINE, CATHERINE MURRAY, *Researching audiences*, London, Edward Arnold Publishers, 2003.

[6] JAMES L. MACHOR, *Reading fiction in antebellum America: informed response and reception histories 1820-1865*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 2011, p. 7.

[7] See MARIA MAŚLANKA-SORO, *La teatralità del disumanar nell'Inferno dantesco sullo sfondo della "vocazione drammatica" di Dante*, in «Dante e l'arte», n. 1, 2014, pp. 11-30; PIERMARIO VESCOVO, *Dante e il "genere drammatico"*, in «Dante e l'arte», n. 1, 2014, pp. 45-66; PIERMARIO VESCOVO, *A viva voce. Percorsi del genere drammatico*, Venezia, Marsilio, 2015, pp. 103-136; PAOLO PIZZIMENTO, *Il Teatro della Commedia per uno studio degli aspetti performativi nel poema sacro*, in «Mantichora», a. 9, n. 9, 2019, pp. 107-129; PIERMARIO VESCOVO, *Il "teatro" della Commedia. Dante e il genere drammatico*, Roma, Carocci, 2023.

emphasise, medieval sacred art was an indispensable means of dialogue between the largely uncultured and illiterate population and the salvific message of Christ. For its educational and religious dimension, sacred art determined the need to resort to a performative component to build a communicative dynamic between artistic representation and the penitent, framed in a logic of codified personal and collective ritual[8].

Dante's fortune, and above all that of the *Commedia*, is then articulated on a double track: a cultured and literary one, whereby he and his works are carefully studied in elite circles through quotation; and a popular, more humble one, whereby they are offered through a repertoire of images, characters and episodes, and are memorised, and often represented, both in the simplicity of everyday family life and in festivity, a true collective memory.

Since the end of the 19th century, scholars such as Carlo Del Balzo[9] have written erudite works that give an account of the broad and already articulated phenomenon of Dante's reception within the arts. In his fifteen volumes of *Poesie di mille autori intorno a Dante Alighieri*, Del Balzo offers an initial reconnaissance of the presence of Dante's poetry within different types of artistic adaptations, framing dramaturgies and performative productions (broadly understood) as practices of rewriting Dante's poetic text of reference. His work is still a valuable tool today and remains one of the earliest attempts at the historical recognition of Dante's reception in the theatrical and artistic spheres. In the 20th century, his work was continued by various critical studies and by circumscribed descriptions of certain spectacular events until arriving at works that attempted an initial systematisation of the worldwide fortune of Alighieri's poetry and that sometimes also considered the spectacular reception. See, for example, the fundamental volume *Dante nel mondo*, edited by Vittore Branca and Ettore Caccia[10].

These early investigations mark the second half of the 20th century and offer a track to interrogate the new globalised context in which Dante's reception operates. They also offer an initial sign of awareness of what artists were already helping to create: a new way of reading Dante's universal message through the increasingly diversified tools and technologies available.

The actual interest in Dante's fortune in the spectacular sphere, however, is to be attributed to the New Millennium. With the emergence of studies reflecting on the reception of medievalism[11],

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[8] See CARLA M. BINO, CORINNA RICASOLI (edited by), *Performing the Sacred. Christian representation and the arts*, Leiden/Boston, Brill, 2023. This will be discussed at length in Chapter 1.

[9] See CARLO DEL BALZO, *Poesie di mille autori intorno a Dante Alighieri / raccolte ed ordinate cronologicamente con note storiche, bibliografiche e biografiche*, 15 voll., Roma, Forzani, 1889-1909.

[10] See VITTORE BRANCA, ETTORE CACCIA (a cura di), *Dante nel mondo: raccolta di studi promossa dall'Associazione Internazionale per gli studi di lingua e letteratura italiana*, Firenze, L. S. Olschki, 1965.

[11] See ROBERTA CAPELLI (a cura di), *Fortune del Medioevo. Studi sul Medievalismo*, Alessandria, Dell'Orso, 2023; TOMMASO DI CARPEGNA FALCONIERI, PIERRE SAVY, LILA YAWN (edited by), *Middle Ages without borders: a conversation on medievalism/Medioevo senza frontiere: una conversazione sul medievalismo/Moyen Âge sans frontières:*

also the sector of Dante criticism began to question with renewed interest the different ways used by artists all over the world to adapt and utilise the works of Alighieri, especially the *Commedia*. International conferences and non-fiction investigations are analysing the phenomenon of a *Dante Pop*, describing a popular reception of the works of the Florentine poet and addressing the implications of the *new media* in the enjoyment of Dante's classic and its dissemination[12] . The fact that, unlike the other classics of the world canon, Alighieri's work is substantially different from the target artistic product and presents, precisely by virtue of this otherness, an initial stumbling block in approaching its complexity, constitutes a test with which artists want to grapple, giving everyone the opportunity to approach the poem or the other Dantean texts from every possible perspective, since there is no framework, no genre to respect, constituting a merit and perhaps the true stimulus to artistic adventure, to enterprise.

In contemporary times, on the one hand, the work of artists constantly intersects with Dante and his works; on the other, scholars still struggle to understand and describe a vast phenomenon with blurred boundaries. What function Dante and the *Comedy* have today, is a question that artists are the first to answer, intercepting a desire on the part of the public to recognise themselves in an icon that works, even in the most unthinkable contexts, such as those of marketing and advertising.

Symptomatic of the decision to investigate Dante's artistic reception in its broadest spectrum in order to understand new developments in contemporary approaches to the medieval classic is the establishment in 2014 of the interdisciplinary open-access journal «Dante e l'arte», promoted by the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. The first issue focuses precisely on Dante's reception in the theatre, and thus opens the door to a new crop of studies, starting from the assumption that Dante is a fixed point, which forms an imaginary, and to which an imaginary inescapably tends:

> Un punto di arrivo, perché Dante raccoglie nella sua opera tutto il sapere iconografico-letterario della sua età per trasferirlo nella costruzione di immagini potentissime che sono rimaste incise nella memoria dell'umanità; un punto di partenza,

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une conversation sur le médiévalisme, Rome, École française de Rome, 2021; UMBERTO LONGO, *"Tra un manifesto e lo specchio". Piccola storia del medievalismo tra diaframmi, maniere e pretesti*, in «Bullettino dell'Istituto Storico Italiano per Il Medio Evo», n. 122, 2020, pp. 383-405; TOMMASO DI CARPEGNA FALCONIERI, *Cinque altri modi di sognare il medioevo. Addenda a un testo celebre*, in «Bullettino dell'Istituto Storico Italiano per Il Medio Evo», n. 122, 2020, pp. 407-433; TOMMASO DI CARPEGNA FALCONIERI, RICCARDO FACCHINI (a cura di), *Medievalismi italiani. (Secoli XIX-XXI)*, Roma, Gangemi, 2018; PATRICK K. FAZIOLI, *The Mirror of the Medieval. An Anthropology of the Western Historical Imagination*, New York/Oxford, Berghahn, 2017; RICHARD UTZ, *Medievalism. A Manifesto*, Kalamazoo/Bradford, Arc Humanities Press, 2017; PATRICK J. GEARY, GABOR KLANICZAY (edited by), *Manufacturing Middle Ages: Entangled History of Medievalism in 19th Century Europe*, Leiden, Brill, 2013; TOMMASO DI CARPEGNA FALCONIERI, *Medioevo militante. La politica di oggi alle prese con barbari e crociati*, Torino, Einaudi, 2011.

[12] See GIUSEPPE ANTONELLI (a cura di), *Dante. Un'epopea pop*, Cinisello Balsamo, Silvana Editoriale S.p.A., 2021; STEFANO LAZZARIN, JÉRÔME DUTEL (a cura di), *Dante pop. La Commedia nella letteratura e nella cultura popolare contemporanea*, Torino, LU.CE, 2021[Manziana, Vecchiarelli, 2018[1]]; TRIFONE GARGANO, *Dante pop. Canzoni e cantautori*, illustrazioni di Carlo Volsa, Bari, Progedit, 2018; FRANCO MORETTI, *Opere Mondo. Saggio sulla forma epica dal Faust a Cent'anni di solitudine*, Torino, Einaudi, 1994.

perché tutte le discipline artistiche, in special modo quelle visive, si sono appropriate di queste immagini e le hanno rese celebri, facendo della *Commedia* un serbatoio dell'immaginario umano lungo tutto il suo percorso vitale[13].

A point of arrival, because Dante gathered in his work all the iconographic-literary knowledge of his age to transfer it into the construction of powerful images that have remained engraved in the memory of humankind; a point of departure, because all artistic disciplines, especially the visual ones, have appropriated these images and made them famous, making The *Comedy* a reservoir of the human imagination throughout its life.

From 2014 onwards, therefore, studies on Dante's theatrical reception see an initial flowering, but they still remain dedicated to single spectacular events, to single companies, privileging the textual reprise component of the Dante poem of reference and not particularly delving into the performative elements as a whole. The first international conferences and specific seminars focusing on Dante's reception within pop culture resulted in publications that, under different signs, investigated how Dante and his works influenced the various arts, focusing mainly on the theatricality of the *Divine Comedy*[14]. In preparation for the centenary in 2021, studies are focusing even more on this theme.

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[13] *Presentazione*, in «Dante e l'arte», n. 1, 2014, pp. 5-8, quotation at p. 5.

[14] See GIOVANNI FALLANI, *La 'Divina Commedia' come esperienza teatrale*, in «L'Alighieri. Rassegna bibliografica dantesca», vol. XVIII, 1960, pp. 26-41; GIOVANNI FALLANI, *Dante moderno*, Ravenna, Longo, 1979, pp. 105-124; AMILCARE A. IANNUCCI, *Dante, television, and education*, in «Quaderni d'italianistica», vol. 10, 1989, pp. 1-33; RINO CAPUTO, *5. Dante 'a mente' e 'ad alta voce'. L'esecuzione della Commedia nella radiotelevisione italiana dell'ultimo decennio*, in RINO CAPUTO, *Il pane orzato. Saggi di lettura intorno all'opera di Dante Alighieri*, Roma, Euroma, 2003, pp. 119-131; AMILCARE A. IANNUCCI (a cura di), *Dante, Cinema and Television*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2004; PAOLO DE VENTURA, *Dramma e dialogo nella "Commedia" di Dante: il linguaggio della mimesi per un resoconto dall'aldilà*, Napoli, Liguori, 2007; ERMINIA ARDISSINO, SABRINA STROPPA TOMASI (edited by), *Dialoghi con Dante: Riscritture e ricodificazioni della 'Commedia'*, Roma, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2007; ANTONELLA CARLO, *La vocazione teatrale della Divina Commedia: quando la letteratura diventa dramma*, in «Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen», n. 162, 2010, pp. 334-347; GIULIANA NUVOLI (a cura di), *Lezioni su Dante*, Bologna, ArchetipoLibri, 2011, pp. 241-277 (sezione *Dante fra musica, danza e teatro*); MANUELE GRAGNOLATI, FABIO CAMILLETTI, FABIAN LAMPART (edited by), *Metamorphosing Dante. Appropriations, Manipulations, and Rewritings in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*, Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2011; PAOLO DE VENTURA, *Dante e Casella, allusione e performanza*, in «Dante: Rivista Internazionale di Studi su Dante Alighieri», a. IX, 2012, pp. 43-58; TABEA KRETSCHMANN, *»Höllenmaschine/Wunschapparat«: Analysen ausgewählter Neubearbeitungen von Dantes Divina Commedia*, Transcript, 2012; PATRIZIA BERTINI MALGARINI, NICOLA MEROLA, CATERINA VERBARO (a cura di), *La funzione Dante e i paradigmi della modernità*, Atti del 26° Convegno Internazionale della MOD (Lumsa, Roma, 10-13 giugno 2014), Pisa, ETS, 2015; FRANCESCO SAVERIO MINERVINI, *Dante a teatro. Drammaturgia dantesca tra Ottocento e Novecento*, in «Sinestesieonline/Il Parlaggio», a. V (Numero Speciale "Tavolozza Teatrale All'italiana: Omaggio A Dario Fo"), novembre 2016, pp. 1-13; STEPHANIE HEIMGARTNER, MONIKA SCHMITZ-EMANS (herausgegeben von), *Komparatistische Perspektiven auf Dantes „Divina Commedia": Lektüren, Transformationen und Visualisierungen*, Berlin/Boston, de Gruyter, 2017; STEFANO LAZZARIN, JÉRÔME DUTEL (a cura di), *Dante Pop. La Divina Commedia nella letteratura e nella cultura popolare contemporanea*, cit.; ROSSEND ARQUÉS COROMINAS, *Dante and the performing arts*, in MANUELE GRAGNOLATI, ELENA LOMBARDI, FRANCESCA SOUTHERDEN (edited by), *The Oxford Handbook of Dante*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2021, pp. 602-618; ALBERTO CASADEI, PAOLO GERVASI, *La voce di Dante. Performance dantesche tra teatro, tv e nuovi media*, Bologna, Luca Sossella, 2021; MARIO CIMINI (a cura di), *L'altro Dante: processi di attualizzazione della Commedia*, Atti del Seminario internazionale di studi (24-25 novembre 2021), Lanciano, Carabba, 2022; SARA FONTANA, *Coreografando Dante. Riflessioni sull'orizzonte coreico europeo contemporaneo*, in ANTONELLA BRAIDA, JOSEPH CADEDDU, GIUSEPPE SANGIRARDI (a cura di), *La mondializzazione di Dante I: Europa*, Atti del Convegno Internazionale (Nancy, 7-8 ottobre 2021), 2022, pp. 191-210; SARA FONTANA, *Dante on Stage*, in FRANCESCO CIABATTONI, SIMONE MARCHESI (edited by), *Dante Alive. Essays on a cultural icon*, London/New York, Routledge, 2023, pp. 130-147; LUCA BANI, RAUL CALZONI, THOMAS PERSICO (a cura di), *Traduzioni, Tradizioni e Rivisitazioni dell'Opera di Dante. In memoria di Marco Sirtori*, Napoli, La scuola di Pitagora editrice, 2023; ROBERTA ALBANO, GIANLUCA BOCCHINO, MARIA VENUSO (a cura di), *Dante performatico: letture in diffrazione tra letteratura e performing arts*, Bologna, Piretti, 2023; ACCADEMIA NAZIONALE DEI LINCEI, *La ricezione della Commedia dai manoscritti ai media*, Atti

Finding itself directly involved in an international framework of studies of Dante's reception in the spectacular sphere, our research aims to offer an update to what has already been published previously and to provide new perspectives.

Research Methodology

In order to carry out a systematic and comprehensive review of the existing bibliography on Dante's theatrical reception, our study has adopted a historiographical and archival methodological approach. After collecting and sifting through the critical literature in the theatrical and sometimes also artistic spheres, an attempt has been made to unify and integrate the fragmentary studies to offer a new, sufficiently systematic European framework.

Given the interdisciplinary nature of this work, many different sources and disciplines contribute to the creation of an organic picture of the spread and articulation of the representative fortune of Dante's work. Bringing different approaches into dialogue with each other, particularly in the European context, has taken some time. The investigation of the sources has made it possible to bring to light important historical passages that cut across the history of literature and that of theatre; passages that make it possible to understand how, from their first publication, Dante's works, and principally the *Commedia*, have circulated on the European continent and contributed to the creation of countless adaptations.

The countries most involved in our interdisciplinary investigation have been Italy, France, England and Germany. The fact is not surprising, as these countries historically played a leading role in the reception of Dante Alighieri tout court, being among the first to create translations of Dante's texts and to promote studies dedicated to the Poet and his works. At the same time, the presence of such a lively interest is reflected in adaptations of various kinds, affecting the performative field from the 14th century to the 2000s.

If some performances had already been examined, this work showed that they were not just extemporaneous and isolated events, but, based on studies in theatre history and cultural studies, they proved to be part of transversal models of processes that recognised Dante as a favourite object of re-

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del Convegno internazionale (Roma, 23-25 marzo 2022), Roma, Bardi, 2023; ANTONIO ATTISANI, STEFANO TOMASSINI, *L'umanità mancata: Dante e la scena*, dossier fotografico di Jacopo Benassi, Torino, Accademia University Press, 2023; ANDREA SIMONE, *Dante in scena. Itinerari performativi della Commedia (secoli XVIII-XXI)*, Firenze, Tab, 2024; ANDREA FABIAN, DONATO PIROVANO, EMANUELE DE LUCA, PAOLO DESOGUS, SILVIO ALOVISIO (sous la direction), *Dante et les arts performatifs: corps dansants, théâtre et cinéma*, Sesto San Giovanni, Éditions Mimésis, 2024. See also the issues n. 1 (2014) and n. 9 (2022) of the journal «Dante e l'arte», devoted to Dante's reception in the performing arts; and also the Dossier *Dante in scena*, a cura di Marco Menini, Roberto Rizzente, Francesco Tei, in «Hystrio», n. 1 gennaio-marzo, 2021, pp. 33-61.

elaboration for being part of the European artistic canon. Moreover, in this historiographical examination, it was possible to trace new case studies pertaining to states particularly close to those already listed, such as Holland, the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries, as directly influenced by Anglo-Saxon culture. From the 19th century onwards, examples of Dante's performances were also found in the Americas, where many Italian emigrants lived and various Italian companies went on tour.

As mentioned above, alongside a historical-biographical review, this research set out to investigate Dante's performative reception from the second half of the 20th century onwards, focusing in particular on the 1980s up to 2021, the second centenary of the new Millennium. The second half of the 20th century, in fact, saw the development of innumerable spectacular forms, in theatre as in dance. Between the 1980s and 1990s, new companies were created and artists emerged who marked the history of the performing arts. At the same time, new technologies became increasingly important in the artistic sphere, determining new frontiers to be crossed for theatrical creation. Dante continues to be an author of particular interest not only for Italy, but for the whole of Europe, and soon for the world.

With regard to the selection of performances to be analysed between the second half of the twentieth century and the first decades of the twenty first-century, historiographic and archival research was preceded by a wide-ranging data collection in order to narrow the field of investigation from which to start. From this initial examination, three types of shows emerged in the context of Dante's work: the *Lecturae Dantis*; the representations of each individual cantica of the *Comedy* in the form of the "trilogy"; and the selective adaptations of the *Comedy*.

As regards the *Lecturae Dantis*, alongside the usual lectern readings by male performers, there is also the appearance of female performers. The new millennium effectively opens the door to the voicing of Alighieri's text by actresses, who are today the most innovative and interesting readers of the *Commedia*, thus defining a new model for the future.

The second half of the 20th century saw for the first time the realisation of trilogies dedicated to the *Commedia*, experiments that had never seen the light of day before, as only shows dedicated to the first cantica, the *Inferno*, were staged. With the trilogy of the Magazzini Criminali in 1989, a new way of adapting the classic was inaugurated, which will continue until 2021 and beyond. Many of the artists involved in the preparation of this first Dante venture went on to make further personal adaptations and were involved in other Dante productions. Since that first example, Dante's trilogies have become an interesting model to be re-proposed in the face of the desire to deal not only with Dante's poetics but also with these particular events and the poetics of the artists who originated them.

Moreover, from the year 2000 onwards, Dante has become also a particularly interesting theme for dance performances. These are new forms of adaptation, which do not require a confrontation with the verses of the text. Through the gestural code, in fact, Dante acquires a new form in the artistic choreographic heritage, allowing artists in Europe and around the world to confront his universal message and to give a wider audience the opportunity to transcend the limits imposed by knowledge of the Italian language. Dance stages a daring transmutation of Dante's verses, allowing original outcomes both from classical academic techniques and in the most diverse contemporary forms.

This second part of the research dedicated to the contemporary performative reception was developed in three stages: the search for new sources, i.e. new performances of Dante, a selection of works and their subsequent analysis and interpretation. A first stumbling block in this side of the research came in seeing some of these productions on video, or live. If one tried to see directly live performances of a Dantesque nature organised during the doctoral years, for the productions no longer scheduled, one tried to track down as much existing and available photographic and audio-visual material as possible that could give an account of the performances already staged, comparing these materials with indirect sources and reviews. In the most fortunate cases, individual publications and articles referring to them were also found. Together with these sources, an attempt was made to get in direct contact with the artists who devised the performance, managing to share dialogues with them and to discuss certain passages of the performances.

Despite various difficulties and moments of uncertainty due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the particularly stringent measures between the years 2020 and 2021, with impactful consequences until 2022, over the four years of doctoral research I have attended more than fifty performances with a Dante theme (Figure 1). Naturally, most of these refer to the Italian context: these are performances not only produced and realised in the most characteristic Dantean cities (such as Florence, Ravenna and Verona), but scattered all over the peninsula. Alongside these, I have attended a vast number of productions in Germany, England, France, Holland and the Netherlands. Almost half of the productions seen live were realised to coincide with the centenary in 2021, being largely supported by initiatives promoted for the occasion in all territories.

In the face of the restrictions imposed and the difficulties in finding news, the COVID pandemic has contributed to the cancellation of several productions planned for that occasion, decreeing the end or a rescheduling, sometimes resulting in the cancellation of some Dante-related projects. Compared to the not-so-distant past, where the real unknown for artists was the funds to finance the venture, the global pandemic has forever changed the production and artistic system of international events, leading to a significant change in the tendency to adapt Dante.

Some performances seen were not included in this research, as they were produced after the *post quem* limit necessary for a proper analysis and dialogue with the artists. This was the case for some Portuguese or Swiss productions. A not secondary limitation was also determined by language barriers. Where the main European languages did not allow research, there might be examples of which one was not aware. In fact, in order to be able to discover performances of Dante, an initial search was conducted on the programmes of particularly significant festivals and events on the international scene, sometimes already the subject of previous studies. Then I moved on to a survey of national and local festivals, attempting to circumscribe the areas of interest by using Dante anniversaries as particularly relevant anniversaries to observe the emergence of spectacular Dante adaptations in proximity to such dates.

In order to be able to intercept these performances, it is necessary to have direct knowledge of the networks of production and dissemination of these performances, or to have a clear idea of who the artistic subjects are. In-depth knowledge of a foreign language, in this case German, as well as English, and knowledge of these networks have been decisive in finding new avenues of research. Conversely, where direct knowledge was scarcer (e.g. in Spanish, Scandinavian, or Balkan languages), an attempt was made to use the search approaches offered by the technological tools implemented by AI tools to try to intercept new releases and productions. To this end, *Google alerts* were created and set up using keywords that could alert the user to any kind of news concerning Dante's performances in Italian, German, English, French, Spanish and Russian.

With this integrated research, which ideally aimed at setting up a database of national and foreign performances and events on Dante, it was possible to intercept a number of performances (in this case the *alerts* mainly signalled press reviews and publicity for events), together with various publications and articles, directly or indirectly implicated in the research, which gave the writer the opportunity to broaden the range of action. Particularly important during the research phase, especially during the long pandemic period, were the social networks and the pages dedicated to the various artists and companies, which soon became relevant sources, not only for the presence of photographic and video material dedicated to Dante's performances but also as a space for interaction and a repository of insights and content for understanding the documentation of various production and realisation phases concerning the dramaturgical elaboration and creation of the performance.

By virtue of the number of performances collected, divided between past events to be analysed at a historical level thanks to existing sources, and new material found through this systematic research campaign of Dante's performances with consequent fieldwork and interviews, in the phase of organising the material for the thesis, choices were therefore made in order to offer an organic picture of contemporary European reception of Dante in the theatrical sphere. Priority was given to

performances that had proven to be historically relevant points of tangency within the European framework. Individual case studies were then chosen, personally seen by the author of this thesis, which constitute a continuation of the phenomenon of the performative reception of Dante through the new frontiers of art.

As far as contemporary productions are concerned, not being able to benefit from the historical distance necessary for concrete assimilation of theatrical phenomena within a certain frame of reference, a detailed description has been offered, trying to highlight the processes and contingencies that led to their creation.

Research Outcomes

Given the above premises, the results of the research were divided into two parts: a brief history of the Italian and European theatrical reception of Dante and an analysis of two centuries of contemporary theatrical reception of Dante. The first part was, in turn, divided into two chapters. Beginning with the earliest reception between the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the first chapter highlighted how the figure of Alighieri and his works immediately proposed a wealth of episodes, characters and imagery that were exploited not only by European literature but by the entire artistic panorama, initially influencing the figurative arts and then moving on to the performative arts. Following this chronological axis, one can observe how, from an initial Italian reception, Dante's poetry was soon welcomed into the broader European canon of poets. Add to this the strong interest it received in the ecclesiastical sphere, which decided to take inspiration from Dante's codification of the Afterlife, in order to offer a repertoire of vices and virtues to refer to during liturgies.

The second chapter, on the other hand, shows how the eighteenth century first, and then the nineteenth, were the centuries that decreed the full rebirth of Alighieri's poetry within the European canon, often quoted in the works of Italian and foreign authors. In these centuries we begin to observe the appearance of dramas and tragedies dedicated to characters and episodes from the *Commedia*: if in the 18th century there is a simple revival of single elements, the 19th century instead produces multiple dramas dedicated to the most famous characters, such as Count Ugolino della Gherardesca and Francesca da Rimini. Finally, dramas also appear dedicated to the Poet Alighieri himself, who becomes a paladin and hero of the Risorgimento.

During the 19th century, the verses of the *Commedia* were declaimed by great actors and actresses in the theatre and in theme evenings in the form of recitals, or new performances, as in the case of Gustavo Modena's famous *Dantate*. Thanks to their association with the figure of the exiled

poet, actors and actresses received glory and honour in the reading of his verses, but also in evenings of poetic improvisation. The otherworldly vicissitudes also became themes for opera and ballet, and the figure of Dante began to be used as an emblem for the struggle for liberation from political oppression, moving from Italian hero to European and international hero.

Also, thanks to the work carried out by Andrea Simone in his doctoral thesis, which focused on Dante's reception in the art of the Great Actor of the 19th century[15], this first historical-geographical examination shows how the practice of staging Dante is not only a prerogative of the Italian cultural heritage but must be brought back to a fully European dimension.

Reciting Dante's verses and adapting them for performance are reproposed in the 20th and 21st centuries, making use of the new tools offered by technological and artistic developments. Of all of Alighieri's works, the *Commedia* proves to be the object of greatest interest, since the imagery described in it, its universal message and its formal structure offer a particularly congenial basis from which to set up a performance: «Dante, more than most writers of his time and earlier, but also more than many later authors, put himself on stage and placed his life at the centre of his works»[16].

The second part of the thesis is developed in three chapters. By re-proposing the fundamental division between the continuous practice of voicing and staging Dante, it is observed how the contemporary scene offers more diversified modes of staging between theatre and dance than observed in previous centuries. It has, therefore, been decided to offer an in-depth look at contemporary *Lecturae Dantis* in chapter three, while chapter four focuses on theatrical performances of Dante's works and chapter five is devoted to dance staging.

The *Lecturae Dantis*, realised between the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, make it possible to reaffirm how the practice of giving voice to Dante is destined never to end, as a founding pillar of the practice of dramatising Dante's text. A red thread links the grand Italian acting tradition of the nineteenth century to the first and second half of the twentieth century, proposing new exemplary performers who decide to make *lectura* a practice of their own artistic habit. In the second half of the twentieth century, some of the most important actors on the Italian scene, made famous in the international context above all for their film careers, took on Dante's verses: Vittorio Gassman, Carmelo Bene and Roberto Benigni.

As the new millennium dawns, the female universe also becomes the protagonist of the *Lecturae Dantis*. The actresses discussed in chapter three are all direct pupils, or declared as such, of

[15] See ANDREA SIMONE, *Dante in scena. Itinerari performativi della Commedia (secoli XVIII-XXI)*, cit.
[16] «Dante, più della maggior parte degli scrittori del suo tempo e precedenti, ma anche più di molti autori posteriori, si è messo in scena e ha posto la sua vita al centro delle sue opere», ELISA BRILLI, GIULIANO MILANI, *Diventare Dante. Le ragioni di una biografia sperimentale*, in «La Ricerca Loescher», a. 9, n. 20 maggio, 2021, pp. 28-32, quotation at p. 29. See also ELISA BRILLI, GIULIANO MILANI, *Vite Nuove. Biografia e Autobiografia di Dante*, Roma, Carocci, 2021.

the protagonists of the second half of the twentieth century, and almost all of them are members of companies that stage Dante in *ad hoc* shows, bringing back in the spotlight the example of the great nineteenth-century actresses, who presented Dante either by interpreting Dante's characters in shows dedicated to them, or in recitals, in which particular cantos were read with musical accompaniment. In this first examination of the female voicing of Dante, emphasis is placed on the new modes of expression that performers bring to the fore, also in the face of the further frontiers offered by streaming platforms during the worldwide pandemic of COVID-19.

Directly related is the topic to which the fourth chapter is devoted: a review of new late twentieth-century ways of staging Dante's works within spoken-word theatre performances. In contrast to the late 19th and early 20th century, there is now a growing desire to deal with the entirety of the *Comedy*, no longer limited to the single cantica of *Inferno*. In the second half of the 20th century, the first attempts at stage adaptation of the entire *Comedy* began to take place, resulting in the trilogy of the Magazzini Criminali, from 1989 to 1991. The success of this first trilogy gave rise to a practice of staging Dante's works that, until the centenary of Dante's birth in 2021, will be articulated in the most diverse dramaturgical modalities, confronting the innovations brought by Nuovo Teatro, post-modern theatre, participatory theatre, and inclusive theatre, by some of the most influential and important companies on the Italian and international scene.

Along with these adaptations, in which several artists participate and support each other's performances, we decided to give space to a fortuitous case study discovered in the Belgian context and realised in the same years as the first Dante operation of Magazzini Criminali. An artistic collective from the city of Gent, Kollektiv D&A, staged *Vita Nova, Het Nieuwe Leven, naar Dante Alighieri* in 1994, an adaptation that was in a way unique. Firstly, due to the fact that it was written in the Flemish language of the region, similar to Dutch, but with its own linguistic peculiarities; secondly, because it is one of the very few twentieth-century adaptations of a 'minor' Dante work, i.e. the prosimetrum *Vita Nova*, which in the entire history of European theatrical reception has very few representations, and provides an unexpected key to the interest and versatility of the artistic model Dante offered to companies.

Chapter four concludes with an assessment of some of the theatrical adaptations offered in the run-up to Dante's centenary in 2021, showing how the impetus of the exceptional event has encouraged several new artists to engage not only with Dante's poetry but also with earlier productions. These performances paint a picture that also demonstrates the multifaceted character of contemporary Dante reception, permeated by new media and capable of incorporating the most innovative ways of staging, just as Elin Diamond states:

While a performance embeds traces of other performances, it also produces an experience whose interpretation only partially depends on previous experience. Hence the terminology of "re" in discussion of performance, as in remember, *reinscribe*, reconfigure, reiterate, restore. "Re" acknowledges the pre-existing discursive field, the repetition within the performative present, but "figure", "script", and "iterate" assert the possibility of something that *excesses* our knowledge, that alters the shape of sites and imagines new unsuspected subject positions[17]

The fifth chapter, as mentioned, is devoted entirely to Dante's adaptations for dance. The analysis offered here highlights, in particular, the European character of Dante's reception. The companies chosen for this last analysis were identified from Italy, Germany, England and Holland and all present points of tangency. The Festival, understood as a space of knowledge in which different practices and modes of representation converge, becomes a crossroads of connection for these companies. From this artistic forge, widely documentable collaborations and cross-pollination phenomena emerge, which make it possible to trace the approach to Dante from the early 2000s to beyond the centenary of 2021. Having chosen to observe certain companies through the lens of Dante's reception has also made it possible to trace contacts and passages of artists between the companies, to observe how the staging choices of each are developed.

Particularly important for the choice of certain companies have been the recent studies by Roberto Serafide Fratini and Stefano Tomassini, who initiated a systematic census of the adaptation of Dante's works in the rich panorama of dance. In this chapter, their choices are complemented by the analysis of new representative proposals.

Final assessment and future perspectives

At the end of this research, we are now able to propose some definite lines with which Dante's reception on stage has had to deal. Together with a congruous number of artistic operations produced following precise requests from a selected clientele (intended to intercept the occasion of Dante's celebrations and institutionalised anniversaries), from the historical reconstruction in the first part and the analysis and interpretation of the contemporary in the second, we can observe how this need to approach Dante emerges from the primordial desire for confrontation with those who have decided to stage their own personal declaration of poetics. Dante, especially in the *Comedy*, offers his audience and himself a declaration of what it means to make art and what it means to live in tune with one's own artistic ethics, tuning production to one's own creed, right to the end, without compromise.

Over time, those who decided to stage Dante always had to deal with both his fortune and those who had previously performed the same operation. From the dialogue between the artists

[17] ELIN DIAMOND, *Writing Performance*, London, Routledge, 1995, p. 2.

involved and the companies, it emerged that they all had a particular figurative reference or performer in mind in addition to Dante's Poem. Since Dante mentions several other artists in his *Comedy*, reserving a principal place for the Latin poet Virgil, who inspired him in the form and style for the writing of his poem, it is not surprising that it is precisely in the quotation at and comparison of arts and artists that Dante's adaptation on stage is played out:

> Tu se' lo mio maestro e 'l mio autore,
> tu se' solo colui da cu' io tolsi
> lo bello stilo che m'ha fatto onore[18].

In this sense, Dante conforms to a canon that includes not only literary works, but also religious works, such as those of the Church Fathers, thus building an encyclopaedia of the world known to him, and he goes further, attributing prophetic value to his own words according to the model of the *visiones* and journeys made by mystics. Every artist follows in the steps of those who have preceded him/her: to decide to cross Dante with one's art is to pay homage to one's masters, contributing to the construction of a constant network of manifest and profound interconnections between past and present arts, with an eye to the future. In the case of our research, we have been able to observe how in every century and in every country Dante's model has been used to touch the most sensitive chords of one's present: from the investigation of the Afterlife to the definition of a model of citizen, up to a concrete *modus operandi* to make oneself a participant in resistance and a witness to crimes against humanity.

After the extraordinary development of the theatrical reception in the 19th century, one observes how, in the 20th century, theatre began to unhinge the traditional theatrical structure, questioning all the codes inherited, starting with the place of performance and its conventions. In this transitional phase, especially in Italy, where the role of the director is being defined in opposition to the prevailing theatrical model based on the artistry of great actors, there is a rejection of spoken word theatre in order to seek new masters and a New Theatre. As a result of this artistic context and an unstable political climate, the Dantesque productions of this particular historical moment become the most important, the same ones that the companies of the 21st century resort to for a real confrontation.

If the predominance of dramaturgical construction shifts from an exclusive focus on the verbal component to a more inclusive one of visual, scenographic and gestural components, Dante and his works offer a universal message and a gallery of characters and imagery with a strong impact, leaving the artist complete freedom in how to construct his or her own adaptation. Since the end of the 1990s, contemporary theatre, thanks to Dante, has been redefining ways and spaces of doing theatre, resorting to new approaches to look at the classics and to question its own present.

[18] *If*. I, vv. 85-87.

As Marvin Carlson argues, postmodern theatre, which saw its flowering at the end of the 20th century, uses the quotation and re-use of pre-existing materials as the basis of its dramaturgical structure, crossing and re-semantising previous elements to give them new life: «postmodern drama and theatre has tended to favor the conscious reuse of material haunted by memory, but in an ironic and self-conscious manner»[19]. This characteristic of the "haunted stage" is well reflected in this practice of retaking Dante, which is an ever-new way of reappropriating a collective memory and using it for the new context in which the company and the artist operate.

At the conclusion of this research path, we can state that Dante, in the artistic-theatrical field, becomes the key to an investigation of the world and of oneself, determining a political stance and a declaration of poetics. In our opinion, Dante is not only resorted to out of necessity, and sometimes objectively for convenience, in what remains a market of entertainment as well as art, but also to try to say, as the writer Italo Calvino said, what *Inferno* is not, to give form to the ineffable and offer a message of hope and compassion to humanity:

L'inferno dei viventi non è qualcosa che sarà: se ce n'è uno è quello che è già qui, l'inferno che abitiamo tutti i giorni, che formiano stando insieme. Due modi ci sono per non soffrirne. Il primo riesce facile a molti: accettare l'inferno e diventarne parte fino al punto di non vederlo più. Il secondo è rischioso ed esige attenzione e approfondimento continui: cercare e saper riconoscere chi e che cosa, in mezzo all'inferno, non è inferno, e farlo durare, e dargli spazio[20].

The inferno of the living is not something that will be; if there is one, it is what is already here, the inferno where we live every day, that we form by being together. There are two ways to escape suffering it. The first is easy for many: accept the inferno and become such a part of it that you can no longer see it. The second is risky and demands constant vigilance and apprehension: seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space[21].

The eternal hope conveyed by Dante's subject matter, a «living fountainhead»[22] that never fails to articulate new possibilities for in-depth study, is also supported by the new avenues of enquiry that the research conducted and described thus far has brought to light, determining new research themes that have already been initiated and hopefully will be pursued in the future.

For example, the fundamental cultural process, and still in some ways obscure, happened between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The perspective offered by the multifaceted figure of the German Ludwig Tieck made it possible to discern *in nuce* many of the elements of approach to the adaptation of Dante's work and of the new dramaturgical approaches that would later find mature declination in the late 19th century and with the director's theatre, demonstrating how the

[19] MARVIN CARLSON, *The haunted stage. The Theatre as Memory Machine*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2011 [2003(1)], p. 14.
[20] ITALO CALVINO, *Le città invisibili*, Torino, Einaudi, 1972, p. 170.
[21] ITALO CALVINO, *The Invisible Cities*, translated from the Italian by William Weaver, Orlando, Harcourt Brace & Company, 1974, p. 165.
[22] «fontana vivace», *Pd.* XXXIII, v. 12.

German reception of Dante still has much to say as a mirror of a more articulated artistic and literary practice[23].

Equally relevant and a source of unexpected insights was the turn of the century between the 19th and 20th centuries, as it was possible to observe how every theatre theorist, along with great playwrights, crossed paths and productions with Dante's fortune, dedicating entire works to the Florentine poet. The artists mentioned within the thesis would each require further individual study, as the limited space offered by this work only begins to outline a panorama that, for reasons of force majeure, could not be exhaustively analysed.

For example, with reference to this period, an initial study is currently being published on the little-known yet extremely significant figure of the English theorist, pedagogue and playwright Emily Underdown, who published her dramas under the pseudonym Norley Chester[24]. Her proposal of an adaptation of Dante's *Vita Nova* in the form of a play makes it possible to investigate a case study of considerable interest, placing it within the history of Dante's reception in late Victorian England and, moreover, offering particular suggestions for investigating Dante's fortunes in the light of gender studies.

Furthermore, due to the numerous points of contact found in European Festivals, and mainly in the decade 1970-1980 for the definition of Nuovo Teatro in Italy, further studies investigating the contacts between American avant-gardes touring Europe and the Italian artists already described in this thesis may be important in the future.

Last but not least, thanks to the activity undertaken for the PRIN project *Dante in the Contemporaneity. Theatrical Rewritings*, it has become evident how useful it is to create digital tools to make the data that emerged from our research usable and potentially implementable. Creating a database where information on the adaptations of Dante that took place in the 20th century and the New Millennium can be brought together makes it possible, first of all, to have an updatable and open tool where the research work that emerged from the doctoral thesis can be brought to light, creating

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[23] Following on from the discussion in Chapter 2 of this thesis, an initial in-depth study of Ludwig Tieck's production was proposed during the study days *La letteratura italiana del Settecento e dell'Ottocento. La ricerca delle giovani studiose e dei giovani studiosi* (University of Verona, 10-12/02/2025), organised by the RRR-Rivoluzione, Restaurazione e Risorgimento research group of the Associazione Italiana degli Italianisti, with a contribution entitled *Il teatro di Carlo Gozzi nella drammaturgia romantica di Ludwig Tieck*.

[24] Departing from an initial discussion on the English artist and his adaptation of Dante, placed in chapter two of this thesis, an initial in-depth study was presented under the title *Dante and Beatrice: an unfaithful love-story drama in Victorian English society* at the international conference *Dante's Global Female Public: Readers, Writers and Collectors* (University of Warwick, 12-13/09/2024), which will subsequently be published in an *online special issue* of the journal «Comparative Critical Studies» in early 2027. Part of this research was also presented within the panel *Adattamenti danteschi/1: drammaturgia della vita e dell'opera dantesca* (curated by Sara Fontana) of the exhibition curated by Federica Coluzzi, *Eredi di Beatrice. Come le scrittrici italiane hanno letto, interpretato e raccontato Dante fra Otto e Novecento (1830-1921)* at the Library of the Centro Dantesco dei Frati Minori Conventuali in Ravenna (22/11/2024-27/02/2025), which can also be viewed online at: https://mint-shrew.lnx.warwick.ac.uk/s/dante-s-female-public/item-set/5310 (xxx).

catalogue entries for each Dante performance and for each artist involved with the technical data of the performance, a brief description of it and a direct reference to the site of the artist or company. Consulting this constantly updated archive can offer an immediate and easy-to-use picture for a varied public, becoming a potentially useful tool for artists, to continue the practice of creating this type of Dante production, but also for those researchers and teachers who wish to benefit from it by offering tools and ideas also for more interdisciplinary and innovative didactics. The *Osservatorio Dante* database is thus only one of the many dissemination outcomes made possible by the thesis presented here.

Only the future, as Alighieri states, will be able to give reason to certain instances that have yet to mature in the existing creative and cultural context, offering that distance that allows an objective analysis of the object of study. Until its conclusion, this research wanted to follow the example of the Poet, in continuing to pursue its own research mission: «se tu segui tua stella, non puoi fallire a glorioso porto»[25].

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[25] *If*. XV, vv. 55-56.

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FIRST PART

A CONCISE HISTORY OF THE PERFORMATIVE EUROPEAN AND ITALIAN RECEPTION OF DANTE

FIRST CHAPTER
FROM THE 14TH TO THE 17TH CENTURY

1.1. The theatrical metaphor of life

XLII. [1] Appresso questo sonetto apparve a me una mirabile visione, ne la quale io vidi cose che mi fecero proporre di non dire più di questa benedetta, infino a tanto che io potesse più degnamente trattare di lei. [2] E di venire a ciò io studio quanto posso, sì com'ella sa veracemente; sì che, se piacere sarà di colui a cui tutte le cose vivono, che la mia vita duri per alquanti anni, io spero di dire di lei quello che mai non fue detto d'alcuna; [3] e poi piaccia a colui che è Sire de la cortesia, che la mia anima sen possa gire a vedere la gloria de la sua donna, cioè di quella benedetta Beatrice, la quale gloriosamente mira ne la faccia di colui *qui est per omnia secula benedictus. Amen* [1].

XLII. [1] After I wrote this sonnet there came to me a miraculous vision in which I saw things that made me resolve to say no more about this blessed one until I would be capable of writing about her in a nobler way. [2] To achieve this I am striving as hard as I can, and this she truly knows. Accordingly, if it be the pleasure of Him through whom all things live that my life continue for a few more years, I hope to write of her that which has never been written of any other woman. [3] And then may it please the One who is the Lord of graciousness that my soul ascend to behold the glory of its lady, that is, of that blessed Beatrice, who in glory contemplates the countenance of the One *qui est per omnia secula benedictus*[2].

In the conclusion of the *Vita Nova*, the poet Dante Alighieri declares how a new text, with higher inspiration, will lead him to deal again with his love for Beatrice in an attempt to ascend to the artistic summit he had so far failed to reach. It was only at the start of the writing of the three canticles and the conclusion in exile of his poem «to which both Heaven and earth have set their hand»[3] that this task was completed. At the time, Dante was certainly not aware

[1] DANTE ALIGHIERI, *Vita Nuova - Rime*, a cura di Donato Pirovano e Marco Grimaldi, con l'introduzione di Enrico Malato, 2 tomi, in DANTE ALIGHIERI, *Le Opere*, 7 voll., Roma, Salerno, 2012- (from now on *Opere*), vol. I, tomo I (*Vita Nuova, Le Rime della Vita Nuova e altre Rime del tempo della Vita Nuova*, 2015), XLII, [1]-[3], pp. 287-289.

[2] DANTE ALIGHIERI, *Dante's Vita Nuova*, a translation and an essay by Mark L. Musa, Bloomington & London, Indiana University Press, 1973 (from now on Musa_DOL), XLII, [1]-[3].

For the works of Dante, as for the rest of the sources, it was chosen to report the quotations in the original, followed by the English translation. Given the diverse nature of the successive sources adopted, for the quotations we have chosen to report in the text the language in which the work was written (e.g. Latin, German, Italian, etc.) followed by the English translation. For lesser-used languages, we will assess the need to also offer the Italian translation of the text in a footnote. Unless otherwise indicated, the English translation is always by the author of this thesis.

[3] For the *Commedia,* we decided to opt for the DANTE ALIGHIERI, *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata*, a cura di Giorgio Petrocchi, 4 voll., Firenze, Le Lettere, 1994 [Milan, Mondadori, 1966-1967[1]]. As a reference translation from among the two available on the *DanteOnline* website, we decided to opt for DANTE ALIGHIERI, *The Divine Comedy, Inferno, Purgatorio, Paradiso*, a verse translation by Robert and Jean Hollander, introduction and notes by Robert Hollander, 3 voll., New York, Anchor Books, 2007 [New York, Doubleday & Co., 2000[1]] (henceforth Hollander_DOL). For all references to the *Comedy*, only the canticle and verse number will be made explicit as usual. For the quoted verse: «al quale ha posto mano e cielo e terra», *Pd. XXV*, v. 2.

of the disruptive force of his poetic production. Still, in *Epistle XIII*, entrusting *Paradise* to the lord of Verona, Cangrande della Scala[4], he finds the need to declare the extent of the poem he has composed and to explain in detail how to read its text:

X. [28] Libri titulus est: «Incipit Comedia Dantis Alagherii, Florentini natione non moribus». Ad cuius notitiam sciendum est quod comedia dicitur a 'comos' 'quod est' villa et 'oda' quod est cantus, unde comedia quasi 'villanus cantus'. [29] et est comedia genus quoddam poetice narrationis ab omnibus aliis differens. Differt ergo a tragedia in materia per hoc, quod tragedia in principio est admirabilis et quieta et in fine seu exitu fetida et horribilis; et dicitur propter hoc a 'tragos', quod est hircus, et 'oda', quasi 'cantus hircinus', idest fetidus ad modum hirci, ut patet per Senecam in suis tragediis. Comedia veron inchoat asperitatem alicuius rei, sed eius materia prospere terminatur, ut patet per Terentium in suis comediis. Et hinc consueverunt dictatores quidam in suis salutationibus dicere loco salutis "tragicum principium et comicum finem". [30] Similiter differunt in modo loquendi: elate et sublime tragedia, comedia vero remisse et humiliter, sicut vult Oratius in sua *Poetria*, ubi licentiat aliquando comicos ut tragedos loqui, et sic e converso:

> Interdum tamen et vocem comedia tollit,
> iratusque Chremes túmido delitigat ore,
> et tragicus plerumque dolet sermone pedestri
> Telephus et Peleus, et cetera.

[31] Et per hoc patet quod *Comedia* dicitur presens opus. Nam si ad materiam respiciamus, a principio horribilis et fetida est, quia Infernus, in fine prospera et desiderabilis et grata, quia Paradisus; 'si' ad modum loquendi, remissus est modus et humilis, quia locutio vulgaris, in quia et muliercule comunicant. Et sic patet quare *Comedia* dicitur[5].

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[4] Without entering here into the merits of the ecdotic debate on the possible attribution or otherwise of the *Epistle* to the hand of the poet, see among many the studies by ALBERTO CASADEI, *Sempre contro l'autenticità dell'epistola a Cangrande*, in «Studi danteschi», a. LXXXI, 2016, pp. 215-245; ALBERTO CASADEI, *Altri accertamenti e punti critici*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2019; PAOLO PELLEGRINI, *Dante e l'Epistola a Cangrande. Tra storia della filologia e storia dell'editoria*, in «StEFI: Studi di erudizione e filologia italiana», a. IX, 2020, pp. 249-273; ANTONIO MONTEFUSCO, GIULIANO MILANI (edited by), *Le lettere di Dante. Ambienti culturali, contesti storici e circolazione dei saperi*, Berlin/Boston, De Gruyter, 2020; LUCA AZZETTA, *Le ragioni della filologia nell'attribuzione a Dante dell'Epistola a Cangrande*, in MARCO BERISSO, MONICA BERTÉ, SIMONA BRAMBILLA, CORRADO CALENDA, CLAUDIA CORfiATI, DANIELA GIONTA, CLAUDIO VELA (a cura di), *Le filologie della letteratura italiana. Modelli, esperienze, prospettive*, Atti del Convegno internazionale (Roma, 28-30 novembre 2019), Firenze, Società dei Filologi della Letteratura Italiana, 2021, pp. 11-29; DANTE ALIGHIERI, *Epistola a Cangrande*, a cura di Luca Azzetta, Roma-Padova, Antenore, 2024.

[5] «X. [28] Il titolo del libro è: «Inizia la Commedia di Dante Alighieri, fiorentino di nascita, non di costumi». Per la sua conoscenza bisogna sapere che commedia si dice da 'comos', cioè villaggio, e 'oda', cioè canto, onde commedia quasi 'canto di villani'. [29] E la commedia è un certo genere di narrazione poetica che differisce da tutti gli altri. Differisce dunque dalla tragedia nella materia per questo, che la tragedia all'inizio è ammirabile e quieta, e alla fine o in conclusione è fetida e orribile; e si dice per questo da 'tragos', che è il capro, e 'oda', quasi 'canto del capro', cioè fetido come un capro, come è chiaro attraverso Seneca nelle sue tragedie. La commedia invece inizia con l'asprezza di una situazione, ma la sua materia si conclude felicemente, come è chiaro attraverso Terenzio nelle sue commedie. E da qui alcuni dettatori hanno preso l'abitudine di dire nelle loro formule di saluto al posto dell'augurio di salute: «tragico principio e comica fine». [30] Allo stesso modo differiscono nel modo di esprimersi: in modo alto e sublime la tragedia, la commedia in modo dimesso e umile, così come vuole Orazio nella sua *Poetica*, dove dà licenza che talvolta i comici si esprimano come i tragici, e viceversa: Talvolta tuttavia anche la commedia innalza la voce, | e irato Cremete disputa con roboanti parole, | e generalmente si dolgono con parole dimesse i tragici | Telefo e Peleo, ecc. [31] E per questo è chiaro perché la presente opera è detta *Commedia*. Infatti, se guardiamo attentamente alla materia, da principio è orribile e fetida, perché è l'inferno, alla fine è prospera, desiderabile e gradita, perché tratta è il paradiso; se al modo di esprimersi, il modo è dimesso e umile, perché è la lingua volgare, nella quale comunicano anche le donnette. E così è chiaro perché è detta *Commedia*», DANTE ALIGHIERI, *Epistole – Egloge – Questio de aqua et terra*, a cura di Marco Baglio, Luca Azzetta, Marco Petoletti e Michele Rinaldi, con l'introduzione di Andrea Mazzucchi, in *Opere*, vol. V (2016), XIII, X, [28] - [31], pp 358-367.

[10] 27. The title of the book is 'Here begins the Comedy of Dante Alighieri, a Florentine by birth, not by disposition'. For the understanding of which it must be noted that 'comedy' is so called from comos, a village, and oda, a song; whence comedy is as it was a 'rustic song'. 28. Now comedy is a certain kind of poetical narration which differs from all others. It differs, then, from tragedy in its subject-matter, in that tragedy at the beginning is admirable and placid, but at the end or issue is foul and horrible. And tragedy is so called from tragos, a goat, and oda; as it were a 'goat-song', that is to say foul like a goat, as appears from the tragedies of Seneca. Whereas comedy begins with sundry adverse conditions, but ends happily, as appears from the comedies of Terence. And for this reason it is the custom of some writers in their salutation to say by way of greeting: 'a tragic beginning and a comic ending to you! 29. Tragedy and comedy differ likewise in their style of language; for that of tragedy is high-flown and sublime, while that of comedy is unstudied and lowly. And this is implied by Horace in the Art of Poetry, where he grants that the comedian may on occasion use the language of tragedy, and vice versa:

> Yet sometimes comedy her voice will raise,
> And angry Chremes scold with swelling phrase;
> And prosy periods oft our ears assail
> When Telephus and Peleus tell their tragic tale.

30. And from this it is clear that the present work is to be described as a comedy. For if we consider the subject-matter, at the beginning it is horrible and foul, as being Hell; but at the close it is happy, desirable, and pleasing, as being Paradise. As regards the style of language, the style is unstudied and lowly, as being in the vulgar tongue, in which even women-folk hold their talk. And hence it, it is evident why the work is called a comedy[6].

For Dante, the work realised is to be defined as comedy primarily because of the subject matter it deals with. Ascribing to the late Latin and later medieval practice, which had rarefied the boundaries between narrative and dramaturgy[7], and had consigned to the oral practice of the public *lecturae* much of the theatre of classical ascendancy, poets promoted a widespread practice of reading their text aloud from a *pulpitum*, in front of a more or less packed audience, in the first person or entrusting themselves to a *lector*. In the *Epistle*, Dante defines himself as a *lector* and already offers a key to the ways and levels in which his work is to be read and interpreted.

In the mediaeval context, performance artists are figures with unclear connotations and multiple professions who are activated according to the needs of their clients in the private and public contexts. In this regard, Sandra Pietrini rightly recalls how at the time «the idea of the actor as the player of a dramatic character was far from being obvious»[8] and again that «the figure of the actor is stretched indeterminately and unsettled, that is, it tends to shatter into a kaleidoscope of partial functions»[9].

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[6] DANTE ALIGHIERI, *The Letters of Dante*, emended text with introduction, translation, notes, and indices and appendix on the cursus by Paget Toynbee, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1966 [1920] (henceforth Toynbee/DOL), letter XIII, X [27-30].

[7] See SANDRA PIETRINI, *Spettacoli e immaginario teatrale nel medioevo*, Roma, Bulzoni, 2001, pp. 105-131. See also the more recent SANDRA PIETRINI, *Edifici teatrali e fantastici del Medioevo*, Alessandria, Edizioni Dell'Orso, 2022.

[8] «[…] l'idea dell'attore come interprete di un personaggio drammatico era tutt'altro che ovvia», ivi, p. 243.

[9] «[…] la figura dell'attore si estende in modo indeterminato e si scompagina, cioè tende a frantumarsi in un caleidoscopio di funzioni parziali», *ibidem*.

Thus, the choice made by Alighieri in restricting his work to the theatrical genre of comedy is grafted onto a basic problem that the present study only examines in its final results: the Middle Ages is a historical period characterised by pluralism of forms, eclecticism in productions and substantial differentiation in the use of functional terms from late antique culture. For example, in this era, the words theatre or actor can indicate one thing, now the other. In addition to the purely stylistic decision to openly declare his text a comedy, Dante makes a choice of language, openly asserting how the illustrious vernacular is now the preferred language for dealing with such lofty and noteworthy topics and, equally, how the vernacular itself must be a language that has as its intended user the audience of *muliercule*, which includes not only the women but rather a segment of the population that embraces as many people as possible, without differentiating them by gender or class.

The choice to ascribe his work to the genre of comedy, at that time, appears denotative, a mere indicator of subject matter, rather than stage practice, thus justifying in *De Vulgari Eloquentia* the search for an ideal language to deal with topics that veer from the sad to the happy and that wish to be told in a humble and plain language:

[3] Est enim cantio, secundum verum nominis significatum, ipse canendi actus vel passio, sicut lectio passio vel actus legendi. Sed divaricemus quod dictum est, utrum videlicet hec sit cantio prout est actus, vel prout est passio[10].

[3] Let us therefore find out what a canzone is, and what we mean when we say 'canzone'. A canzone, according to the true meaning of the word cantio, is an act of singing, in an active or passive sense, just as lectio means an act of reading, in an active or passive sense. But let me define more precisely what I have just said, according, that is, to whether this act of singing is active or passive[11].

Thus, the *Commedia* is identified with the height and depth of the *cantio*, for which the Poet chooses the illustrious vernacular as the vehicular language to satisfy the largest possible audience, and is grafted into the tradition of the performability of poetry, which still strictly considers itself "dramatic", but remains to all intents and purposes «contaminated in the Middle Ages by narrative intrusions that make it a kind of mixed form»[12].

The public reading aloud of poetic texts followed in the wake of that oral tradition from which a large part of Romance lyric productions was articulated. Not only Jesters, minstrels,

[10] «La canzone è, secondo il vero significato della parola, l'atto stesso di cantare nella sua accezione attiva o passiva, così come "lettura" è l'azione, attiva o passiva, del leggere. Distinguiamo ora quanto detto, secondo che tale canzone sia intesa come azione attiva o come azione passiva», DANTE ALIGHIERI, *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, a cura di Enrico Fenzi, con la collaborazione di Luciano Formisano e Francesco Montuori, in *Opere*, vol. III (2012), vol. II, VIII [3], pp. 200-201.

[11] DANTE ALIGHIERI, *De vulgari eloquentia*, edited and translated by Steven Botterill, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996 (henceforth Botterill/DOL), vol. II, VIII [3].

[12] «contaminata nel medioevo da intromissioni narrative che la rendono una specie di forma mista», PIERMARIO VESCOVO, *Dante e il "genere drammatico"*, in «Dante e l'arte», n. 1, 2014, pp. 45-66, quote on p. 48.

and fools were some of the more or less learned performers who could be ascribed among those who used these convivial practices in which a *cantor* performed the *carmina*. We may think that Dante Alighieri himself witnessed these forms of popular *performances* and consequently decided to connote the *Commedia* with intrinsic elements of theatricality and performability[13], so that a listening audience could not only understand what was being narrated (thanks to the poem's linguistic choices), but moreover could follow the thread of the discourse without

[13] For a more in-depth look at Dante's theatrical potential, see also: GIOVANNI FALLANI, *La 'Divina Commedia' come esperienza teatrale*, in «L'Alighieri. Rassegna bibliografica dantesca», vol. XVIII, 1960, pp. 26-41; GIOVANNI FALLANI, *Dante moderno*, Ravenna, Longo, 1979, pp. 105-124; AMILCARE A. IANNUCCI, *Dante, television, and education*, in «Quaderni d'italianistica», vol. 10, 1989, pp. 1-33; RINO CAPUTO, *5. Dante 'a mente' e 'ad alta voce'. L'esecuzione della Commedia nella radiotelevisione italiana dell'ultimo decennio*, in RINO CAPUTO, *Il pane orzato. Saggi di lettura intorno all'opera di Dante Alighieri*, Roma, Euroma, 2003, pp. 119-131; AMILCARE A. IANNUCCI (a cura di), *Dante, Cinema and Television*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2004; PAOLO DE VENTURA, *Dramma e dialogo nella "Commedia" di Dante: il linguaggio della mimesi per un resoconto dall'aldilà*, Napoli, Liguori, 2007; ERMINIA ARDISSINO, SABRINA STROPPA TOMASI (edited by), *Dialoghi con Dante: Riscritture e ricodificazioni della 'Commedia'*, Roma, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2007; ANTONELLA CARLO, *La vocazione teatrale della Divina Commedia: quando la letteratura diventa dramma*, in «Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen», n. 162, 2010, pp. 334-347; GIULIANA NUVOLI (a cura di), *Lezioni su Dante*, Bologna, ArchetipoLibri, 2011, pp. 241-277 (sezione *Dante fra musica, danza e teatro*); MANUELE GRAGNOLATI, FABIO CAMILLETTI, FABIAN LAMPART (edited by), *Metamorphosing Dante. Appropriations, Manipulations, and Rewritings in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*, Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2011; PAOLO DE VENTURA, *Dante e Casella, allusione e performanza*, in «Dante: Rivista Internazionale di Studi su Dante Alighieri», a. IX, 2012, pp. 43-58; TABEA KRETSCHMANN, *»Höllenmaschine/Wunschapparat«: Analysen ausgewählter Neubearbeitungen von Dantes Divina Commedia*, Transcript, 2012; PATRIZIA BERTINI MALGARINI, NICOLA MEROLA, CATERINA VERBARO (a cura di), *La funzione Dante e i paradigmi della modernità*, Atti del 26° Convegno Internazionale della MOD (Lumsa, Roma, 10-13 giugno 2014), Pisa, ETS, 2015; FRANCESCO SAVERIO MINERVINI, *Dante a teatro. Drammaturgia dantesca tra Ottocento e Novecento*, in «Sinestesieonline/Il Parlaggio», a. V (Numero Speciale "Tavolozza Teatrale All'italiana: Omaggio A Dario Fo"), novembre 2016, pp. 1-13; STEPHANIE HEIMGARTNER, MONIKA SCHMITZ-EMANS (herausgegeben von), *Komparatistische Perspektiven auf Dantes „Divina Commedia": Lektüren, Transformationen und Visualisierungen*, Berlin/Boston, de Gruyter, 2017; STEFANO LAZZARIN, JÉRÔME DUTEL (a cura di), *Dante Pop. La Divina Commedia nella letteratura e nella cultura popolare contemporanea*, Manziana, Vecchiarelli, 2018; ROSSEND ARQUÉS COROMINAS, *Dante and the performing arts*, in MANUELE GRAGNOLATI, ELENA LOMBARDI, FRANCESCA SOUTHERDEN (edited by), *The Oxford Handbook of Dante*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2021, pp. 602-618; ALBERTO CASADEI, PAOLO GERVASI, *La voce di Dante. Performance dantesche tra teatro, tv e nuovi media*, Bologna, Luca Sossella, 2021; MARIO CIMINI (a cura di), *L'altro Dante: processi di attualizzazione della Commedia*, Atti del Seminario internazionale di studi (24-25 novembre 2021), Lanciano, Carabba, 2022; SARA FONTANA, *Dante on Stage*, in FRANCESCO CIABATTONI, SIMONE MARCHESI (edited by), *Dante Alive. Essays on a cultural icon*, London/New York, Routledge, 2023, pp. 130-147; LUCA BANI, RAUL CALZONI, THOMAS PERSICO (a cura di), *Traduzioni, Tradizioni e Rivisitazioni dell'Opera di Dante. In memoria di Marco Sirtori*, Napoli, La scuola di Pitagora editrice, 2023; ROBERTA ALBANO, GIANLUCA BOCCHINO, MARIA VENUSO (a cura di), *Dante performatico: letture in diffrazione tra letteratura e performing arts*, Bologna, Piretti, 2023; ACCADEMIA NAZIONALE DEI LINCEI, *La ricezione della Commedia dai manoscritti ai media*, Atti del Convegno internazionale (Roma, 23-25 marzo 2022), Roma, Bardi, 2023; ANTONIO ATTISANI, STEFANO TOMASSINI, *L'umanità mancata: Dante e la scena*, dossier fotografico di Jacopo Benassi, Torino, Accademia University Press, 2023; ANDREA SIMONE, *Dante in scena. Itinerari performativi della Commedia (secoli XVIII-XXI)*, Firenze, Tab, 2024; ANDREA FABIAN, DONATO PIROVANO, EMANUELE DE LUCA, PAOLO DESOGUS, SILVIO ALOVISIO (sous la direction), *Dante et les arts performatifs: corps dansants, théâtre et cinéma*, Sesto San Giovanni, Éditions Mimésis, 2024. Si ricordano inoltre i fascicoli annuali legati alla ricezione dantesca nelle arti spettacolari di «Dante e l'arte», n. 1 (2014) e il recente n. 9 (2022). Infine, il Dossier *Dante in scena*, a cura di Marco Menini, Roberto Rizzente, Francesco Tei, in «Hystrio», n. 1 gennaio-marzo, 2021, pp. 33-61.

getting lost among the various episodes and characters of the work (thanks to the intense presence of traits inherent to orality).

In support of this hypothesis, what Dante had presumably seen in the widespread mediaeval spectacular context - the different forms of sacred and profane representations which he likely attended - flows into what was, at his death, the first form of voicing the poem, namely the public *lectura* of the work. Giovanni Boccaccio, a great admirer of Alighieri and one of his earliest biographers, tells us about it. The performance practice, i.e. the tradition of reading the *Commedia* aloud, finds its first formal attestation precisely at the time when the Municipality of Florence, in its institutional figures, asked him to perform some dramatic readings (held from October 1373 to January 1374 at the church of Santo Stefano in Badia, Florence), which stopped after about sixty appointments at the seventeenth canto of the *Inferno*, due to the illness that would later lead the poet to die in Certaldo the following year[14]. For these *Esposizioni*[15], Boccaccio decided to accompany the reading of each canto with a literal and an allegorical explanation in order to give an exhaustive and compelling picture of what Dante had written. At the same time, he decided to undertake this Dantesque operation to be understood by a heterogeneous audience, who acclaimed his artistic operation[16]. From the *Comento sopra la Divina Commedia*, it is easy to understand how Boccaccio was a child of the medieval confusion and approximation of considering both theatre and epic poetry to be scenic practices with blurred and untraceable boundaries, failing to distinguish the difference between them on a spectacular level. Taking up a passage here, we read:

Fu ne' tempi di Platone e avanti, e poi perseverò lungamente ed eziandio in Roma, una spezie di poeti comici, li quali, per acquistare ricchezze e il favore del popolo, componevano lor comedìe […] e queste cotali comedìe poi recitavano nella scena, cioè in una piccola casetta, la quale era costituita nel mezzo del teatro, stando dintorno alla detta scena tutto il popolo, e gli uomini e le femine, della città ad udire. E non gli traeva tanto il desiderio di udire quanto di vedere i giuochi che dalla recitazione del comedo procedevano; li quali erano in questa forma: che una spezie di buffoni, chiamati "mimi", l'ufficio de' quali è sapere contro fare gli atti degli uomini, uscivano di quella scena, informati dal comedo, in quegli abiti ch'erano convenienti a quelle persone gli atti delle quali dovevano contro fare, e questi cotali atti, onesti o disonesti che fossero, secondo che il comedo diceva, facevano[17].

There was in the time of Plato and before, and then it persisted for a long time and also in Rome, a variety of comic poets, who, in order to acquire riches and the favour of the people, composed their comedies [...] and these comedies were then performed on stage, that consisted in a small house, which was set up in the middle of the

[14] See CARLO DELCORNO, *Gli scritti danteschi del Boccaccio*, in ENNIO SANDAL (a cura di), *Dante e Boccaccio. Lectura Dantis Scaligera 2004-2005 in memoria di Vittore Branca*, Roma-Padova, Antenore, 2006, pp. 109-137, reference at p.113.
[15] See GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO, *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia di Dante*, a cura di Giorgio Padoan, in GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO, *Tutte le opere*, a cura di Vittore Branca, 10 voll., Milano, Mondadori, 1964-1998, vol. 6, 1965.
[16] See CARLO DELCORNO, *Gli scritti danteschi del Boccaccio*, cit., pp. 113-137.
[17] GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO, *Il Comento sopra la Commedia di Dante Alighieri. Nuovamente corretto sopra un testo a penna*, in GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO, *Opere volgari corrette sui testi a penna,* a cura di Ignatio Moutier, 17 voll., 10 tomi, Firenze, Magheri, 1827-1834, vol. 1, tomo I, 1831, pp. 47-48.

theatre, with all the people, men and women of the city standing around the stage to listen. And it was not so much the desire to hear as to see the jokes that came out of the recitation of the comedo; which were in this form: that a variety of jesters, called 'mimes', whose office it is to know how to perform the acts of men, came out of that scene, informed by the comedo, in those clothes that were appropriate to those persons whose acts they had to perform against, and these acts, whether honest or dishonest, according to what the comedo said, they performed.

The quotation above offered, which is supposed to describe the ancient Romans' way of doing comedy, confirms what Sandra Pietrini and Piermario Vescovo[18] report about the action of the Church Fathers, for whom theatre is «a recurring ghost»[19], basically misunderstood, described according to the educational or pedagogical needs of the moment. According to the two critics, in fact, other authors such as St Augustine, St Jerome and Isidore of Seville argue that one should detach oneself as much as possible from the sinful *visio* of the eyes, favouring meditation triggered by attentive listening: «Narrative can approach theatre, as the image of ancient performance is based on an extended idea of performance, centred on listening»[20].

To sum up, the figures of the *tragedo* and *comedo* were those who read aloud a previously written text, not necessarily being its direct authors, but becoming its bearers from a pulpit, in front of an audience, convened on purpose, and thus codifying a *theatre* in that scenic space. This practice was reported by Dante's son, Pietro Alighieri, commentator of his father's work, who describes how the genre of the *comoedia* encompassed at that chronological height all the public declamation value mentioned so far:

Libri titulus est *Comoedia Dantis Alighierii*; et quare sic vocetur, adverte. Antiquitus in theatro, quod erat area semicircularis, in eius medio erat domuncula, quae scena dicebatur, in qua erat pulpitum, et super id ascendebat poeta ut cantor, et sua carmina ut cantiones recitabat; extra vero erant mimi ioculatores, carminum pronuntiantem gestu corporis effigiantes per adaptationem ad quemlibet ex cuius persona ipse poeta loquebatur; unde cum loquebatur, pone, de Junone conquerente de Hercule privigno suo, mimi, sicut recitabat, ita effigiabant Junonem invocare Furias infernales ad infestandum ipsum Herculem[21].

The title of the book is *Comoedia* of Dante Alighieri; and so it is remembered. In ancient times, in the theatre, which was a semicircular area, in the middle of which there was a little house that was called a scena, where there was a pulpit; and on it the poet climbed, not in his guise as author but in the guise of performer, and recited his

[18] See SANDRA PIETRINI, *Spettacoli e immaginario teatrale nel medioevo*, cit., pp. 195-220 e PIERMARIO VESCOVO, *A viva voce. Percorsi del genere drammatico*, Venezia, Marsilio, 2015, pp. 103-136. See also the more recent: PIERMARIO VESCOVO, *Il "teatro" della Commedia. Dante e il genere drammatico*, Roma, Carocci, 2023.
[19] «fantasma ricorrente», SANDRA PIETRINI, *Spettacoli e immaginario teatrale nel medioevo*, cit., p. 220.
[20] «Il racconto può avvicinarsi al teatro, poiché l'immagine dello spettacolo antico si fonda su un'idea estesa di rappresentazione, incentrata sull'ascolto», *ibidem*.
[21] «Il titolo del libro è Commedia di Dante Alighieri; e così viene ricordato. Anticamente nel teatro, che era un'area semicircolare, in mezzo ad esso, si trovava una casupola che veniva detta scena, dove era un pulpito; e su di esso saliva il poeta, non nelle sue vesti di autore ma, nelle vesti di esecutore, e recitava i suoi versi come fossero cantiones; al di fuori di tale area stavano giullari specializzati nel mimo, che raffiguravano con l'atteggiamento delle membra ciò che il poeta esprimeva con le parole dei suoi versi, adattandosi a ciascuno dei personaggi interpretati verbalmente dal poeta; per cui se, metti caso, questi parlava di Giunone che si lamentava del figliastro Ercole, i mimi, secondo ciò che egli esprimeva, raffiguravano Giunone all'atto di invocare le Furie infernali perché perseguitino Ercole», PIETRO ALIGHIERI, *Il «Commentarium» nelle redazioni Ashburnhamiana e Ottoboniana*, trascrizione a cura di Roberto Della Vedova e Maria Teresa Silvotti, con nota introduttiva di Egidio Guidubaldi, Firenze, L. S. Olschki, 1978, p. 8.

verses as if they were songs. Outside this area were jesters specialised in mime, who portrayed with the attitude of their limbs what the poet expressed in the words of his verses, adapting themselves to each of the characters interpreted verbally by the poet; thus if, say, he spoke of Juno complaining about his stepson Hercules, the mimes, according to what he expressed, portrayed Juno in the act of invoking the infernal Furies to persecute Hercules.

To fully understand the premises of such a large fortune and the exceptional nature of Dante's operation within the medieval theatrical forge, which was to produce itself in more mature and independent forms in the centuries to follow, it is necessary to introduce a clarification regarding the active and passive value of the poetry written by Dante. The poet is the composer of his own verses (active role), and, at the same time, he can be, like anyone else, a performer of his own work (passive role); thus, the difference between *actus* and *passio* «concerns not the poetic text and its execution with music, but the difference between the "writing" (in the precise sense of the "making" of the text) and the "execution"»[22]. The fact that, in various places and moments of the poem, Dante can take the floor as part of the story and, at the same time, can also be, in a certain sense, extraneous to it, generates a compositional short-circuit, as it contravenes what should be the golden rules of the differentiation between dramatic and epic genre.

Once again, Boccaccio would highlight this anomaly in Alighieri's poetic praxis, reporting in the *Esposizioni* how some did not look favourably on the stylistic choices, nor the linguistic choice of the illustrious vernacular for the mixed subject matter of the work, nor even less on the fact that the rule of not letting the author speak in the first person in his own work was contravened, clashing with the typical fiction of theatrical mimesis that wants two subjects to refer to each other in dialogue on stage, without the intrusion of the author's thoughts and words:

E, appresso, dell'arte spettante al comedo: mai nella comedìa non introducere se medesimo in alcuno atto a parlare; ma sempre a varie persone, che in diversi luoghi e tempi e per diverse cagioni deduce a parlare insieme, fa ragionare quello che crede che apartenga al tema impreso della comedìa; dove in questo libro, lasciato l'artificio del comedo, l'autore ispessissime volte e quasi sempre or di sè or d'altrui ragionando favella.

Moreover, with regard to the art pertaining to the comedo: never in the comedy does he introduce himself in any act of speaking in first person; but always through various persons, who in different places and times and for different reasons he led to speak together, he reasons what he believes belongs to the theme of the comedy; thus at those points of the text, having shed the guise of the comedo, the author often, not to say almost always, expresses his own or others' thoughts in this way.

The scholar Boccaccio does not fully understand the reason for this choice and does not take a clear position on the matter, leaving the debate on the *Commedia*'s compositional

[22] «riguarda non il testo poetico e la sua esecuzione con musica, ma la differenza tra la "scrittura" (nel senso puntuale della "fabbricazione" del testo) e l'"esecuzione"», PIERMARIO VESCOVO, *A viva voce. Percorsi del genere drammatico*, cit., p. 126.

modalities an open subject. According to Vescovo, this presence of the "I" within Dante's narration is nothing more than a form due to a real stance towards the *activus* value of poetry, in this case, a problem of modality rather than of genre. Therefore Dante, in order to be both *auctor* and *agens* in his work, cannot but split himself into a constant ambivalence of presence-absence within this universe[23].

This interpretation is also reinforced by the philosophical analysis carried out by Giorgio Agamben, who probes the fundamental relations between guilt and redemption operating within comedy in the medieval context[24]. The subject par excellence of the comic is a guilty person, guilty of a sin. The context surrounding her/him cannot but be *fetidus*, precisely because, through the vicissitudes and trials that lead her/his personal guilt to be remedied through her/him, the low dramaturgical dynamic typical of the genre is created, rather than the high and noble one of tragedy. While in the latter form, the guilt of the individual is inherent in the protagonist her/himself, and the task of the individual is to reset the tragedy that is fulfilled in her/him through expiation (i.e. she/he must necessarily have her/his person as the price), comedy, on the other hand, moves from a diametrically opposite position, seeing in the initial sin of the subject and in his subsequent redemption the fulfilment of the Christian message of salvation.

Therefore, Dante, having decided on his own subject of writing, according to Agamben, must necessarily choose the genre of the comedy, despite all philological and stylistic remonstrances from colleagues and critics, as it is the only form contemporary to him capable of fully interpreting the evangelical message of which he is the bearer in the first person, becoming a true Christian comic "hero", a *figura Christi* and example for humanity in search of salvation[25].

Once again, the choice of the poet Dante is, first and foremost, an ideological-existential choice, hardly separable from the worldly-political figure of the man Dante. The natural guilt of the tragic does not fit in well with the Gospel message, which instead loudly promotes comic

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[23] PIERMARIO VESCOVO, *A viva voce. Percorsi del genere drammatico,* cit., p. 130. In this regard, see the following PIERMARIO VESCOVO, *Il tempo di Dante*, Roma, Salerno, 2018.

[24] See GIORGIO AGAMBEN, *Categorie italiane. Studi di poetica e di letteratura*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2010, pp. 3-26 [Venezia, Marsilio, 1996[1]; trad. ingl. GIORGIO AGAMBEN, *The End of the Poem. Studies in Poetics*, translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford (CA), Stanford University Press, 1999, pp. 1-23].

[25] For more on the figural reading of Dante's poem and its implications, see: ERICH AUERBACH, *Mimesis. Il realismo nella letteratura occidentale*, 2 voll., Torino, Einaudi, 2016 [1956[1]], vol. 1, pp. 212- 221; ERICH AUERBACH, *Nuovi Studi su Dante*, in ERICH AUERBACH, *Studi su Dante*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 2012 [1963[1]], pp. 164-240; ERICH AUERBACH, *Un'idea di Dante*, Torino, Einaudi, 1976, pp. 33-62 (*Dante come personaggio-poeta della Commedia*).

personal guilt, which can be atoned for through Eucharistic redemption[26]. Agamben appropriately captures the poetic-existential parabola of Alighieri, who emancipates himself from the sensual love of his first poetic production - characterised by stilnovism and the courtly first "sin of Love" (by his definition, imperfect and limiting because it is always aimed at a lack, pursued and constantly unfulfilled) - and then arrives at a stylistic maturity innervated with philosophy and wisdom, which will lead him to compose the *Commedia.*

The process described is evident in the *Purgatorio* canticle (the twenty-ninth *canto* being a prime example), in which Dante *character/agens*, but also *persona/auctor*, must undergo the punishment of his beloved: only through this penitential humiliation - typical of the comic genre, of the *passiones* and of the same coeval processions - can he incarnate that Poundian *everyman*, who becomes part of a collective of penitents on the path to redemption.

La nozione moderna di persona come soggetto inalienabile della conoscenza e della morale non esiste nella cultura medievale, che avverte ancora l'originaria sonorità teatrale del termine e vede in esso l'insieme delle proprietà individuali che si aggiungono alla *simplicitas* della natura umana. Solo in Adamo (e in Cristo) natura e persona coincisero perfettamente e un peccato personale poté contaminare l'intera natura umana[27].

The modern notion of the person as an inalienable subject of knowledge and morality did not exist in medieval culture, which still detects the original theatrical sonority of the term and sees in it the set of individual properties that are added to the human nature's *simplicitas*. For only in Adam (and in Christ) did nature and person coincide perfectly and a personal sin could contaminate all of human nature[28].

To ensure that human nature, collective, innocent, once again finds the «diritta via»[29], it is necessary to have an actor, a new penitent paladin, impersonate the responsible search for true joy. This cannot be but the poet, as he is a person marked by guilt, an individual limited by his own choices and pettiness: «The one who accomplishes the voyage of the Comedy is not a subject or an *I* in the modern sense of the word but, rather, simultaneously a *person* (the sinner called Dante) and human *nature* (according to Boethius' definition, the *specificato proprietas* that is *subjecta* to this person)»[30].

The theatrical metaphor of life, of personal dramatic action as the protagonist of existence, is mediated by Dante on the strength of a late Latin Christian production, which

[26] GIORGIO AGAMBEN, *Categorie italiane. Studi di poetica e di letteratura*, cit., pp. 18-19.
[27] Ivi, p. 23.
[28] GIORGIO AGAMBEN, *The End of the Poem. Studies in Poetics,* cit., p. 19.
[29] See *If*. I, v. 3.
[30] GIORGIO AGAMBEN, *The End of the Poem. Studies in Poetics*, cit., p. 20; «Chi compie il viaggio della Commedia non è un soggetto, un Io nel senso moderno della parola ma, insieme, una persona (il peccatore di nome Dante) e la natura umana (la specificata proprietas, secondo la definizione di Boezio, che è subjecta a questa persona)», GIORGIO AGAMBEN, *Categorie italiane. Studi di poetica e di letteratura*, cit., p. 24.

attributes, to the mystical *visiones* first[31], and then to the public practices of preaching[32], a decisive function in creating an imagery, in which the individual finds himself invested with the responsibility to act well in order to find himself in an afterlife that is appropriate to his actions[33], thus constituting a concrete manual, an *Itinerarium* to access the ultimate *visio Dei.*

The structure of the afterlife system and its punishments, as well as the most suitable way of living and why it is so essential to ask this question about the future in the afterlife, are set out for the audience of believers through a powerful system of visual and aural references. As has been pointed out in various interdisciplinary studies, the *Commedia* constitutes a reservoir and an encyclopaedia of medieval imagery[34], drawing largely on iconographic sources[35], whose references can be traced in the known bibliography, while other elements remain the terrain of forthcoming research. Indeed, Dante's «visibile parlare»[36] and his stylistic choices take on a different significance when placed in the social, religious, historical, iconographic and representative context of the time, which still remains largely unknown to our time. Only recently, under the impetus of the studies promoted by William John Thomas Mitchell's *Pictorial Turn* (1992)[37] and the research conducted overseas[38], has there been a

[31] See GIUSEPPE LEDDA, *Dante e la tradizione delle visioni medievali*, in «Letture Classensi» (*Le tre Corone - Modelli e antimodelli della "Commedia"*, a cura di Michelangelo Picone), n. 37, 2008, pp. 119-142; BERNARD HUSS, MIRKO TAVONI (a cura di), *Dante e la dimensione visionaria tra Medioevo e prima età moderna*, Ravenna, Longo, 2019.

[32] See NICOLÒ MALDINA, *In pro del mondo: Dante, la predicazione e i generi della letteratura religiosa medievale*, Roma, Salerno, 2017.

[33] See ALISON MORGAN, *Dante e l'aldilà medievale*, Roma, Salerno, 2012; ANDREA GAMBERINI, *Inferni medievali. Dipingere il mondo dei morti per orientare la società dei vivi*, Roma, Viella, 2021.

[34] See GIOVANNI BATTISTA BRONZINI, *Prospetto critico delle tradizioni popolari dantesche*, in «Medioevo e Umanesimo» (Studi Filologici, Letterari e Storici in memoria di Guido Favati, a cura di Giorgio Varanini e Palmiro Pinagli), n. 28, 2 voll., 1977, vol. 1, pp. 149-175.

[35] See, among others: CHRISTOPHER KLEINHENZ, *On Dante and the Visual Arts*, in TEODOLINDA BAROLINI AND H. WAYNE STOREY (edited by), *Dante for the New Millenium*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2003, pp. 274-298; LAURA PASQUINI, *Diavoli e inferni nel medioevo. Origine e sviluppo delle immagini dal VI al XV secolo*, Padova, Il Poligrafo, 2015; LAURA PASQUINI, *Fonti iconografiche della "Commedia"*, in «Italianistica: Rivista di letteratura italiana», vol. 46, n. 1 (gennaio/aprile), 2017, pp. 133-153; LUCIA BATTAGLIA RICCI, *Dante per immagini. Dalle miniature trecentesche ai giorni nostri*, Torino, Einaudi, 2018; LAURA PASQUINI, *«Pigliare occhi, per aver la mente». Dante, la Commedia e le arti figurative*, Roma, Carocci, 2020; LINA BOLZONI, *La Commedia di Dante nello specchio delle immagini*, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 2021; ROSSEND ARQUÉS, LAURA PASQUINI, SILVIA MADDALO (eds), *The Smiling Walls. Dante e le arte figurative/Dante and the Visual Arts*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2023.

[36] *Pg.* X, v. 95.

[37] Reference is made to the first emblematic article that marked the history of visual studies and to the subsequent volume collecting the scholar's essays: WILLIAM JOHN THOMAS MITCHELL, *Pictorial Turn*, in «Artforum», vol. 30, n. 7 March, 1992, pp. 89-94; WILLIAM JOHN THOMAS MITCHELL, *Picture Theory*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994 [ita. ed. *Pictorial Turn. Saggi di cultura visuale*, a cura di Michele Cometa e Valeria Cammarata, Milano, Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2017].

[38] See MICHELE COMETA, *Parole che dipingono. Letteratura e cultura visuale tra Settecento e Novecento*, Roma, Meltemi, 2004; ANTONIO SOMAINI, *Il luogo dello spettatore. Forme dello sguardo nella cultura delle immagini*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 2005; MICHELE COMETA, *La scrittura delle immagini: letteratura e cultura visuale*,

beginning to approach Dante's *corpus* from an interdisciplinary perspective, observing it through the analysis of a broader context of reference.

1.2. The medieval performativity in Dante's language

In order to trace a history of Dante's theatrical reception, it is indispensable to take into account the results of a number of studies pertaining to the literary sphere, which have begun to probe the interdisciplinary gap and approach between what is reported in the *Comedy* and the historical-artistic investigations referring to sacred theatre and medieval performativity. Paolo De Ventura, for example, starting from the linguistic approach, investigates the ways in which Dante as the author constructs the scene of the *Commedia*, thus succeeding in explaining how language in the context of medieval oral performativity played a precise function in effectively constituting a set within which to make his characters act, to make them live[39]. Recalling the historical studies of Mario Ferrigni, Umberto Bosco and Vittorio Russo[40], one can see how the first hurdle to overcome, in order to rightly locate the *Comedy* within a comprehensible performative context, lies in giving due prominence to the representational nature intrinsic in its poetic metre.

Since the work is defined as a song (*cantio*, *comoedia*), the style selected by Dante for his masterpiece is ascribable to high-brow popular performativity, not unlike the *chansons de geste*[41], which conceived poetry, performance and music as intrinsically linked by the ephemeral nature of the event. Following this assumption, this type of poetry has very little that is silent and solitary, but the communal and musical elements are the first traits to vanish in the

Milano, Raffaello Cortina, 2012; MICHELE COMETA, *Archeologie del dispositivo. Regimi scopici della letteratura*, Cosenza, Pellegrini, 2016; ANTONIO SOMAINI, ANDREA PINOTTI, *Cultura visuale. Immagini, sguardi, media, dispositivi*, Torino, Einaudi, 2016; MICHELE COMETA, *Cultura visuale: una genealogia*, Milano, Raffaello Cortina, 2020.

[39] See PAOLO DE VENTURA, *Dramma e dialogo nella Commedia di Dante: il linguaggio della mimesi per un resoconto dell'aldilà*, cit.

[40] See MARIO FERRIGNI, *Dante e il teatro*, in «Annali del teatro italiano», 2 voll., 1921, vol. 1 (1901-1920), pp.1-22; UMBERTO BOSCO, *Dante e il teatro medievale*, in «Medioevo e Umanesimo» (Studi Filologici, Letterari e Storici in memoria di Guido Favati, a cura di Giorgio Varanini e Palmiro Pinagli), n. 28, 2 voll., 1977, vol. 1, pp. 135-147; VITTORIO RUSSO, *Il romanzo teologico*, Napoli, Liguori, 2002 [*Il romanzo teologico. Sondaggi sulla «Commedia» di Dante*, Napoli, Liguori, 1984[1]].

[41] See JOSEPH J. DUGGAN, *Modalità della cultura orale*, in PIERO BOITANI, MARIO MANCINI, ALBERTO VÀRVARO (a cura di), *Lo spazio letterario del Medioevo. 2. Il medioevo volgare*, 5 voll., Roma, Salerno, 1999-2005, vol. 1, tomo I (1999), pp. 147-177.

transcription and subsequent transmission of the text, as they are ephemeral elements, difficult to fix with the transcription techniques developed at the time.

Initially, literary studies and critics sanctioned a real divorce between poetry and music, as Aurelio Roncaglia[42] reports in the wake of Gianfranco Contini[43], attesting to a greater height of the former, de facto disengaging it from the study of the performer's vocality. Other scholars, in more recent times, reveal instead a happy marriage operating at that chronological height between poetry and music and push for a different study of Dante's work[44].

As Nino Pirrotta reminds us, the difficulty in fully understanding the quantity and quality of medieval music, especially with the advent of the *ars nova* and the differentiations between polyphony and monody[45], constitutes the basis for understanding the enduring inability to fully comprehend the musicality of Dante's text, which was supposed to be an example of

[42] See AURELIO RONCAGLIA, *Sul "divorzio tra musica e poesia" nel Duecento italiano*, in AGOSTINO ZIINO (a cura di), *L'Ars Nova Italiana del Trecento*, IV, Atti del 3° Congresso internazionale sul tema «La musica al tempo di Boccaccio e i suoi rapporti con la letteratura» (Siena-Certaldo 19-22 giugno 1975), Certaldo, Centro di studi sull'Ars nova italiana del Trecento, 1978, pp. 365-397, reference at pp. 389-390.

[43] See GIANFRANCO CONTINI, *Preliminari sulla lingua del Petrarca*, in GIANFRANCO CONTINI, *Varianti e altra linguistica. Una raccolta di saggi (1938- 1968)*, Torino, Einaudi, 1970, pp. 169-192, reference at p. 176.

[44] See NINO PIRROTTA, *Poesia e musica e altri saggi*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1994; MARIA SOFIA LANNUTTI, *Teoria, produzione e ricezione della lirica romanza medievale. Alcune questioni di metodo*, in «I quaderni del m.ae.s.», n. II, 1999, pp. 23-37; MARIA SOFIA LANNUTTI, *«Ars» e «scientia», «actio» e «passio». Per l'interpretazione di alcuni passi del «De vulgari eloquentia»*, in «Studi medievali», a. XLI, 2000, pp. 1-38; JOHN L. NÁDAS, MICHAEL SCOTT CUTHBERT (edited by), *Ars nova. French and Italian Music in the Fourteenth Century*, London, Routledge, 2009; FEDERICO DI SANTO, *La rima fra testo e melodia nel «De vulgari eloquentia» e la questione del "divorzio" fra poesia e musica*, in FRANCESCA CASTELLANO, IRENE GAMBACORTI, ILARIA MACERA, GIULIA TELLINI (a cura di), *Le forme del comico*. Atti delle sessioni parallele del XXI Congresso dell'ADI-Associazione degli Italianisti (Firenze, 6-9 settembre 2017), Firenze, Società Editrice Fiorentina, 2019, pp. 244-256.

[45] See ARNALDO BONAVENTURA, *Dante e la musica*, Livorno, Raffaello Giusti Editore, 1904, pp. 3-13. Per approfondire ulteriormente recenti studi su Dante e la musica, nella *Commedia* nello specifico, o sulla sua ricezione in musica, si vedano: DAVIDE FARA (a cura di), *La musica di Dante*, Roma, Aracne, 2023; EMIDIO RANIERI TOMEO, *"de la sampogna vento che penètra". Altre interpretazioni per lo strumento musicale della Commedia dantesca*, in in «Utriculus», a. XX, nn. 61-62, 2021, pp. 9-18; STEFANO A.E. LEONI (a cura di), *La musica e Dante. Percorsi sonori intorno al Sommo Poeta*, Milano, Rugginenti Editore c/o Volonté & Co., 2021; ALBERTO GRANESE, *La coscienza metaletteraria di Dante: le refrazioni strutturali della «Comedìa»*, Salerno, Edisud, 2021, pp. 129-234 (*Parte seconda: la funzione strutturale della musica*); MARIA TERESA ARFINI, ALBERTO RIZZUTI (a cura di), *«AnDante». Dante e la musica: riflessioni interdisciplinari*, Torino, Università degli studi di Torino, 2018; RICCARDO DRUSI, *Musica polifonica nella Commedia: indizi storici e miti storiografici (a proposito di alcuni saggi passati e di un libro recente)*, in «L'Alighieri», a. LIII, n. 42 luglio-dicembre, 2013, pp. 5-58; FEDERICO SCHNEIDER, *Ancora su "Dante musicus": musica e dramma nella Commedia*, in «Studi Medievali e Moderni», vol. XIV, n. 2, 2010, pp. 5-24; MARIA ANN ROGLIERI, *Dante and music : musical adaptations of the Commedia from the sixteenth century to the present*, Aldershot-Burlington USA, Ashgate, 2001; CLAUDIA ELISABETH SCHURR, *Dante e la musica: dimensione, contenuto e finalità del messaggio musicale nella "Divina Commedia"*, Perugia, Cattedra di storia della musica dell'Università degli studi di Perugia-Centro di studi musicali in Umbria, 1994; GUIDO SALVETTI, *La componente musicale nel mondo poetico di Dante*, Milano, Cisalpino-Goliardica, 1988; LUIGI PESTALOZZA (a cura di), *La Musica nel tempo di Dante. Atti del Convegno* (Ravenna, 12-14 settembre 1986), Milano, UNICOPLI, 1988. Lastly, see the dossiers already published in the journal «Dante e l'Arte» (vol. 2-2015; vol. 6, 2019) and the articles sometimes present in the other issues of the same journal, pertaining to the world of Dante's reception specifically referring to music and ancient and contemporary musicology.

monody entrusted to a single *cantor*, but which has all the complexity of its time within itself[46]. As Nino Pirrotta and Aldo Menichetti argue, poetry is often defined as «musica di parole», resembling singing[47]. Especially for the fourteenth century and the transition to the subsequent fifteenth century, Italian poetry becomes a great collector of complexity, gathering together many traits of different disciplines to arrive at the definition of a single artistic event. As Elena Abramov-van Rijk argues in her studies on *parlar cantando*, the prerequisites for the recitative style, which will see its heyday in the 17th century, can be found in the 14th-century Italian model, which creates a mixture of music, poetry and recitation and enables a heterogeneous audience to appreciate an oral improvised creative style[48].

The theatricality of Dante's context is acknowledged, but covertly ascribed, until recent studies, to a production of little value. Instead, from what has been seen so far, the relevance of the performativity of the event in the Middle Ages can be said to be the real cornerstone of a way of being together, which sees codified rituality and collective sphere as two of its fundamental elements in both the sacred and profane spheres.

Just as any believer would have done by taking part in a procession, or by responding with chants and other codified liturgical elements to the represented moments of the Cristian service, Dante decides to write a play with the intention of becoming a witness to an act of faith, to a truth in which his entire value system finds meaning. To this end, he uses the genre capable of placing himself as a performer, and the audience as active participants in the condition of sharing a fulfilling cognitive experience, just as art and liturgical theatricality did in their sphere of interest. As a man of his time, like a skilful contemporary filmmaker, he chooses how to bring a dream to life:

> Il pubblico di Dante, nel Trecento, doveva capire agevolissimamente, per appassionarsi tanto al poema. L'istruzione religiosa (unica) facea familiari le leggende ultramondane, la tradizione facea presenti i fatti e i personaggi storici: la potente suggestione del verso dovea avere integra, pura, perfetta la sua virtù rappresentativa; finalmente la chiarezza adamantina della lingua dovea render facile a chiunque l'intenderlo, anche alle "muliercule". Ma a questo effetto doveva contribuire anche la recitazione[49].

[46] See NINO PIRROTTA, *Ars Nova e Stilnovo*, in «Rivista Italiana di Musicologia», vol. 1, n. 1, 1966, pp. 3-19, reference at p. 4.
[47] See NINO PIRROTTA, ELENA POVOLEDO, *Music and Theatre from Poliziano to Monteverdi*, traslated by Karen Eales, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982, p. 22 [ed. ita NINO PIRROTTA, ELENA POVOLEDO, *Li due Orfei: Da Poliziano a Monteverdi*, Torino, Einaudi, 1975; NINO PIRROTTA, *Li due Orfei: Da Poliziano a Monteverdi*, Torino, ERI, 1969[1]]; ALDO MENICHETTI, *Metrica italiana: fondamenti metrici, prosodia, rima*, Roma-Padova, Antenore, 1993, p. 66.
[48] See ELENA ABRAMOV-VAN RIJK, *Parlar Cantando: The Practice of Reciting Verses in Italy from 1300 to 1600*, Bern, Peter Lang AG, 2009.
[49] MARIO FERRIGNI, *Dante e il teatro*, cit., pp. 5-6.

Dante's audience, in the fourteenth century, had to understand very easily to become so passionate about the poem. Religious instruction (the only one) made the otherworldly legends familiar, tradition made the historical facts and characters present: the powerful suggestion of the verse had to have its representative virtue intact, pure and perfect; finally, the adamantine clarity of the language had to make it easy for anyone to understand it, even the 'muliercule'. But the recitation was also to contribute to this effect.

Going back to what Maria Maślanka-Soro wrote, the widespread medieval performativity, so strongly recalled, has a substantial relevance in the stylistic choices of the *Commedia*[50]. In addition to the musical component, it is important to analyse how the spectacular and visual context from which Dante takes his cue to imagine his work is conceived, referring to the studies conducted by Carla Maria Bino. In her research on medieval performance practice derived from iconography and in the investigation conducted through a close examination of religious and historical sources, which led to the formation of early medieval theatrical practices, the scholar illustrates the artistic and religious panorama in which the cognitive experience of the sacred takes place for the medieval believer.

The theatricality inherent in the poem, described by Dante through poetic language that outlines gestures, relational situations and motifs, can be an attestation of religious practices enacted by the faithful in the designated places during the various moments of the liturgy and the Christian liturgical calendar. Despite the fact that the *Commedia* is a poetic text, it can be analysed with an interdisciplinary approach, as Heather Webb and Giulia Bonaldi's studies attest[51], and become a «biblioteca visiva»[52], which functions as a map, as a testimony, in a broad sense, of a present practice that can be traced back to the spectacular sacral matrix that was experienced by witnessing and participating in the widespread medieval theatricality.

We take up here a short extract from Bino describing the socio-cultural context in which Dante himself was immersed:

Nel Medioevo la vista non è semplicemente uno dei cinque sensi: è un incontro fisico, un contatto tra i raggi emessi dall'occhio e quelli emessi dall'oggetto. Se la vista è un 'contatto', vedere è un'azione concreta e complessa, nella

[50] See MARIA MAŚLANKA-SORO, *La teatralità del disumanar nell'Inferno dantesco sullo sfondo della "vocazione drammatica" di Dante*, in «Dante e l'arte», n. 1, 2014, pp. 11-30.

[51] See recent studies investigating gestures, the relationship with artistic and visual descriptions of Dante in the *Commedia*, and emotions: HEATHER WEBB, *Culture visive e teorie degli affetti nella lettura di Dante*, in «Letture Classensi», vol. 50 (*Dante oltre il centenario. Nuove prospettive per gli studi danteschi internazionali*, a cura di Giuseppe Ledda), 2022, pp. 7-28; HEATHER WEBB, *Dante, artist of gesture*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2022; HEATHER WEBB, *Dante's persons. An Ethics of the Transhuman*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016 [trad. Ita. HEATHER WEBB, *L'idea di persona in Dante. Corpo e identità*, traduzione di Paolo Rigo, Firenze, Tab, 2023]; GIULIA BONALDI, *Weeping and smiling in Dante's works*, tesi di dottorato in School of Languages, Literatures and Cultures-Italian (Trinity College Dublin), Tutor. Prof. Igor Candido, 2023, available online: http://www.tara.tcd.ie/bitstream/handle/2262/101578/THESIS%20GIULIA%20BONALDi.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y (last accessed 14/05/2025).

[52] See LUCIA BATTAGLIA RICCI, *Una biblioteca "visiva"*, in LUCIA BATTAGLIA RICCI (a cura di), *Leggere Dante*, Ravenna, Longo, 2003, pp. 191-215.

quale sono coinvolti tutti gli altri sensi del corpo (tatto, odorato, udito, gusto) nello stesso tempo (sinesteticamente); un'azione che richiede una disciplina interiore, una 'postura' dello spirito oltre che del corpo, un'intenzione dello sguardo che genera una precisa prospettiva. Vedere, dunque, significa entrare in contatto con un'immagine e agirla o, meglio ancora, far parte di una 'scena sensibile' fatta di azioni e relazioni. Vedere è una performance[53].

In the Middle Ages, sight is not simply one of the five senses: it is a physical encounter, a contact between the rays emitted by the eye and those emitted by the object. If sight is a 'contact', seeing is a concrete and complex action, in which all the other senses of the body (touch, smell, hearing, taste) are involved at the same time (synaesthetically); an action that requires an inner discipline, a 'posture' of the spirit as well as of the body, an intention of the gaze that generates a precise perspective. Seeing, then, means coming into contact with an image and acting upon it or, better still, being part of a 'sensitive scene' made up of actions and relationships. Seeing is a performance.

Studies applied to sacred theatre or medieval sacred drama, in close collaboration with studies on the perception of art[54], make it possible to circumscribe and interpret those phenomena defined as «acting image» and «performative gaze», i.e. material images, spaces and individuals that placed within a given interpretative context, in this case, that of the Christian liturgy and pertaining to the sacred, become actors and objects of a cognitive dramatic dimension[55].

By tracing the connections between sister disciplines that contribute together to the codification of a context of vision, understood as the subsisting relationship between the images with which the public relates in the devotional sphere, and the co-present apparatus of gestures, practices and actions that are enacted by the faithful and officiants, the centre of a full and satisfying cognitive experience, Bino emphasises together with many[56] the vitality that medieval Christian visual apparatuses demonstrate, becoming devices of the performative vision mentioned above.

Through a comparison with historical-religious studies in order to fully analyse the evolution of medieval culture, these studies clearly indicate how it was necessary to move from an initial Platonic, Christian Orthodox[57] tradition that valued the image as a copy, mimesis of a

[53] CARLA BINO, *Immagine e visione performativa nel Medioevo*, in «Drammaturgia», a. XI, n.s. I, 2014, pp. 335-346, quote on p. 336 e anche HANS HENRIK LOHFERT JØRGENSEN, HENNING AUGERUD, LAURA KATRINE SKINNEBACH (edited by), *The Saturated Sensorium Principles of Perception and Mediation in the Middle Ages*, Århus, Aarhus University Press, 2015.
[54] See MARIE-JOSÉ MONDZAIN, *Le commerce des regards*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 2003.
[55]See the recent volume CARLA M. BINO, CORINNA RICASOLI (edited by), *Performing the Sacred. Christian representation and the arts*, Leiden/Boston, Brill, 2023.
[56] See ÉRIC PALAZZO, *L'invenzione cristiana dei cinque sensi nella liturgia e nell'arte del Medioevo*, tradotto da Giuseppe Piccinno, Napoli, Editrice Domenicana Italiana, 2017 [ed. fr. *Les cinq sens au Moyen Âge*, Paris, CERF, 2016]; HERBERT LEON KESSLER, *L'esperienza medievale dell'arte. Gli oggetti e i sensi*, a cura e traduzione di Fabrizio Lollini, Giacomo Confortin, Roma, Officina Libreria, 2023 [engl. ed. *Experiencing Medieval Art*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2019].
[57] See CARLA BINO, *Il dramma e l'immagine. Teorie cristiane della rappresentazione (II-XI sec.)*, Firenze, Le Lettere, 2014, pp. 148-217. Moreover, CHARLES BARBER, *Figure and Likeness: on the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2002; BISSERA VLADIMIROVA PENTCHEVA, *The*

superior reality to strive for, to a new declination of the image as an experience of the true sacred body of God, as a carnal impression, an embodied experience of divine reality through the revelation of the Eucharistic miracle of the son who became man[58].

By following backwards the path that generates the image of God, as the one and only *ordo veritatis* and source of redemption, Bino investigates the relational value of the image device that is inserted into dramaturgical praxis, as it is included in a function or in a particular occasion or liturgical feast, becoming no longer fiction but «word, living presence among us». The image is a very powerful *medium* to solicit the audience and build the basis for a dramaturgy of salvation, it is a *true memory of the real*: «The icon, in essence, is memory of the body and evidence of a fact»[59].

This triggers a physical reciprocity with the artistic artefact that becomes a living body, not just a performative vision, but a physical, sensual and above all emotional fruition experience.

> The hypothesis of the Incarnation had from the start altered the Same, the sameness of the transcendent God. Here is the great operation. Here is what would give Christian images the categorical imperative - rather: the fantasy imperative - *always to alter the Same*. Now we can better grasp how the Incarnation required an "opening" of imitation, as Longinus in the legend had opened the beautiful body of Christ. *To open imitation*: this was not to exclude resemblance; this was to think and to make resemblance work as a drama-and not as the simple successful effect of a mimetic technique. The great tradition of biblical anthropology bears the most massive testimony to this, having constructed its famous models of origin, its famous "economy of Salvation", wholly through a drama of image and resemblance, divine as much as human[60].

The mediaeval representation thus becomes a device of remembrance, a *visio*, a bringing to life, to bring back to the present a living memory of the body that re-constructs a personal relationship with the here and now of the divine, of the mystic, starting from the resemblance of which it is the fruit and memory of the form of the Father, constituting itself in a collectivity (Church) of which it is an integral part and entering into resonance with it, immersing the faithful in an exchange of proximity in the consecrated space. The revelation of the divine message, unquestionable for medieval man, becomes an empathic responsive process in which

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sensual Icon: Space, Ritual, and the Senses in Byzantium, University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010.

[58] See JEAN-CLAUDE SCHMITT, *Le corps des images. Essais sur la culture visuelle au Moyen Âge*, Paris, Gallimard, 2002; JEAN-MARIE SANSTERRE, *Les images sacrées en occident au Moyen Âge: histoire, attitudes, croyances. Recherches sur le témoignage des textes*, Madrid, Axal/Visum, 2020.

[59] «L'icona, insomma, è memoria del corpo e prova di un fatto», CARLA BINO, *Immagine e visione performativa nel Medioevo*, cit., p. 343.

[60] GEORGES DIDI-HUBERMAN, *Confronting images. Questioning the ends of certain history of art*, University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005, p. 211 [ed. fr. *Devant l'image: Question pose´e aux fin d'une histoire de l'art*, Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, 1990; ed. ita. *Davanti all'immagine: domanda posta ai fini di una storia dell'arte*, a cura e con postfazione di Matteo Spadoni, introduzione di Daniele Guastini, Udine, Mimesis, 2016].

the devout action of the faithful is declined in an inhabitable space by means of the path codified by *deputed loci* and stations, following a precise order and movement as within a dramaturgy, in that all are actors and an integral part of the liturgical scene, a representation repeated, reiterated, handed down[61].

The necessity of Christian doctrine to have images as the device of memory and dramatised liturgies to give rise to full, *non-fictional* adhesion on the part of the faithful, therefore describes religious knowledge as a collective act, which proceeds through dialogue and empathy[62]. Recognising and remembering the presence of God around the bystanders allows one to recognise the presence of his "imprint" in the other and in the whole community, thus making each one live in the active and personal choice of *agere memoriam* of the divine.

The relationship created between representation, concrete sensible reality and truth is condensed in the chosen language, i.e. the visual performative, multisensory language, in an active exchange of gazes between the present and the absent, contributing to sustaining total adherence to the eschatological truth of the body of Christ, which is not illusory, but the true and substantial experience of the individual in communion with others[63].

Precisely because of this context, the theatrical poetry of the *Commedia* then proves much more suggestive and complex to investigate, implicitly requiring a more interdisciplinary approach to study. Reflecting on the influence of the *visiones* of saints and mystics, i.e. the sensitive memory of the otherworldly journey (which has as its apex the vision of God and the need to witness in the first person in order to create a *transfer* useful for the salvation of the reader/listener) the structure of Dante's poem and the manner in which the journey is made (from Hell to Heaven), narrated by Dante up to the total profession of impotence[64] in

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[61] See HASSO HOFMANN, *Repräsentation. Studien zur Wort- und Begriffsgeschichte von der Antike bis ins 19. Jahrhundert*, Berlin, Duncker und Humblot, 1974; JODY ENDERS, *Rhetoric and the origins of medieval drama*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1992; THEODORE KARL LERUD, *Memory, Images, and English Corpus Christi Drama*, New York, Pelgrave, 2008; CARLA BINO, *Per un'indagine dei significati di repraesentare nel pensiero cristiano. Alcuni esempi tra retorica e liturgia (XI-XII secolo)*, in GUIDO CARIBONI, NICOLANGELO D'ACUNTO, ELISABETTA FILIPPINI (a cura di), *Presenza-Assenza. Meccanismi dell'istituzionalità nella Societas Christiana*, Milano, Vita e Pensieri, 2021, pp. 29-42; CARLA BINO, *A 'Dramatic Turn': the Revolution of Christian Representation*, in CARLA M. BINO, CORINNA RICASOLI (edited by), *Performing the Sacred. Christian representation and the arts*, cit., pp. 32-4.

[62] See JEFFREY F. HAMBURGER, *The Place of Theology in Medieval Art History: Problems, Positions, Possibilites*, in JEFFREY F. HAMBURGER AND ANNE-MARIE BOUCHÉ (edited by), *The Mind's Eye. Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2006, pp. 11-31.

[63] See TIMOTHY VERDON, *The Drama of Christian Images: Art, Liturgy, Sacred Theatre*, in CARLA M. BINO, CORINNA RICASOLI (edited by), *Performing the Sacred. Christian representation and the arts*, cit., pp. 13-31; JEAN-CLAUDE SCHMITT, *Performing the Bible: Christian Drama and the Arts*, in CARLA M. BINO, CORINNA RICASOLI (edited by), *Performing the Sacred. Christian representation and the arts*, cit., pp. 217-233.

[64] See *Pd.* XXXIII.

transferring onto paper what has been seen and experienced, brings to mind the substantial duty in having to *agere memoriam* of the experience of contact with God:

Perciò le icone sembrano dotate di una loro corporeità e possono dare la sensazione che il divino sia presente nel momento della visione ed entri in contatto *facies ad faciem* con chi le guarda. In questo senso si può parlare del rapporto tra icona e spettatore come di una performance sensibile, un'esperienza sinestetica fatta di luce, profumo, canto, azione, e la *mimesis* può essere intesa come 'imitazione della presenza'. L'icona è qualcosa di più di una finestra aperta su un altrove: vedere l'icona è incontrare la forma del prototipo, riconoscere la somiglianza e 'andare verso' l'assente 'come se' fosse presente. Se poi intendiamo l'assente come un soggetto un tempo presente, la mimesi è anche 'riattuazione memorativa della presenza' poiché la somiglianza formale innesca il ricordo della verità storica dei fatti avvenuti. In definitiva, se con l'idea di icona come traccia memorativa viene risolto il problema della presenza del divino, attraverso l'idea di icona performativa si soddisfa la necessità del contatto fisico con il divino[65].

Therefore, icons seem to be endowed with their own corporeity and can give the sensation that the divine is present at the moment of viewing and comes into contact *facies ad faciem* with the beholder. In this sense, one can speak of the relationship between icon and viewer as a sensitive performance, a synaesthetic experience made up of light, scent, song, action, and mimesis can be understood as 'imitation of presence. The icon is more than a window open to an elsewhere: to see the icon is to encounter the form of the prototype, to recognise the similarity and to 'go towards' the absent 'as if' it were present. If we then understand the absent as a subject once present, mimesis is also 'memorative re-actualisation of presence' since formal resemblance triggers the memory of the historical truth of the events that occurred. Ultimately, if with the idea of the icon as a memorative trace the problem of the presence of the divine is solved, through the idea of the performative icon the need for physical contact with the divine is satisfied.

Medieval theatrical and visual sources reveal the unavoidable conditions *for* Dante's fortune within the performing arts and provide a clear path to follow in order to openly ascribe the performances of the *lecturae Dantis* within the framework of the practices codifying the different forms of the widespread medieval theatrical performances.

The study approach described so far is the result of recent research that builds on a different production, mainly found in the second half of the 20th century, which started from the visual arts and then applied to all disciplines[66]. That Dante took possession of medieval performativity is undeniable by now, but certainly his is only a very fortuitous case of excellence within a framework of the synaesthetic and multi-sensorial experience of medieval representation, reported through third-party sources, which to this day still remains largely to be investigated and would need to be highlighted more often, as the true driving force of a tradition that is erroneously circumscribed to the usual literary sphere and which is instead rightly the result of the complexity of the artistic context of reference.

If Dante's fortunes in the following centuries were markedly grafted onto a slavishly creative revival of the text, with the constant production of high poetry that reworked its dictation, form and *topoi*, a form pertinent to a cultural *elite* that was not very open-minded, a

[65] CARLA BINO, *Immagine e visione performativa nel Medioevo*, cit., p. 345.
[66] See CHRISTINA CLARK-KAZAK, *Research across Borders: An Introduction to Interdisciplinary, Cross-Cultural Methodology*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2023.

large section of the public of the first *lecturae Dantis* instead became the avid producers of oral reworkings of "high" texts, sending verses and entire cantos by heart through charlatans and storytellers. In fact, from the very beginning, Dante's reception is grafted onto two tracks that are co-present and at times deaf to each other: the literary and cultured, and the popular oral one.

1.3. Early popular practices of "saying Dante"

We have seen how the practice of "saying Dante" in a more or less regulated manner can be traced back to the very beginnings of the circulation of the *Commedia*[67]. Following the first *lecturae* by Boccaccio and his *inventio* of a Poet who brings with him the memory of Inferno, walking through the streets of the city of Verona[68], the novelist and lyricist Franco Sacchetti (1332-1400)[69] re-proposes the figure in two of his *Trecento novelle*[70], portrayed in a burlesque key. Here, an author Dante finds himself grappling with a blacksmith (CXIV)[71] and a donkey-breeder (CXV)[72] who mispronounce the verses of his poem, echoing an established and productive practice of reproducing the *Commedia in a different way*, with a different metre and freely reworking the text. Since the poet's death, in fact, and perhaps already in the latter part of his life, his image has been widely revived, "carnivalized"[73] , mocking the figure of the poet vate, a political and noble character, in a total low and ridiculous subversion, typical of jester

[67] Due thanks must be expressed to Andrea Simone who, with his doctoral study on the reception of Dante centred on the *ancien régime* and the grand-actor figures of the 19th century, first reconstructs the rich harvest of popular and academic acting practices from the 14th to the 20th century, creating the basis for the present study, See ANDREA SIMONE, *Dante in scena. Percorsi di una ricezione: dalla fine dell'ancien régime al grande attore*, tesi di dottorato in Storia delle arti e dello spettacolo, Tutor. Prof.ssa Marzia Pieri, 2019, available online at: https://flore.unifi.it/handle/2158/1152148 (last accessed 14/05/2025).

[68] See GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO, *Trattatello in laude di Dante*, a cura di Pier Giorgio Ricci, in GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO, *Tutte le opere*, a cura di Vittore Branca, 10 voll., Milano, Mondadori, 1964-1998, vol. 3, 1974, pp. 422-538, reference at p. 465, par. 113-114 (I red.); anche p. 512, par. 69 (II. red.). In this regard, we refer visually to the painting of Francesco Saverio Altamura, *Ecco colui che andò all'Inferno e tornò* (1865), oil on canvas, in the collection of the Museo dell'Ottocento in Pescara (IT), directly inspired by the Boccaccio passage.

[69] See *Franco Sacchetti*, a cura di Michelangelo Zaccarello, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 100 voll., Roma, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 1960-2020 (from now on DBI), vol. LXXXIX (2017): online version https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/franco-sacchetti_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/ (last accessed 14/05/2025). For forthcoming entries, reference will be made to the digital edition without reporting the link.

[70] See FRANCO SACCHETTI, *Le trecento novelle*, edizione critica a cura di Michelangelo Zaccarello, Firenze, Edizione del Galluzzo, 2014.

[71] Ivi, pp. 260-262.

[72] Ivi, pp. 262-263.

[73] See MICHAIL M. BACHTIN, *Estetica e romanzo*, a cura di Clara Strada Janovič, Torino, Einaudi, 1979, p. 466 [ed. fr. *Esthétique et théorie du roman*, traduit du russe par Daria Olivier, préface de Michel Aucouturier, Paris, Gallimard, 1978].

jokes, and thus becoming a legend[74]. Far from losing his credibility, Dante, in this way, becomes a *de facto* well-rounded fictitious character[75].

La richiesta popolare di pubblica recitazione dei canti danteschi assume i contorni di un appello dal basso, espresso da pochi cittadini in rappresentanza di un'intera comunità desiderosa di fondare un'istituzione, quella che poi si sarebbe perpetrata come *lectura Dantis*, in grado di mantenere vivo e trasmettere alle future generazioni l'immenso bagaglio di virtù, eloquenza e cultura contenuto nel «libro *Dantis*» delle cui bellezze, in questo modo, potessero essere edotti anche i "non grammatici" («possunt etiam, non gramatici informari»): *gli illitterati* e la *gens idiota*. Il poema muoveva così i primi passi verso la sua fortunata storia di letture, recite e declamazioni pubbliche che ne avrebbero costantemente rinvigorito e confermato il forte spessore performativo; mentre in parallelo il suo autore cominciava a trasformarsi in personaggio mitico nell'immaginario e nella letteratura popolare[76].

The popular demand for the public recitation of Dante's cantos took on the contours of a grassroots appeal, expressed by a few citizens representing an entire community eager to found an institution, that would later become the *lectura Dantis*, capable of keeping alive and transmitting to future generations the vast wealth of virtue, eloquence and culture contained in the «Book of Dante», of whose beauty, in this way, even the "uneducated" («possunt etiam, non gramatici informari») could be informed: the *illiterati* and the *gens idiota*. The poem thus took its first steps towards its fortunate history of readings, recitations and public declamations that would constantly reinvigorate and confirm its strong performative depth, while, at the same time, its author began to transform himself into a mythical character in popular imagination and literature.

If, on the one hand, in the face of rising and rampant Petrarchism and the strong influence of private literary circles, Dante seems to have passed more and more into the background during the following centuries (the 16th and 17th centuries), to rightly arrive in all its splendour in the reception of the late 18th and 19th centuries, the latter marked by strong political undertones, on the other hand, it is relevant to point out how, along with these practices of distancing oneself from the poem and Dante's style, there remains instead the "singing of Dante", the investment in the musicality of the text at a popular level and, in some cases, on the academic side:

Sempre più poi si diffuse con la rapidità e la forza di espansione di una musica perfettamente rispondente al gusto degli ascoltanti, l'uso di recitare e ascoltare Dante. Si recitava per le strade da corretani e da istrioni, quanto e più che nei palazzi dei dotti, nei monasteri, nelle corti: se ne imparavano a memoria brani, episodi e canti, e se ne ripetevano versi come oggi si ripetono i motivi di un'opera musicale[77].

It then spread more and more with the rapidity and expanding force of a music perfectly suited to the taste of the listeners, the custom of reciting and listening to Dante. It was recited in the streets by charlatans and by histrions, as much and more than in the palaces of the learned, in monasteries, in courts: passages, episodes and cantos were learnt by heart, and verses were repeated in the same way as the motifs of a musical work are repeated today.

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[74] See GIOVANNI PAPINI, *La leggenda di Dante: motti, facezie e tradizioni dei secoli 14.-19*., con introduzione di G. Papini, Lanciano, Carabba, 1911.
[75] See ANDREA BATTISTINI, *Il modello e le suggestioni letterarie: Dante nella tradizione della letteratura e nella cultura popolare*, in ENRICO MALATO, MASSIMO MIGLIO, OVIDIO CAPITANI *et al.* (a cura di), *"Per correr miglior acque...". Bilanci e prospettive degli studi danteschi alle soglie del nuovo millennio*, Atti del convegno (Verona-Ravenna, 25-29 ottobre 1999), 2 voll., Roma, Salerno, 2001, vol. 1, pp. 443-484, reference at p. 448.
[76] ANDREA SIMONE, *Dante in scena. Percorsi di una ricezione: dalla fine dell'ancien régime al grande attore*, cit., p. 26.
[77] MARIO FERRIGNI, *Dante and the Theatre,* cit., p. 5.

At a social level, and even in the most privileged circles, the enjoyment of Dante's work took place for a long time at an oral level, through public shared readings, depriving writing and individual silent reading of the supremacy they would achieve.

As for the diffusion of and demand for Dante's works, read and reworked through parodic rewritings by other singers/authors, it may be useful to refer to Paul Zumthor's studies of popular poetry and poetic forms since the Middle Ages[78].

The scholar argues how the precise distinction of professions during the Middle Ages between those who know how to write or copy texts (at that height only manuscripts), and those who have the skills to decipher and read what is transcribed, should be clear to our contemporary imagination. It is precisely of the latter that Zumthor compares the slow process of interpreting the written page, from the grapheme to the sign, up to the final comprehension of the complex meaning of the set of constituent elements of the sentence, to the stubborn assimilation of food by the great bovines. Metaphorically ruminating on this complex set of abbreviations, signs and languages/dialects, the reader must perform an action that is anything but immediate to ideally pass the written text from his mouth to his own ear as a listener and to that of the onlookers, creating only in the final oral expression the text, which becomes its own material.

In this sense, the work, more modernly understood, is categorised as «that which is communicated poetically, here and now; text, sonority, visual rhythms; the word includes the totality of the factors of performance; [...] the *work* can be both heard and seen»[79].

Poetry, as a collective practice of narration and constitution of the foundations of a community first, and civilisation later, plays a central role in human society. From the value of memory to the more unfathomable character of religious ritual and magical mystery[80], the word is embellished in the act of making itself by taking on a body, a form, a tangible presence. Zumthor therefore emphasises how important the presence of a voice is[81], once again linking it

[78] See PAUL ZUMTHOR, *La lettera e la voce. Sulla «letteratura» medievale*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1990 [ed. fr. *La lettre et la voix*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1987[1]].

[79] «ciò che è comunicato poeticamente, qui e ora; testo, sonorità, ritmi visuali; la parola include la totalità dei fattori dell'esecuzione; […] l'*opera* può essere sia udita che vista», PAUL ZUMTHOR, *Una cultura della voce*, in PIERO BOITANI, MARIO MANCINI, ALBERTO VÀRVARO (eds.), *2. Il medioevo volgare*, cit., vol. 1, tomo I (1999), pp. 117-146, quotation at p. 135.

[80] See ANITA SEPPILLI, *Poesia e magia*, Torino, Einaudi, 1962.

[81] See PAUL ZUMTHOR, *La presenza della voce. Introduzione alla poesia orale*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1984 [trad. ingl. *Oral Poetry: an introduction*, translation by Kathryn Murphy-Judy, foreword by Walter J. Ong, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1990; ed. fr. *Introduction à la poésie orale*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1983[1]].

to the collective practices of shared reading inherent in Dante's reception of the text, and specifies the difference operating between *orality* and *vocality*:

La vocalità è la storicità di una voce: il suo uso. Una lunga tradizione di pensiero, è vero, considera e valorizza la voce in quanto portatrice del linguaggio, che in essa e per essa si articola in sonorità significanti. Ma il fatto che deve più attirare la nostra attenzione è la funzione larga della voce, di cui la parola costituisce la manifestazione più evidente ma non la sola né la più vitale: l'esercizio della sua potenza fisiologica, la sua capacità di produrre la fonia e di organizzare la sostanza. Questa *phonê* non riguarda immediatamente il senso: non fa che procurargli un luogo. Ciò su cui voglio attirare l'attenzione così è l'aspetto corporale dei testi medievali, il loro modo di esistere in quanto oggetti di percezione sensoriale[82].

Vocality is the historicity of a voice: its use. A long tradition of thought, it is true, considers and values the voice as the bearer of language, which in it and for it is articulated in meaningful sonorities. But the fact that must most attract our attention is the broad function of the voice, of which speech constitutes the most evident manifestation but not the only nor the most vital: the exercise of its physiological power, its capacity to produce phonê and to organise substance. This phonê does not immediately concern sense: it merely provides it with a place. What I want to draw attention to in this way is the bodily aspect of medieval texts, their mode of existence as objects of sensory perception.

The practice of *saying Dante* takes on an increasingly communitarian significance within the different social contexts in which it is re-proposed. If, on the one hand, Alighieri and his artistic production shake-up customs, supplanting the hegemonic position of Latin over vernacular and identifying a greater differentiation of stylistic registers for the different genres[83], on the other hand, Dante remains a touchstone to return to despite the predilection for Petrarchan monolingualism becoming increasingly present. Dante's style, which is more expressive and multilingual, lays the foundations for a half-scholarly reception and for popular productions[84].

Between the 14th and 16th centuries, singers continued the popular practice of memorising the verses of the *Commedia* and, above all, reworking them in the face of the epic-chivalric tradition and the new Renaissance taste for spectacularisation. Figures such as the

[82] PAUL ZUMTHOR, *Una cultura della voce*, cit., p. 122.

[83] See CORRADO CALENDA, *Dante e i poeti del Tre e Quattrocento*, in ENRICO MALATO, MASSIMO MIGLIO, OVIDIO CAPITANI *et al.* (a cura di) *"Per correr miglior acque...". Bilanci e prospettive degli studi danteschi alle soglie del nuovo millennio*, cit., vol. 1, pp. 415-441.

[84] For more detailed information, see the essays by Gioacchino Papparelli, Gianvito Resta and Tommaso Pisanti in ADALGISA BORRARO, PIETRO BORRARO (a cura di), *Dante nel pensiero e nella esegesi dei secoli XIV e XV*, Atti del Convegno di studi realizzato dal Comune di Melfi in collaborazione con la Biblioteca provinciale di Potenza e il Seminario di studi danteschi di Terra di Lavoro (Melfi, 27 settembre - 2 ottobre 1970), Firenze, L. S. Olschki, 1975: GIOACCHINO PAPPARELLI, *Dante e il Trecento*, pp. 31-70; GIANVITO RESTA, *Dante nel Quattrocento*, pp. 71-91; TOMMASO PISANTI, *Dante nell'Europa del Trecento e del Quattrocento*, pp. 449-470. See also CARLO DIONISOTTI, *Dante nel Quattrocento*, in CARLO DIONISOTTI, *Scritti di storia della letteratura italiana*, a cura di Tania Basile, Vincenzo Fera, Susanna Villari, 5 voll., Roma, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2008-2011, vol. 2 (*1963-1971*, 2009), pp. 173-212; MIRKO TAVONI, *Storia della lingua italiana. Il Quattrocento*, Padova, Libreria Universitaria.it, 2015 [Bologna, Il Mulino, 1992[1]].

Florentine Antonio Pucci (1310-1388c.)[85] became interpreters of a taste that recognised the specific function of the written text as a "safe" vehicle of transmission, without however depriving it of vocal performance, thus preserving perhaps the truest interpretation of the *ratio creandi.* An illustrious singer and public figure, in his *Libro di varie storie* Pucci describes in great detail the plausible repertoire of poetry used by the storytellers of his time, citing Dante and his works in over a hundred proven references. Recent studies have revealed how he worked as a copyist, and his hand can be recognised in manuscripts attributable to the first circulation of the *Commedia*[86]. At that time, through the interconnections between public, popular, and academic performance, and beyond, we understand how a distinction of register and audience for the enjoyment of the same works requires performers to be educated, trained in the subject matter to be articulated, and to be equally versatile in being able to harmonise the more or less marked references to the context of the performance of extemporaneous poetry.

Driven by the rediscovered passion for the classics and their value, the humanist temperament and the Renaissance context offered a plurality of widely differing spectacular events, sometimes united by the same performers and workers performing tasks that were adapted to the occasion. In this flourishing era for letters and the arts, Dante remained a reference author, only tangentially entering the courts and the debate on language for his style and poetic production[87]:

Il Dante del Quattrocento umanistico (della sua prima metà, cioè) è, in buona sostanza, materia di dispute teoriche, di contrapposte appropriazioni ideologiche, di tendenziose riletture. La trasformazione oggettiva delle circostanze materiali e ideali, con l'introduzione cruciale tra latino e volgare, finisce per emblematizzare la figura di Dante, la quale viene insieme valorizzata e, in qualche modo, coartata, in ogni caso spesso settariamente piegata all'attualità di polemiche contingenti[88].

The Dante of the humanistic 15th century (of its first half, that is) is, in essence, the subject of theoretical disputes, of opposing ideological appropriations, of tendentious re-readings. The objective transformation of the material and ideal circumstances, with the crucial introduction between Latin and the vernacular, ends up emblematising the figure of Dante, who is both valorised and, in some ways, coercively coaxed, in any case often following a sectarian approach, bent to the topicality of contingent controversies.

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[85] See *Antonio Pucci*, a cura di Michele Messina, in *Enciclopedia dantesca*, 6 voll., Roma, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 1970, IV. See also the online version: https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/antonio-pucci_%28Enciclopedia-Dantesca%29/ (last accessed 14/05/2025). The entries in the *Encyclopaedia of Dante* will henceforth also be given in abbreviated form, referring to the online version.

[86] See RUDY ABARDO, *Il "Dante" di Antonio Pucci*, in FRANCESCO MAZZONI (a cura di), *Studi offerti a Gianfranco Contini dagli allievi pisani*, Firenze, Le Lettere, 1984, pp. 3-31; MARCO CURSI, *Un Codice della Commedia di mano di Antonio Pucci*, in «Scripta», vol. 7, 2014, pp. 65-76; MARCO CURSI, *Gli argomenti all'Inferno di Antonio Pucci*, in «Papyrologica Lupiensia», n. 24 (Supplemento: *Studi paleografici e papirologici in ricordo di Paolo Radiciotti*, a cura di Mario Capasso, Mario De Nonno), 2015, pp. 127-149.

[87] See BERNARD WEINBERG, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1961; ALDO VALLONE, *Storia della critica dantesca dal XIV al XX secolo*, 2 voll., Padova-Milano, Piccin Nuova Libreria-Vallardi, 1981.

[88] CORRADO CALENDA, *Dante e i poeti del Tre e Quattrocento*, cit., p. 432.

In a period in which a literary canon was beginning to be delineated, capable of exerting asphyxiating pressure against anything that did not conform to the linguistic norm of beautiful writing and courtly themes derived from the classical models, great space was nevertheless granted to oral production, novella writing and improvised poetry:

L'oralità era infatti alla base del patto di narrazione su cui era costruito il genere, con un richiamo – implicito o esplicito – a un pubblico che non era costituito solo di lettori ma si allargava a una cerchia mobile di uditori: un pubblico che, ascoltando, poteva comunque apprezzare e apprendere, e rendersi disponibile per altre storie consimili. Tutto ciò implicava, o comunque favoriva, esiti formali caratteristici, che apparentavano molta parte di queste scritture ai prodotti di taglio popolare: la serialità flessibile, l'indifferenza rispetto all'idea di originalità autoriale, e soprattutto uno spiccato interesse per i più concreti bisogni del mercato, per una immediata spendibilità editoriale che andava a moltiplicare le pratiche disinvolte delle botteghe dei libri, dal cambio del titolo all'adattamento geografico e temporale, dallo smembramento all'amplificazione, e via stampando[89].

Orality was in fact at the basis of the narrative pact on which the genre was built, with an appeal - implicit or explicit - to an audience that was not only made up of readers but widened to a mobile circle of listeners: an audience that, by listening, could, in any case, appreciate and learn, and make itself available for other similar stories. All this implied, or in any case favoured, expected formal outcomes, which likened many of these writings to popular products: flexible seriality, indifference to the idea of authorial originality, and above all a marked interest in the more concrete needs of the market, for immediate editorial expendability, which multiplied the nonchalant practices of the bookshops, from title changes to geographical and temporal adaptation, from dismemberment to amplification, and so on.

As already noted for Pucci, the quotation of famous Dantean expressions and the frequent reference to unforgettable episodes of the *Commedia* are found in a further example of a popular performer, the Bolognese storyteller and author Giulio Cesare Croce (1550-1609)[90], who, in the historical period that saw the dawn of the full professionalisation of the figure of the actor and actress thanks to the *Commedia dell'Arte*, carried on the tradition of singing *all'improvviso*[91]. In this new cultural climate, Croce understands the artistic and commercial value of printing his own extemporaneous poems in small volumes, «as mediators between written and oral cultures and transmitters of information and entertainment»[92], providing subsequent studies with direct sources for a better understanding of the cultural diffusion of improvised poetry, its users and its transmission models. Singers and storytellers such as Croce operated in courts and piazzas throughout Italy, modulating their songs for the ears of the largely heterogeneous public, and were a fundamental example of how the circulation of ideas and culture through orality, and also through the press, passed through the

[89] See MARINA ROGGERO, *Le vie dei libri. Letture, lingua e pubblico nell'Italia moderna*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2021, pp. 133-134.
[90] See *Giulio Cesare Croce*, a cura di Lucia Strappini, in DBI.
[91] See the new online version of the Biblioteca Comunale dell'Archiginnasio in Bologna, which has digitised its holdings of printed volumes and manuscripts on Giulio Cesare Croce: https://digital.fondazionecarisbo.it/category/edizioni-di-opere-di-giulio-cesare-croce (last accessed 25/05/2025).
[92] See ROSA SALZBERG, MASSIMO ROSPOCHER, *Street Singers in Italian Renaissance Urban Culture and Communication*, in «Cultural and Social History», vol. 9, n. 1, 2012, pp. 9-26, quote on p. 10.

few who could enjoy it, sometimes to the benefit of the many: «The illiterate or partially literate majority did not lack for occasions to consume popular poetry and song by means of oral performance»[93].

Croce's works, as well as some stereotypical characters he created such as the foolish peasant Bertoldo, his wife Marcolfa and their son Bertoldino at the court of the Longobard king Alboin[94], were the subject of extensive reworking in later theatre productions and *canovacci*, confirming what Anna Pegoretti reports in her description of the multifaceted artist, namely that the *cantimbanco* of the time, exemplified by Croce, tended to be a hybrid figure, competent in literary matters and capable of mixing different popular cultures with more cultured ones:

> Croce is well into this multifaceted picture as a hybrid figure, combining a peculiar mixture of humble background, social ambition, and intellectual voracity. His works display all the common techniques of cantimbanchi: formulaic prologues, catalogues, and addresses to the audience, along with popular and narrative contents, accompanied by music. However, his adoption of popular genres and techniques was not unimaginative; his production progressively developed from early reworkings of popular songs to personal creations[95].

Again, Pegoretti emphasises the presence of Alighieri, like that of other poets counted in the literary canon, within Croce's production and argues their particular relevance as indicative of a collective memory composed of Dante's stylistic features, topoi and scenarios, known even to the most uncultured, taught during the years of "scholastic" education[96]. In Croce's boundless production, one can find, for example, Dante's infernal quest transformed into a folkloric canovaccio entitled the *Disgratiae del Zane*[97]. If these are but some emblematic

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[93] ROSA SALZBERG, MASSIMO ROSPOCHER, *Street Singers in Italian Renaissance Urban Culture and Communication*, p. 13. For a comprehensive view of the phenomenon, see the entire issue collecting essential contributions on oral production in the Italian Renaissance *The Cantastorie in Renaissance Italy: Street Singers between Oral and Literate Cultures* a cura di Luca Degl'Innocenti e Massimo Rospocher, in «Italian Studies», vol. 71, n. 2, 2016.

[94] See GIULIO CESARE CROCE, *Le astuzie di Bertoldo e le semplicità di Bertoldino*, a cura di Piero Camporesi, Milano, Garzanti, 2004 [Milano, Garzanti, 1993[1]]; PIERO CAMPORESI, *Il palazzo e il cantimbanco. Giulio Cesare Croce*, Milano, Garzanti, 1994; PIERO CAMPORESI, *La maschera di Bertoldo*, Milano, il Saggiatore, 2022 [*G. C. Croce e la letteratura carnevalesca*, Torino, Einaudi, 1976[1]].

[95] ANNA PEGORETTI, *Dismembered Voices and Acoustic Memories: Dante in Giulio Cesare Croce*, in «Italian Studies», vol. 71, n. 2 maggio, 2016, pp. 225-237, quote on p. 228.

[96] Ivi, pp. 229-237. On this subject see also PAUL F. GENDLER, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning, 1300-1600*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1989; ROBERT BACK, *Humanism and Education in Medieval and Renaissance Italy. Tradition and Innovation in Latin Schools from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001.

[97] See GIULIO CESARE CROCE, *Disgratiae del Zane narrate in un sonetto*, in GIULIO CESARE CROCE, *Opere dialettali e italiane: il mondo visto dal basso*, a cura di Vladimir Fava e Ilaria Chia, con prefazione di Andrea Battistini, Roma, Carocci, 2009, pp. 184-198. See also the digitised version from the Archivio dell'Arciginnasio di Bologna, GIULIO CESARE CROCE, *Disgratie del Zane narrate in un sonetto*, Bologna, presso gli eredi di Bartol. Cochi, 1621, available online at: http://badigit.comune.bologna.it/GCCroce/reader/17_IX_167.htm#page/1/mode/2up (last accessed 14/05/2025).

examples of Dante's popular reception, the higher and more educated echelons of society will show as much enthusiasm and interest in the reuse of Dante's works.

1.4. Diffusion in elitist humanistic circles

During the carnival of 1553 in Milan, Dante appears as a character participating in a masquerade, whose «structure is generally identified by the progression: tournament, banquet, dance, allegorical masquerade»[98], along with other distinguished poets of the canon such as Petrarch, Boccaccio, Sannazzaro, Bembo and Ariosto[99].

The author of the work is the Milanese scholar Anton Francesco Raineri[100], «a *trasformato* academic, formerly secretary to Cardinal Verulano in Piacenza and then Pier Luigi Farnese and finally canon in the cathedral of Milan for the protection of Cardinal d'Este»[101], who published it in 1553, after other literary compositions and a few dramas, the *Cento sonetti* and several additional rhymes, addressed to Fabiano de' Monti from Rome, nephew of Cardinal Innocenzo de' Monti and Pope Julius III, at whose court he had already been a poet since 1550[102].

Among the compositions, of particular importance are the two spectacular writings, the performance of which the author says he personally witnessed in Milan during the carnival celebrations of 1553[103], on 10 and 16 February. While he was in Pavia on family business, he

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[98] See ALESSANDRO PONTREMOLI, *Intermedio spettacolare e danza teatrale. A Milano fra Cinque e Seicento*, Milano, Euresis, 1999 [2005[2]], pp. 130-132.

[99] Among the many reports of this occurrence, the only one to place it in an early Dantean perspective is the examination made by STEFANO TOMASSINI, *Sempre in piedi: Dante e la danza*, in LINA BOLZONI (a cura di), *La Commedia di Dante nello specchio delle immagini*, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana Treccani, 2021, pp. 600-627, reference at p. 602. The contribution was later incorporated in the recent STEFANO TOMASSINI, *Sempre in piedi. Dante e la danza*, in ANTONIO ATTISANI, STEFANO TOMASSINI, *L'umanità mancata. Dante e la scena*, Torino, Accademia University Press, 2023, pp. 47-87.

[100] See *Anton Francesco Raineri*, a cura di Pietro Giulio Riga, in DBI.

[101] CARLO ANTONIO VIANELLO, *Teatri Spettacoli Musiche a Milano nei secoli scorsi*, Milano, Libreria Lombarda, 1941, p. 70; presenza confermata anche da CLAUDIO SARTORI, *La musica nel duomo e alla corte sino alla seconda metà del '500*, in GIOVANNI TRECCANI DEGLI ALFIERI E GIAN PIERO BOGNIETTI (a cura di), *Storia di Milano*, voll. 19, 1953-1966, Milano, Fondazione Treccani degli Alfieri, vol. 9 (1961), pp. 721- 903, reference at p. 860 [Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1995].

[102] «Raineri si inserì subito nell'orbita protettiva del nuovo pontefice, diventando segretario del fratello, Baldovino Ciocchi Del Monte», *Anton Francesco Raineri*, a cura di Pietro Giulio Riga, cit.

[103] On the actual chronology of the *Pompe*, one could encounter a substantial discordance of sources. By comparing Raineri's private correspondence, the dates of publication of the works and the ambassadorships to which he had been sent on behalf of Pier Luigi Farnese, it is possible to contextualise the words of the author himself, who declares in the first *Pompa* that he was in Pavia for private reasons, and that he had been invited to Milan by Carlo Visconti, whom he would later favour at the court of Pope Julius III. Therefore, the literary use of the figure of

was invited by Carlo Visconti to participate in the festivities to devise and write down some games and *pompe* for the court of Ferrante Gonzaga, to entertain the ladies and knights gathered in the house and in another sumptuous patrician residence with a large colonnade, artfully decorated for the occasion. The two *pompe* are to be considered consequential, as is indicated in the first, entitled *Pompa dei corrieri amorosi*, which is intended as a pretext to pay homage to the beauty of the noblewomen of Milan and sing their praises, starting with the Lord's bride, Isabella Gonzaga, and her daughter Ippolita, in a courtly view of the singing of arms and love.

Given the resonance of the first masquerade, it was decided to stage a second one, *Pompa dei poeti amorosi*[104], in which once again the illustrious guests masquerade as poets and offer the ladies sonnets eternalising their beauty, followed by Apollo and the Muses. As Alessandro Pontremoli writes, the form of the masquerade is strongly based on the medieval system of chivalry, always envisaging a moment of tournament and/or parade in warlike garb that then flows, as in the case of the *Pompa dei poeti amorosi*, into the banquet hall, giving the ladies the opportunity to admire the magnificence of the Lords, the Lords to make contact with the Ladies and have a moment of *divertissement* and dance together[105].

In this case, the allegorical value brought by the presence of the masks of the Poets of Love and the Muses of Parnassus is intended to reinforce the previous masquerade that extolled the beauty of the noble ladies in Milan and support with more rhetorical force the dramaturgical enterprise of Raineri, who can thus show off his belonging to a literary aesthetic canon that draws on the tradition of the *Vati* and create a spectacular event that delights his courtly patrons in the ball.

Dante in dramaturgies for dance dates back to 1553, while 1553 is certainly to be defined as the *terminus ante quem* for a certain dating of the spectacular value of the event that took place in Milan. To give an account of this lesson on the dating of the *Pompe*, read: «Sembrerebbe che il Raineri, assunto con la giolitina del 1547 a primo autore rappresentato, con quarantasei componimenti, e raggiunta la carica di poeta ufficiale in corte di Giulio III, raccolga a Milano il tributo dei compatrioti con la pubblicazione nella sede della tipografia offerta dall'accademia locale della sua raccolta lirica, alla quale si sarebbe indotto su loro pressione proprio nel periodo trascorso a Milano, componendo gli ultimi sonetti, le *Stanze* e i *Madrigali* e aggiungendovi quanto di più loro proprio egli avesse allora prodotto, le *Pompe*, in una gara di scambievoli omaggi e dimostrazioni di stima (e la stampa autonoma delle *Pompe* sarà allora dovuta alla volontà di esprimere fin da subito un tangibile segno di gratitudine, visto il ritardo che andava accumulando la pubblicazione dei *Cento Sonetti* in attesa che il commento di Girolamo giungesse a compimento)», ANTON FRANCESCO RAINERI, *Cento sonetti, altre Rime e Pompe, con la brevissima esposizione di Girolamo Raineri*, testo e note a cura di Rossana Soldano, Torino, RES, 2004 pp. 205-277 (*Nota biografica*), quotations at pp. 255-256.

[104] See ANTON FRANCESCO RAINERI, *Cento sonetti di M. Antonfrancesco Rainerio, gentilhuomo milanese, con breuissima espositione dei soggietti loro; & con la tauola in fine*, Impressi in Milano, per Giovan Antonio Borgia, 1553.

[105] See ALESSANDRO PONTREMOLI, *Intermedio spettacolare e danza teatrale. A Milano tra Cinque e Seicento*, cit., p. 129.

The spectacular value of this first documented example of a masquerade linked to the figure of Dante, a poet exalted in this case for his courtly production, is relevant for at least two reasons: on the one hand, it allows us to understand how the figure and not only the imagery and episodes of Dante in his works were present and generative in Renaissance culture; on the other, it reinforces the mixing of literary and festive, spectacular production. In fact, it is no coincidence that literary criticism, especially with Guglielmo Gorni[106], has until recently attributed a negative opinion to the production of this man of letters, failing to observe the studies carried out by dance and theatre historians who refer to this spectacular event as important for the court of Milan in transition under King Charles V.

The recent critical edition edited by Rossana Sodano[107] and the comparison with further sources in the field of music history, which place the presence of the company of the musician Moscatello[108], cited by Raineri, and active at the Duomo Chapel since the arrival of Ferrante Gonzaga with the musician Orlando di Lasso in Milan from 1546 to 1569[109], provides a positive picture of Raineri's artistic production, supporting with renewed benevolence his «making lyric poetry an instrument of investigation and questioning of contemporary history»[110]. His, therefore, is a poetry that lives in dialogue with all the parties with which it is constantly involved in the system of Renaissance patronage, and, above all, it reveals an author who interprets in his own complex artistic production the idea of contamination between different arts, a further confirmation of how artistic circles largely coexisted and communicated among them.

After the affirmation of dance in the 15th century, the art of choreography was in the Renaissance a primary discipline in the education of boys and girls, as a training of the body, as an unfailing gymnastic art, on a par with fencing or vaulting on horseback[111], a pedagogical moment of great relevance for knowing how to behave, even with the opposite sex, and

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[106] «in ottava rima […] vale quanto la prima; e noi qui farem punto», GUGLIELMO GORNI, *Un'ecatombe di rime. I «Cento sonetti» di Antonfrancesco Rainerio*, in «Versants: revue suisse des littératures romanes = Rivista svizzera delle letterature romanze = Revista suiza de literaturas románicas», vol. 15, 1989, pp. 135-152, citazioni a pp. 136-137.

[107] See ANTON FRANCESCO RAINERI, *Cento sonetti, altre Rime e Pompe, con la brevissima esposizione di Girolamo Raineri*, cit.

[108] «l'eccellente Moscatello, co' i suoi compagni, musici rarissimi, et ciascuno d'essi venìa sonando in strumenti musicali diversi l'un da l'altro», ANTON FRANCESCO RAINERI, *Cento sonetti di M. Antonfrancesco Rainerio*, cit., *Pompa dei corrieri amorosi.*

[109] See CLAUDIO SARTORI, *La musica nel duomo e alla corte sino alla seconda metà del '500*, cit., pp. 856-861.

[110] «fare della lirica uno strumento d'indagine e d'interrogazione della storia contemporanea», STEFANO JOSSA, *Cento sonetti by Anton Francesco Raineri and Rossana Sodano*, in «Italianistica: Rivista di letteratura italiana», vol. 35, n. 3, 2006, pp. 165-167, quote on p.167.

[111] See SYDNEY ANGLO, *The martial arts of Renaissance Europe*, New Heaven, Yale University Press, 2000, pp. 40-90.

knowing how to keep one's place in society[112]. As Pontremoli and Alessandro Arcangeli report[113], Renaissance dance holds a leading role within courts and elite contexts, always keeping in mind its constant presence in popular contexts, strictly connected to the collective moment of the feast. Its form is closely determined by the space in which it is performed, to a precise idea of measure between the parties. It is, therefore, a courtly social dance, able to exemplify the power of the Prince and the power relations between individuals and to account for the harmony coming from a sought-after artificial agreement between the different parties in dialogue. From an initial Italian/Lombard taste, one observes the emergence throughout Europe of similar, schematic forms, contemplating non-representational dances, such as *bassedanze* and dances involving more pantomimic, narrative actions.

Looking again at the variegated spectacular context of the Renaissance, even within the genre of the villanesque comedy, an equally illustrious type offered to an elitist and high-ranking audience, we find a not dissimilar case of reception of Dante's atmospheres by the comedian and actor Angelo Beolco, in art Ruzante (circa 1496-1542)[114]. At the Doge's Palace in Venice, in 1523[115], the comedy *Betìa* was presented to a group of cultured and refined guests, «where the basic framework is that of the pastoral fable and the villanesque *mariazo* respectively, and [...] assimilates the scattered material of a pre-existing repertoire, in which the novelistic cue is associated with the jester mode, the verbal invention with the canonical precept, the singing interlude with the mimic exercise»[116]. Singular is the architecture of this comedy created by Ruzante, which encompasses in its apparent simplicity a reprise of the folkloristic wedding with annexed jokes and laughter, typical of the low apotropaic context of popular spectacle, a constant insistence on references to classical texts and erudite citations. It

[112] See ALESSANDRO PONTREMOLI, *La danza: balli di società e balli teatrali*, in «Comunicazioni Sociali. Journal of Media, Performing Arts and Cultural Studies», n. 1-2 (*Aspetti della teatralità a Milano nell'età Barocca*, a cura di Annamaria Cascetta), 1994, pp. 113-164, reference at pp.116-117.

[113] See ALESSANDRO PONTREMOLI, *Storia della danza, dal Medioevo ai giorni nostri*, Firenze, Le Lettere, 2002; ALESSANDRO PONTREMOLI, *La sapienza dei piedi. Pensiero teorico e sperimentazione nei trattati italiani di danza del XV secolo*, in EUGENIA CASINI ROPA E FRANCESCA BORTOLETTI (a cura di), *Danza, cultura e società nel Rinascimento italiano*, Macerata, Ephemeria, 2007, pp. 33-47; ALESSANDRO PONTREMOLI, *Danza e Rinascimento: cultura coreica e "buone maniere" nella corte del XV secolo*, Macerata, Ephemeria, 2011; ALESSANDRO PONTREMOLI, *La danza nelle corti di antico regime. Modelli culturali e processi di ricezione fra natura e arte*, Bari, Edizioni di pagina, 2012; ALESSANDRO ARCANGELI, *Danza e scrittura nel Rinascimento: l'enigma dei trattati italiani di ballo*, in LAURA COLOMBO, STEFANO GENETTI (a cura di), *Figure e intersezioni: tra danza e letteratura*, Verona, Fiorini, 2010, pp. 49-59.

[114] Encyclopaedia and more?

[115] RUZANTE (ANGELO BEOLCO), *Teatro*, prima edizione completa. Testo, traduzione a fronte e note a cura di Ludovico Zorzi, Torino, Einaudi, 1967, pp. 1313-1314.

[116] «dove l'intelaiatura di fondo è rispettivamente quella della favola pastorale e del *mariazo* villanesco, e […] assimila dall'altro la sparsa materia di un repertorio preesistente, in cui lo spunto novellistico si associa al modo giullaresco, l'invenzione verbale al precetto canonico, l'intermezzo canoro all'esercizio mimico», Ivi, p. XXXII.

can be understood how these elements were necessary embellishments for his constant presence in the academic contexts of the University of Padua and the cultured court of Alvise Cornaro, with whom he quickly found protection to support his artistic activity.

La *Betìa* is a five-act comedy in verse in the *Pavano* dialect, the Paduan variety of the Venetian Language. In the most eye-catching scene one of the main characters, the wealthy and scheming Nale, pretends to be dead in front of his wife, Tamia, and makes her believe through an initial monologue that he has just returned from a visit to the Underworld, where he has seen how damned souls are eternally punished, catches the eye. On the stage, therefore, the audience witnesses the lament of the woman, a typical element of *villanesca*, and then a jester-like decalogue of punishments and annexed tortures, typically referred to in popular entertainment[117]. In the fifth act, Nale recollects the experience of the infernal journey, explaining to his beloved how it is possible for the soul to be separated from the mortal body and pass into the other world, recounting how he himself had been subjected to the punishments of incessant fire for his sins of lust. This is the passage of the drama in which we find strong echoes of Dante and a certain revival in parodistic and simplistic terms of the experience of eschatological truth of the *visiones*, in which a human traveller is allowed to witness the other world in order to tell his experience to his neighbors[118].

In the examination of one's own and others' guilt, there is no lack of mention of the citizens of the Serenissima Republic, in Padua and Venice, who can be said to be the object of these treatments, making use of language that is more than a little carnivalesque. In this particular list of episodes and characters that mixes the plane of reality with that of fiction, once again, we are reminded of the modality used by Dante to indicate to his audience the various protagonists of the episodes of the *Commedia*, individuals chosen from the history

[117] With reference to this vast spectacular basin where subversion, parody, and the carnivalesque in its many forms are also realised from Christian folklore hybridised by the various pagan mythologies, see PIERO CAMPORESI, *Il paese della fame*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1978; ALESSANDRO D'ANCONA, *I precursori di Dante*, Firenze, Sansoni, 1874. See also the recent ANNA SCANNAPIECO, *Tra Fumoso e Ruzante. Villani in scena*, Bari, Di Pagina, 2024, pp. 23-39 (*II. Così lontani, così vicini. Villani a teatro da Ruzante a Fumoso*).

[118] As summarised in the words of Gugliemo Cavallo, before «agli occhi dell'uomo medievale sfilavano immagini simboliche di terrore e di speranza, parlandogli un linguaggio diverso, spesso, dai significati dotti, razionali, che a quei simboli aveva imposto la cultura ecclesiastica, un linguaggio affondante le sue radici in credenze religiose "deviate" e tradizioni folkloriche, e perciò stesso più immediato e drammatico», GUGLIEMO CAVALLO (a cura di), *Libri e lettori nel Medioevo. Guida storica e critica*, Bari, Laterza, 2016 [1977[1]], p. X. See RUZANTE, *Teatro*, cit., pp. 455-480; PIERO CAMPORESI, *Il paese della fame*, cit., pp. 38-40. For further study of the implications this type of theatre had in subsequent performances over the centuries, and especially in its recent revival in the twentieth century, see: SIMONA BRUNETTI, *La Betìa, regia di Gianfranco De Bosio (1994)*, in SIMONA BRUNETTI, MARZIA MAINO (a cura di), *Ruzante sulle scene del Novecento*, progetto e coordinamento di Cristina Grazioli, Esedra, Padova, 2006, pp. 283-289; SIMONA BRUNETTI, *Il fantasma redivivo contro il disincantato filosofo dell'eros: Virgilio Zernitz in Betìa* (1994), in SIMONA BRUNETTI, *Attori in video nel secondo Novecento*, Bari, Edizioni di Pagina, 2022, pp. 143-164.

contemporary to him and part of a common collective heritage, a practice also used in mockery and popular shows. In the *Betìa,* the name of «Domenego Taiacalze bufon» is mentioned: even in Inferno he is able to make everyone stop and tremble, like an earthquake, but laughter-induced[119]. From the commentary provided by Ludovico Zorzi, we learn how the Tagliacalze was a clownish collaborator well known to Beolco, famous for his interpretations of otherworldly journeys and hordes of demons, resembling the description of Dante's Malebolge[120].

As already in Raineri's *Pompe,* Dante also in this case belongs to a popular culture that the elite appropriates, combining it with their own refined stylistic features and apparatuses, but returning in this example to that carnivalesque simplicity that is summed up in the instance of the world turned upside down and of subversion circumscribed to customs. Hinting at the rich dramaturgy of Beolco, anything but a simple author at the time, a fine interpreter of a changing reality and one who maintains strong ties with less affluent and acculturated contexts, one understands how the true legacy of Dante and his works is still largely unfathomed, especially in contexts such as this one, which attest to a clear popular matrix innervated in the most mundane and academic theatrical *divertissement.*

In those same years, in Renaissance Medici Florence, from the extemporary *performances* of poets, Dante's reception shifted into the musical sphere or rather became a spectacular pretext for one of the first attempts at *recitar cantando* by Vincenzo Galilei (1520-1621)[121]. Father of the famous scientist, he was at the time a fervent Dante scholar and a member of the Camerata, which, around the figure of Count Giovanni de' Bardi del Vernio, brought together leading figures of the humanistic scene, such as Girolamo Mei, Giulio Caccini, Emilio de' Cavalieri, Jacopo Peri, Francesco Rasi, Ottavio Rinuccini and Claudio Monteverdi, to revive the harmonious combination of word and music of tragic-classical extraction, contrasting it with the polyphonic manner in vogue at the time. In 1580, it was Galilei *pater* himself who had the idea of using the canto of Count Ugolino (*If.* XXXIII), a song full of pain and tension

[119] RUZANTE, *Teatro*, cit., pp. 474-475.
[120] Ivi, pp. 1357-1358. On this figure and his idealisation as a theatrical character *post mortem*, see VITTORIO ROSSI (ed.), *Novelle dell'altro mondo. Poemetto buffonesco del 1513*, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1929, in particular from p. 10 onwards, in which the two infernal visions of Domenego and Zan Polo are present. In the dialogued visions, in this specific topos very similar to the dantean descents with the master/guide, exemplary characters used in turn by Dante and placed in the various circles, such as Minos, Charon and Lucifer, are taken up. See in this sense the recent annotated edition of ARTURO GRAF, *Miti, leggende e superstizioni del medio evo*, a cura di Clara Allasia e Walter Meliga, con introduzione di Marziano Guglielminetti, e saggi critici di Enrico Artifoni e Clara Allasia, Milano, Mondadori, 2002, pp. 257-291 (*La demonologia di Dante*).
[121] See *Vincenzo Galilei*, a cura di Alberto Pironti, in ED.

with grotesque traits, to create the first experiment of *recitar cantando* between poetic text, single voice and viola accompaniment[122].

As Abramov-van Rijk reports, this first experiment in recitative style is mentioned in the correspondence between Galilei and Doni. Critics have not particularly studied the episode, which passes unnoticed and leaves open the question as to the reason for Galilei's choice of Dante's production for a first exercise in musical style[123]. However, as the Dante scholar Viscount Paul Colomb de Batines attests in his contribution dedicated to the *Musicografia della Divina Commedia*, thanks to the mention of Dante's text and especially Count Ugolino's canto in eighteenth-century works, the nineteenth century witnessed a trend towards operatic reception of particular importance with authors such as Francesco Morlacchi, Gaetano Donizetti and Nicola Zingarelli who made their own adaptations[124].

In this academic fervour for the rediscovery of a new musical art form that would respond to the perfect marriage of music and poetry in the wake of the search for ancient performativity, it is not surprising that only a few years later, in 1589, Dante's work was once again the reference and source for the creation of the scenographic apparatus for the *Pellegrina*, a comedy composed by Monsignor Girolamo Barzagli in honour of the wedding of Grand Duke Ferdinando I de' Medici and Christine of Lorraine. To give a measure of the echo produced by Dante's reception in the Renaissance scene, one only has to think that the Grand Duke himself, due to the importance of the occasion, decided to entrust the musical direction of the event to Count de' Bardi, who in turn wanted his most trusted collaborators at his side; not least, Bernardo Buontalenti, an esteemed artist renowned for his fine stage design, was also called upon to prepare the six intermediate parts of the *Pellegrina.*

In particular, in the fourth intermediate section, entitled *La regione de' demoni (The Region of Demons),* the infernal verses and atmospheres of the first *cantica* are recalled, thanks to the words and madrigals composed by Giovan Battista Strozzi and the music, by chamber musician Giulio Caccini, taking the sound and visual landscape recounted in *Inferno as* a model. As we learn from Bastiano De' Rossi's description, from the first appearance of a sorceress surrounded by fire-breathing dragons and the subsequent appearance of devils, Furies, even old

[122]See ELENA ABRAMOV-VAN RIJK, *Singing Dante: The Literary Origins of Cinquecento Monody*, London-New York, Routledge, 2016 [London, Ashgate, 2014[1]], pp. 91-128 (*Part III: Galilei's monody*).
[123] Ivi, p. 9.
[124] See PAUL COLOMB DE BATINES, *Bibliografia dantesca, ossia Catalogo delle edizioni, traduzioni, codici manoscritti e comenti della Divina Commedia e delle opere minori di Dante, seguito dalla serie de' biografi di lui*, 2 voll., Prato, Tipografia Aldina Editrice, 1846, vol. 1., pp. 350-351.

Charon, «with his boat, as Dante seems to paint him, with his long, wispy beard»[125], we pass from the connotative element of fire typical of Malebolge and Avernus, to the vision of Lucifer, stuck in the ice of Lago Cocito and surrounded by his own devils, while flapping his bat-like wings. De' Rossi highlights the skill with which three bodies are actually inserted into the three infernal mouths, echoing Dante's verses from the thirty-fourth canto[126]. Subsequently, the multitude of devils and the gloomy and sooty atmosphere, typical of the first cantica, disappear, giving way to the salvific and benevolent atmosphere of the fifth intermediate part. As Barbara Marignetti summarises, commenting on the way in which Buontalenti's sketches were used by Aby Warburg to reconstruct the sense of the ideological scaffolding underlying the choice of subjects[127], for «each intermediate Bardi thus draws on traditional iconography, whose homogeneity is guaranteed by the *auctoritas* of the source»[128].

This 'model case' of Renaissance intermediation, a favourite place for the contamination of genres and styles, acknowledges Dante's work's inescapable fortune within the most disparate representational practices. That a major spectacular event, such as the wedding of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, a masquerade at the Milanese court, or the birth of a new form of art in music within the circles of the most prominent men of letters and artists of the time made such slavish use of Dante's *Commedia* (through its text, or by quoting and reworking its characters and episodes), suggests how strong was the poet's bond with all circles of court life, despite the controversies and, perhaps, precisely on the strength of or in opposition to them.

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[125] «con la sua barca, come par che'l dipinga Dante, con la barba lunga, e canuta», BERNARDO DE' ROSSI, *Descrizione dell'apparato e degl'intermedi fatti per la commedia rappresentata in Firenze. Nelle nozze de' Serenissimi Don Ferdinando Medici e Madama Cristina di Lorena, Gran Duchi di Toscana*, Firenze, per Anton Padouani, 1589, p. 53. Si veda anche ANGELO SOLERTI, *Gli albori del melodramma*, 3 voll., Milano, R. Sandron, 1904-1905, vol. 1, 1904, pp. 29-31.

[126] See *If.* XXXIV, vv. 55-60.

[127] See ABY WARBURG, *I costumi teatrali per gli Intermezzi del 1589. I disegni di Bernardo Buontalenti e il Libro dei conti di Emilio de' Cavalieri. Saggio storico artistico*, in ABY WARBURG, *La rinascita del Paganesimo antico. Contributi alla storia della cultura*, a cura di Gertrud Bing, con la traduzione di Emma Cantimori, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1966, pp. 61-107; ABY WARBURG, *I costumi teatrali per gli Intermezzi del 1589*, con uno scritto di Nicola Badolato, Milano, Abscondita, 2021. In this regard, we recommend the image showing Epifanio d'Alfiano's engraving of Buontalenti's sketch corresponding to the Ade, in NINO PIRROTTA, ELENA POVOLEDO, *Li due Orfei. Da Poliziano a Monteverdi*, cit., pp. 200-275, fig. 37.

[128] «ciascun intermedio Bardi attinge dunque all'iconografia tradizionale, la cui omogeneità è garantita dall'*auctoritas* della fonte», BARBARA MARIGNETTI, *Gli Intermedi della "Pellegrina": Repertori emblematici e iconologici*, in «Rivista Italiana di Musicologia», vol. 31, n. 2, 1996, pp. 281-301, quote on p. 293.

1.5. Dantean *topoi* in clerical training and preaching

The traces of the heterogeneous fortune of the poet's work find correspondents in popular circles of storytellers, as well as in the refined and high-ranking circles of the courtly feast. Dante traverses the environments transversally, allowing an extraordinary propensity for reuse, for oral, aural and even written reworking, leaving each interpreter the greatest freedom in how to make this crossing. Once again, the fluid characteristic of the poem emerges, easily adaptable to the context, but extremely productive in disparate socio-cultural environments and through heterogeneous performance practices.

The patrimony of universal images and *topoi* offered by the *Comedy* provides a valuable aid not only to the profane, festive or scholastic sphere but also to the sacred, religious sphere. In view of the plurality of artistic forms and the development over the centuries of Dante's message among the arts, the role of the Church, embodied in its various ministers and institutes, becomes decisive in deciding what can be read, said and heard within sacred places and areas of interference.

The consequences of this decision-making process are obvious, just think of how theatre was first opposed by the Fathers of the Church and then, instead, became the most widely used means of promoting the evangelisation of believers through the articulation of the liturgy and sacred representations[129]. In order to have a greater grip on a heterogeneous territory in terms of diversity of cultures, traditions and languages, it is no coincidence that the Church takes upon itself the task of educating and offering a homogeneous order in complexity. In addition to deciding which authors can be read and can be useful in defining a canon that fits its own precepts (or at least makes explicit reference to them), the Church promotes such a canon through the figures of preachers.

Moreover, to spread the Gospel message, figures were needed who could appeal to the public, which tended to be illiterate and uneducated, and the methods of dissemination used had an immediate effect and imprinted themselves in the memory of the faithful so as to generate total adherence to the dictates of the catechism[130].

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[129] See PAOLA VENTRONE, *La sacra rappresentazione fiorentina, ovvero la predicazione in forma di teatro*, in GINETTA AUZZAS, GIOVANNI BAFFETTI, CARLO DELCORNO (a cura di), *Letteratura in forma di sermone: i rapporti tra predicazione e letteratura nei secoli XIII-XVI*, Atti del Seminario di studi (Bologna, 15-17 novembre 2001), Firenze, L. S. Olschki, 2003, pp. 255-280.

[130] See SANTA CASCIANI, *Dante and the Franciscans*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2006, pp. 85-111; GINETTA AUZZAS, GIOVANNI BAFFETTI, CARLO DELCORNO (a cura di), *Letteratura in forma di sermone: i rapporti tra predicazione*

As has already been pointed out, the performativity of specific events in both the sacred and profane spheres is decisive for the success of the operation: captivating the audience, moving them to emotion and triggering their complete consent. Taking their cue from the performers of the mediaeval spectacle and classical rhetoric, preachers also became figures capable of combining the heritage of the sacred scriptures with the endless quantity of figurative and metaphorical elements present in classical and Romance literature, availing themselves of certain strategies implemented above all by storytellers, minstrels and jesters, such as the quotation of maxims at the exhortatory end of the homily, the use of dialogues or the description of exemplary characters and figures.

Already in Bernardino of Siena (1380-1444)[131], who had begun his career as a notary before entering the Franciscan order, we find the use of (carefully) selected quotations from Dante aimed at providing tangible *exempla* for catechesis referring to the concrete problems of everyday reality, taking a cue from events, characters known to the public of the faithful and referring to the intense images artfully constructed by the poet in his work[132]. Echoing the already abundant harvest of quotations taken from Virgil and Ovid, Dante thus became the new *vate* of the otherworldly, the main author to be studied in order to portray an accurate and gruesome description of the punishments inflicted on the damned in Hell, making the first *cantica* the most overused at this chronological height in order to have a good grip on the average listener, a canticle that was perceived almost as a faithful testimony to the presence of a tripartite afterlife, supported by the contemporary artistic production in places of worship[133].

In the area of preaching, regardless of the era and in spite of the stylistic disputes already described above, which considered Dante's style insufficiently posed and suited to the refinement to be sought, the Church, and especially those who were to take his place in the popular context, saw in Dante an indispensable author to support and expand the formation of the father preacher, a preparation that would be constantly enriched by the careful reading of

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e letteratura nei secoli XIII-XVI, cit.; CARLO DELCORNO, *Cadenze e figure della predicazione nel viaggio dantesco*, in «Lettere Italiane», vol. 37, n. 3 luglio-settembre, 1985, pp. 299-320; CARLO DELCORNO, *Dante e il linguaggio dei predicatori*, in «Letture Classensi» (*Intertestualità dantesca*, a cura di Emilio Pasquini), n. 25, 1996, pp. 51-74.

[131] See *Bernardino da Siena, santo*, a cura di Raoul Manselli, in DBI.

[132] See NICOLÒ MALDINA, *Dante tra i predicatori del Quattrocento*, in LUCA LOMBARDO, DIEGO PARISI, ANNA PEGORETTI (a cura di), *Theologus Dantes. Tematiche teologiche nelle opere e nei primi commenti*, Atti del convegno internazionale (Università Ca'Foscari Venezia, 14-15 settembre 2017), Venezia, Edizioni Ca'Foscari, 2018, pp. 231-246.

[133] See JÉRÔME BASCHET, *Les justices de l'au-delà – Les représentations de l'enfer en France et en Italie (XII-XV siècle)*, Rome, École Française de Rome, 1993; JÉRÔME BASCHET, *L'iconographie médiévale*, Paris, Gallimard, 2008 [trad. ita. *L'iconografia medievale*, traduzione di Fabio Scirea, Milano, Jaca book, 2014].

the text[134], as witnessed, for example, by the case of the Dominican Gabriele Barletta[135], who attests to a substantial and persistent revival of Dante's poem in the Renaissance repertory of sermons[136]. Preaching manuals thus become spies of widespread education, manuals to create the *vir bonus dicendi peritus*, capable of having a hold on the faithful, educating them in the Gospel message[137]:

Il predicatore deve essere dotato di buona memoria per poter recitare in pubblico, in modo efficace, il suo testo. Nello stesso tempo, perché la predicazione raggiunga il suo scopo, è essenziale che i suoi contenuti rimangano nella mente degli ascoltatori, tanto più in una situazione in cui in gran parte del pubblico è analfabeta. Ecco allora che la questione della memoria investe anche la struttura della predica, influenza anche i suoi caratteri formali[138].

The preacher must have a good memory to recite his text effectively in public. At the same time, for preaching to achieve its purpose, it is essential that its contents remain in the minds of the listeners, all the more so in a situation where a large part of the audience is illiterate. Here, then, the question of memory also affects the structure of the sermon; it also influences its formal traits.

In the chronological span from the Middle Ages up to the age of the Counter-Reformation, many scholars[139] extensively describe how the persistence of medieval *artes preadicandi* models in sacred rhetoric plays a key role in giving impetus to innovation in preaching itself, and testify to an influential and prolific dialogue between the homiletic tradition of the Church Fathers and the rediscovery of later classical and literary culture, a dialogue involving not only poets such as Dante and Petrarch, but also later authors such as Jacopo Sannazzaro, Torquato Tasso and Giovan Battista Marino[140].

From the mendicant orders to the Jesuit colleges, Dante's work becomes an indispensable element of education for the preacher and, as a side consequence, for the man of the Church who wants to make his *ratio studiorum* a systematisation of knowledge and thus a

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[134] See ANDREA BATTISTINI, *Il modello e le suggestioni letterarie: Dante nella tradizione della letteratura e nella cultura popolare*, cit., pp. 464-465.
[135] Biographical indications on the Dominican are still very uncertain for scholars. Therefore, please refer to the entry *Gabriele Barletta*, a cura di Antonio Alecci, in DBI.
[136] See NICOLÒ MALDINA, *Dantean devotions: Gabriele Barletta's 'oral' Commedia in context*, in STEFANO DALL'AGLIO, BRIAN RICHARDSON, MASSIMO ROSPOCHER (edited by), *Voices and texts in early modern Italy society*, London, Routledge, 2016, pp. 185-199.
[137] See LINA BOLZONI, *La rete delle immagini. Predicazione in volgare dalle origini a Bernardino da Siena*, Torino, Einaudi, 2002; LINA BOLZONI, *Predicazione in volgare e uso delle immagini, da Giordano da Pisa a san Bernardino da Siena*, in GINETTA AUZZAS, GIOVANNI BAFFETTI, CARLO DELCORNO (a cura di), *Letteratura in forma di sermone: i rapporti tra predicazione e letteratura nei secoli XIII-XVI*, cit., pp. 29-52.
[138] LINA BOLZONI, *La rete delle immagini. Predicazione in volgare dalle origini a Bernardino da Siena*, cit, p. XIX.
[139] Among others, see again GINETTA AUZZAS, GIOVANNI BAFFETTI, CARLO DELCORNO (a cura di), *Letteratura in forma di sermone: i rapporti tra predicazione e letteratura nei secoli XIII-XVI*, cit.
[140] See ERMINIA ARDISSINO, *Torquato Tasso e i predicatori*, in GINETTA AUZZAS, GIOVANNI BAFFETTI, CARLO DELCORNO (a cura di), *Letteratura in forma di sermone: i rapporti tra predicazione e letteratura nei secoli XIII-XVI*, cit., pp. 97-121, reference at p. 115.

phenomenal weapon to captivate his listeners with his beautiful eloquence[141]. From the techniques of acquiring mnemonic modules to gestures, from sacred lyricism modulated on the Psalms to the heritage of the popular Laude, up to the education of the body in dance[142], nothing is left to chance in the training of preachers, who were supposed to instruct the audience of faithful to follow the dictates of the Holy See to the letter:

L'accorgimento risultava a suo dire particolarmente efficace con i fanciulli, con "i rozzi d'ingegno, i rustici et le donne", perché nel caso dei borderline bisognava rafforzare "la memoria co'l canto", sì da rendere "più soave l'imparare". L'esperienza provava invece che trascurando rime e canzoni si ottenevano progressi più lenti e minor coinvolgimento, e nella dottrina si procedeva "freddamente, […] et con assai manco frutto"[143].

The expedient was particularly effective with children, with 'the witless, the rustic and the women', because in the case of borderline persons, 'the memory must be strengthened with singing', to make 'learning gentler'. The experience proved, on the other hand, that neglecting rhymes and songs resulted in slower progress and less involvement, and in doctrine, one proceeded 'coldly, [...] and with much less fruit'.

So, while Dante was the object of strong opposition and his style was subjected to a heated debate in the literay sphere, the Tridentine Christian tradition pursued an organic revival of the text of the *Comedy* to support its own catechesis and the pedagogy of the humblest, planning on the oral, physical and melodic training of its pupils the precise adherence to its dictates[144]. Relevant and decisive is the process of cultural osmosis that is generated thanks to this unconscious approach to the Church's cultural canon, a process that is based on a pedagogical practice played on the voice and memory, through a constant and effective improvement of the catechesis practices offered to the community of the faithful.

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[141] See GIOVANNI ISGRÒ, *Il teatro dei gesuiti. La pedagogia teatrale, la scena europea, il teatro di evangelizzazione*, Bari, Di Pagina, 2021; GIOVANNI ISGRÒ, *Il sacro e la scena*, Roma, Bulzoni, 2010; GIOVANNI ISGRÒ, *Fra le invenzioni della scena gesuitica. Pedagogia e debordamento*, Roma, Bulzoni, 2008; MANFRED HINZ, ROBERTO RIGHI, DANILO ZARDIN (a cura di), *I Gesuiti e la Ratio Studiorum*, Roma, Bulzoni, 2004; GIAN PAOLO BRIZZI (a cura di), *La "Ratio studiorum": modelli culturali e pratiche educative dei Gesuiti in Italia tra Cinque e Seicento*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1981; MARIO SALOMONE, *Ratio studiorum atque institutio studiorum Societatis Jesu. L'ordinamento scolastico dei collegi dei Gesuiti*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1979.

[142] See ALESSANDRO ARCANGELI, *I gesuiti e la danza*, in «Quadrivium», a. 1, n. 2, 1990, pp. 21-37; ALESSANDRO ARCANGELI, *The Ballroom and the Stage: the Dance Repertoire of the society of the Jesus*, in MANFRED HINZ, ROBERTO RIGHI, DANILO ZARDIN (a cura di), *I Gesuiti e la Ratio Studiorum*, cit., pp. 67-74.

[143] MARINA ROGGERO, *Le carte piene di sogni. Testi e lettori in età moderna*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2006, pp. 29-30. I passaggi tra virgolette sono tratti da GIANCARLO ROSTIROLLA, DANILO ZARDIN, OSCAR MISCHIATI, *La lauda spirituale tra Cinque e Seicento*. *Poesie e canti devozionali nell'Italia della controriforma*, Roma, Ibimus, 2001, pp. 298-301.

[144] See LUCA CURTI, *Dante e il canone letterario da Bellarmino a Bettinelli*, in MANFRED HINZ, ROBERTO RIGHI, DANILO ZARDIN (a cura di), *I Gesuiti e la Ratio Studiorum*, cit., pp. 357-378; GIUSEPPE MELANDRI, *Intorno allo studio dei Padri della Compagnia di Gesù nelle opere di Dante Alighieri; lettera del P. Giuseppe Melandri della medesima Compagnia al Antonio Donati*, Modena, Tipografia di L. Gaddi già Soliani, 1871; DOMENICO MONDRONE, *Dante e i gesuiti*, in «Civiltà Cattolica», n. 2760, vol. II, 1965, pp. 535-547; DOMENICO MONDRONE, *Gesuiti studiosi di Dante*, in «Civiltà Cattolica», n. 2762, vol. III, 1965, pp. 119-132; FABIO DI GIANNATALE, *Il «cantore della rettitudine evangelica e cattolica». Gesuiti interpreti di Dante nel Risorgimento*, in «Storia e Politica», vol. IX, n. 2, 2017, pp. 333-362; GIANDOMENICO MUCCI, *Dante e i gesuiti*, in «Civiltà Cattolica», n. 4089, vol. IV, 2020, pp. 291-296.

The cultural policy advocated by the Jesuits, for example, in the various colleges, in Italy and abroad, is an operation aimed at supporting a ruling class to be protected[145]: using Renaissance cultural models, which put the excellent individual at the centre, the aim is to educate children in beauty as a form of communication of power, adopting all those techniques that constitute the prerequisites for the construction of a spectacle. Suffice it to mention the extreme attention given to the study of corporeity and the techniques of representation mentioned so far[146].

One example among many of this practice that continued over time is the academic Giuseppe Bianchini di Prato (1685-1749)[147], ordained priest in 1709, a key figure in understanding the circulation of ideas and outlining the current debate: a member of various Academies, he maintained correspondence with some of the most important authors of the time, such as Muratori, Crescimbeni and Maffei, and took part in the debate on language, openly defending the value of Alighieri's poetry. In his *Difesa di Dante Alighieri* [148], he succeeds in defending the poet against age-old accusations of style and prefigure:

un più maturo indirizzo esegetico che verrà condiviso dai moderni, puntando sull'esigenza di interiorizzare e storicizzare il linguaggio, connettendolo dinamicamente con la personalità dell'autore e con la varietà eccezionale dei soggetti da lui accostati, e giungendo per questa via a intuire la complessità, risolta in unità, delle forze operanti nell'ideazione e nella risoluzione poetica della *Commedia*[149].

a more mature exegetical approach that will be shared by moderns, focusing on the need to internalise and historicise language, connecting it dynamically with the author's personality and with the exceptional variety of subjects he approached, and thus arriving at an intuition of the complexity, resolved in unity, of the forces at work in the conception and poetic resolution of the Comedy.

Even though Dante's work is, to a certain extent, censored for its fierce criticism of the ecclesiastical world, it is precisely thanks to the Church and its ministers that Dante is passed on so widely. This phenomenon of reinterpretation and adaptation will be transversal and increasingly frequent in the various spheres of speaking with a "viva voce": poetic improvisation and theatrical declamation, as well as religious preaching, can be compared, with due caution and in different historical and cultural contexts, with the performance practices of

[145] See OLWEN HUFTON, *Persuasion, Promises and Persistance: funding the early Jesuit College*, in MANFRED HINZ, ROBERTO RIGHI, DANILO ZARDIN (a cura di), *I Gesuiti e la Ratio Studiorum*, cit., pp. 75-95.
[146] See GIOVANNA ZANLONGHI, *Il teatro nella pedagogia gesuitica: una "scuola di virtù"*, in MANFRED HINZ, ROBERTO RIGHI, DANILO ZARDIN (a cura di), *I Gesuiti e la Ratio Studiorum*, cit., pp. 159-190.
[147] See *Giuseppe Maria Bianchini*, a cura di Renzo Negri, in DBI.
[148] See GIUSEPPE MARIA BIANCHINI, *Difesa di Dante Alighieri. Lezione del Dottor Giuseppe Bianchini di Prato Accademico Fiorentino, detta da esso pubblicamente nell'Accademia fiorentina l'anno MDCCXV, nella quale dimostra che lo stile della Divina Commedia non è rozzo ed incolto, ma bensì leggiadro e gentile*, Firenze, nella Stamperia di Giuseppe Manni, 1718.
[149] See *Giuseppe Maria Bianchini*, a cura di Renzo Negri, cit.

the storytellers of the 15th and 16th centuries, with the improvisational poets of the late 18th century and the Great Actors of the 19th century.

It follows that Dante goes through the so-called "dark ages" of his reception thanks to popular culture, which is articulated between more or less cultured street practices and preaching with strong religious connotations.

1.6. Traces in the International Baroque Theatre

In the centuries previously dealt with, we can observe how Dante quickly became a myth and a character, taken up and/or parodied, especially by those who, as popular singers, jesters or preachers, found themselves dealing with the less cultured population and needed to create the conditions to have a strong hold on the public, creating a consolidated and shared imagery, insofar as consistent with a medieval depiction of the afterlife that was by now prevailing and pervasive. Dante's language, with some of the most famous passages of his work, forms a collective heritage, which is fixed in people's memory, depending on the skills of the performer. Dante's imagery, mainly infernal, and some of the emblematic characters described by him were also widely accepted by the cultured side of the population, who, thanks to the epic-chivalric production of the Renaissance and the adherence to classical myths and legends, brought the main *topoi* of Dante's journey back into vogue, passing from the text, or oral performance, to the actual re-elaboration in performances for dance, music and theatre with a Dantean echo.

In the face of the inclusive and syncretic experience of the seventeenth century, with its encyclopaedic and labyrinthine taste, aimed at the cultured poetic revival, at the pluristylistic rewriting chiselled in an eccentric lexicon that refers to the *topos* of metamorphosis and eclecticism, Dante persists in the production of Parnassian and Baroque poets, such as Guarini, Marino, Stigliani, Chiabrera and Ciampoli[150]. It is, therefore, wrong to speak of the seventeenth

[150] For a brief bibliography on the reception of Dante in the seventeenth century, see: UMBERTO COSMO, *Con Dante attraverso il Seicento*, Bari, Laterza, 1946; ALDO VALLONE, *Dante nel Seicento attraverso testi inediti*, in «Studi secenteschi», vol. III, 1962, pp. 3-25; UBERTO LIMENTANI, *La fortuna di Dante nel Seicento*, in «Studi danteschi», vol. V, 1964, pp. 3-36; ANTONIO PAGLIARO, *La Divina Commedia nella critica*, Messina-Firenze, D'Anna, 1967; ALDO VALLONE, *Aspetti dell'esegesi dantesca nei secoli XVI e XVII attraverso testi inediti*, Lecce, Milella, 1966; GIUSEPPE TAVANI, *Dante nel Seicento. Saggi su A. Guarini, N. Villani, L. Magalotti*, Firenze, L. S. Olschki, 1976; ALDO VALLONE, *Storia della critica dantesca dal XIV al XX secolo*, Milano, Vallardi, 1981; ANDREA BATTISTINI, *Il modello e le suggestioni letterarie: Dante nella tradizione della letteratura e nella cultura*

century as a «century without Dante»[151], when in fact a real «assault on Dante» took place[152] as, in addition to the literati, philosophers such as Tommaso Campanella, who extolled his unique, anti-Pedantic style, were able to appreciate him, and his choices in opposition to the fixed and dogmatic rules of grammar[153], and men of science of the calibre of Galileo Galilei, increasingly clarifying his universal contribution on a cultural level, in terms of music, poetry and performance[154]. If Renaissance-style criticism still remains strongly negative towards style, and, as we shall see, it will remain so for much of the 18th century, the subject matter and its influence remain alive and generative in the poetic and epic production of the entire century[155].

In the poetic-stylistic *querelle* that rages over the goodness of Alighieri's language, stylistic and lexical choices, the scholar Gianvincenzo Gravina (1664-1718) places the much disputed laurel on the Florentine poet's head, declaring his expressiveness and pluristylism indispensable traits for the creation of the Italian language[156]. The line of thought that recognises in Dante a «Tuscan Homer»[157], comparing the admirability of his Works with the Greek *epos*, the Virgilian Works and the Bible itself in terms of their impact on their audience, makes use of the generous contribution of the philosopher Giambattista Vico (1668-1774), with his *Scienza nuova*, which sees in the barbarous and irrepressible temperament of medieval man

popolare, cit., pp. 455-461; GRAZIA DISTASO, *Dante nella cultura dell'età barocca*, in COFANO DOMENICO *et al.* (a cura di), *Dante nei secoli. Momenti ed esempi di ricezione*, Foggia, Rosone, 2006, pp. 87-113; MARCO ARNAUDO, *Reminiscenze di Dante nei poemi epici del Seicento*, in «Seicento e Settecento», vol. III, 2008, pp. 107-137; BRUNO CAPACI (a cura di), *Dante oscuro e barbaro. Commenti e dispute (secoli XVII e XVIII)*, con saggio introduttivo di Andrea Battistini, Roma, Carocci, 2008; MARCO ARNAUDO, *Dante barocco. L'influenza della Divina Commedia su letteratura e cultura del Seicento*, Ravenna, Longo, 2013.

[151] «secolo senza Dante», LUIGI FIRPO, *Dante e Campanella*, in «L'Alighieri», vol. X, n. 2, 1969, pp. 31-46, reference at p. 31.

[152] «assalto a Dante», See See CARLO CALCATERRA, *L'assalto a Dante*, in CARLO CALCATERRA, *Il Parnaso in rivolta*, introduzione di Ezio Raimondi, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1961, pp. 259-282 [Milano, Mondadori, 1940[1]].

[153] «Divino spirito del poeta architettonico», TOMMASO CAMPANELLA, *Opere letterarie*, a cura di Lina Bolzoni, Torino, Utet, 1977, p. 362. Also, ENZO NOÈ GIRARDI, *Dante nel pensiero e nella poesia di Campanella*, in «Critica letteraria», n. 115-116, 2002, pp. 423-440.

[154] See the lectures delivered by Galileo Galilei in 1588, entitled *Due lezioni all'Accademia fiorentina circa la figura, sito e grandezza dell'Inferno di Dante* in GALILEO GALILEI, *Scritti letterari*, a cura di Alberto Chiari, Firenze, Le Monnier, 1943, pp. 47-80.

[155] See MARCO ARNAUDO, *Reminiscenze di Dante nei poemi epici del Seicento*, in «Seicento e Settecento», cit.

[156] «Or Dante, che nel suo poema comprese tanto l'universale quanto il particolare, o per via di regola o per via d'esempio o di comparazione, venne a dare alla nostra lingua espressione per ogni cosa e per ogni concetto, ad imitazion d'Omero, da cui la greca fu tal arte arricchita», See GIAN VINCENZO GRAVINA, *III. Della volgare e comune lingua d'Italia*, in GIAN VINCENZO GRAVINA, *Scritti critici e teorici*, a cura di Amedeo Quondam, Bari, Laterza, 1973, pp. 277-281, quote on p. 280.

[157] «toscano Omero», GIAMBATTISTA VICO, *Principj di scienza nuova*, in GIAMBATTISTA VICO, *Opere*, a cura di Andrea Battistini, 2 voll., Milano, Mondadori, 1999 [1990[1]], vol. I, p. 814.

the right environment for natural language to germinate into a proud and fierce poetry, which rises to the sublime and remains in our eyes dense with fantasy[158].

For the history of theatre and dance, the 17th century was Europe's *golden century,* bringing capital authors to the stage for world culture, and conversely, the 18th century was indispensable in kick-starting a revision of acting theories, of the institution of theatre itself, in its various places of production and in the clarification of genres and their functions. These two centuries saw Italian glory expand throughout Europe under the disruptive charge of the Commedia dell'Arte and its fixed types[159]. If the Renaissance had given way to a still slow revival of the classical theory of comedy and tragedy, which remained the prerogative of the *elite* and of the courtly games of amateurs, the Italian and European courts and later the piazzas, theatres and commercial theatres witnessed the succession of Comici dell'Arte on private and public stages, paving the way for professional actors and the improvised technique, handcrafted by a consolidated artistic knowledge transmitted from generation to generation in the families of the arts.

France, which offered a home to the Commedia dell'Arte at the end of the 17th century and, as Delia Gambelli attests, gave birth to one of the most iconic and diabolical masks, Harlequin[160], with the foundation of the *Académie royale de danse* (1661) by King Louis XIV, and the subsequent founding of the rival *Comédie-Française* and *Comédie-Italienne* (1680), institutionalised its first forms of protection towards a profession otherwise characterised by a fair amount of instability and risk, defining *ad hoc* theatres for the different types of performances offered.

Reflecting on the increasingly close relations between broadly conceived theatre and literature, the theatrical landscape of the seventeenth century presents certain figures that would later become omnipresent in the comparison between 'great' authors. If Vico and others openly correlated Dante and Homer, the cumbersome figure of the Bard of Stratford-upon-Avon would over the centuries become the third unavoidable term of comparison for the new canon of

[158] See ANDREA BATTISTINI, *Dante a chiaroscuro. Requisitorie e apologie settecentesche*, in COFANO DOMENICO *et al.* (a cura di), *Dante nei secoli. Momenti ed esempi di ricezione*, cit., pp. 115-136, reference at pp. 118-120. Si veda inoltre JÓZSEF NAGY, *Dante e Vico. La teologia politica di Dante. Capitoli della ricezione dantesca*, Roma, Aracne, 2021.

[159] Ask Prof which texts to put here as indispensable

[160] See DELIA GAMBELLI, *Arlecchino a Parigi. Dall'inferno alla corte del Re Sole*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1993. We also recommend reading the entire series, within which this volume is the third, edited by Ferruccio Marotti, *La Commedia dell'Arte. Storia, Testi, Documenti*.

Western poetry[161], tracing a *common thread* between the great epic circular narratives and the poetry acted, or read publicly, for the assembled community, to arrive then at the proper theatre, a means of circulation of ideas, interclassist and place of aggregation. The Renaissance first, the important role played by Italian artists in the various European courts and the increasingly frequent exchanges between cultures, then, established the channel through which Dante and his works were also received abroad: and for the most part Alighieri's presence is known through mentions in third works and in the presence within the literary canon.

What is fascinating about the evocative power of Dante's poetry which crosses the ages, declining in different forms, is the otherworldly imagery of classical derivation, which is enriched by Christian doctrine. Inferno and Paradise become attractive poles for seventeenth-century dramaturgy that, in the various genres, gives them a completely new reinterpretation, as can also be seen in the light of John Milton's poem in *blank verses Paradise Lost* (1667)[162], which benefits from an English reception of Dante already attributable to Chaucer's short stories[163].

A still relatively unknown fruit of Dante's influence on the Baroque cultural and artistic universe is the *Tartarea, Commedia Infernale* published by Giovanni Briccio in 1614 in Viterbo[164], heir to a comic spectacular mode typical of the Roman context straddling academic theatricality and the piazza[165], and a conception that is articulate to say the least: «La tartarea (Viterbo 1614, 1620, 1622, 1627; Pavia 1622; Venice 1624, 1636, 1637; Milan 1639; Bologna

[161] For further reading, see: BRUNO BASILE, *La scoperta di Dante nella cultura europea del Sette e Ottocento*, in ENRICO MALATO, MASSIMO MIGLIO, OVIDIO CAPITANI *et al.* (a cura di), *"Per correr miglior acque...". Bilanci e prospettive degli studi danteschi alle soglie del nuovo millennio*, cit., pp. 485-514, reference at pp. 490-495; *William Shakespeare*, a cura di Eric R. Vincent, in ED; ISABELLE BATTESTI, PASCALE DROUET (sous la direction de), *Dante et Shakespeare. Cosmologie, politique, poétique*, Paris, Garnier, 2020.

[162]See JOHN MILTON, *Paradise Lost. An Illustrated Edition with an introduction by Philip Pullman*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005 [ed. it. JOHN MILTON, *Il paradiso perduto*, a cura di Fabio Cicero e con la traduzione di Roberto Piumini, Milano, Bompiani, 2009]. Si veda anche il saggio JOHN M. STEADMAN, *Milton and Mazzoni: The Genre of the "Divina Commedia"*, in «Huntington Library Quarterly», vol. 23, n. 2 February, 1960, pp. 107-122.

[163] See *Inghilterra*, a cura di Adolfo Cecilia, Filippo Brancucci, Eric R. Vincent, in ED; STEVEN WALLACE, *Dante in English*, in RACHEL JACOFF (edited by), *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 34–44.

[164] See GIOVANNI BRICCIO, *La Tartarea, comoedia infernale, dove con nova, e dilettevole compositione si mostra la virtù acquistarsi per sola opera di gran disaggio e fatica*, In Viterbo, Presso Girolamo Discepolo, 1614. On this subject, see also LUCIANO MARITI, *Commedia ridicolosa: comici di professione, dilettanti, editoria teatrale nel seicento: storia e testi*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1979, pp. 1-66.

[165] See LUCIANO MARITI, *Commedia ridicolosa: comici di professione, dilettanti, editoria teatrale nel seicento: storia e testi*, cit., pp. CLXV-CLXX.

1674; Rome 1677), a 'hellish' comedy, with a scene in the otherworldly realm and a wealth of liveliness and eccentricities»[166].

The choice of the allegorical/moralising subject matter and its setting are influenced by what we have already seen in the case of the *Intermezzi* of the play *Pellegrina*: Inferno, taken up with its hordes of demons and the Elysian Fields, which evokes more of the classical precedents, calls to mind Dante's subtext. The author conveys a vocation for literature that benefits from his familiarity with the visual arts, and, in his Infernal comedy, he reconciles his taste for detailed scenic description with his canonical training, which sees him invariably quoting Dante.

The characters listed include both Zanni masks, typical servants, and characters of classical-mythological ancestry, figures taken from Dante's *Commedia,* such as Charon the demon and Radamante, in the guise of the infernal judge Minos: «Charon and the judge, Radamante, are depicted as demons, both by the author, who constantly uses Dante's phrase, "Caron demonio", and by his unnamed artist friend who executed delightful little woodcuts of the stage-set and the personages for early editions of the play»[167].

In *Della Scena e sua descrittione*, verse n. 9 of the third canto of the *Inferno*, «Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch'intrate»[168], to describe the gate of Hell with the verses affixed to a sign, while the Elysian Fields contain an enigmatic and evocative «L'alta giustizia fin quà giù si estende», presumably a reworking taken from several keywords such as justice and the adjective *alta*, present and used with clear intentions in Dante's *Commedia*, but hardly traceable to a precise verse.

As reported by Beatrice Corrigan, Dante's occurrences of topical verses, settings and characters, such as Ugolino, Francesca and the devils of Malebolge, are very frequent, so much so that there is an almost silent mention of this five-act play in Dante's spectacular fortune so far, which instead appears evident in these timely echoes:

> All these minor but unmistakable allusions are set in a play which appealed to the current taste for mock-heroic, and whose situations and characters were handled with such comic vigour that it went through six editions. *La Tartarea* is one of the most bizarre comedies of the period, and, despite the fixed set, offered great possibilities for comic effects and fantastic costumes[169].

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[166] «La tartarea (Viterbo 1614, 1620, 1622, 1627; Pavia 1622; Venezia 1624, 1636, 1637; Milano 1639; Bologna 1674; Roma 1677), commedia "infernale", con scena nel regno ultraterreno e ricchezza di vivacità e bizzarrie», *Giovanni Bricci*, a cura di Olivier Michel, DBI.
[167] BEATRICE CORRIGAN, *Dante and Italian Theater: A Study in Dramatic Fashions*, in «Dante Studies», n. 89, 1971, pp. 93-105, quote on p. 95.
[168] «ABANDON EVERY HOPE, WHO ENTER HERE», *If.* III, v. 9.
[169] BEATRICE CORRIGAN, *Dante and Italian Theater: A Study in Dramatic Fashions*, cit., p. 96.

Marina Roggero provides more food for thought as regards reception. This, like the other hilarious comedies produced by Briccio, had great success with the public, which was also a consequence of the editorial success that these formats and texts had with purchasers. Not only was the work the product of and linked to private patronage, who would sometimes call in a company or offer to stage it, but it must also be thought of as being staged in public square contexts to be produced in front of a popular audience. Not only, therefore, did the popular context take the cue to make these comedies richer and more scathing, but above all with regard to the difficulty of the linguistic choices to be made, one understands how this type of comedy, proposed in two parallel and appropriately separate worlds, instead had to deal with the most difficult common challenge, namely to be understood, a challenge to which the theatre, and especially the Comici dell'Arte, had already found a solution through multilingualism and the recovery of fixed types[170].

In this panorama of dramaturgy written for small circles and dramas conceived for the stage of the time in terms of Dantean reception, a further example emerges on the European scene, a writer long known only for the literary value of his writings and instead widely active for the stage. The author referred to is Joost van den Vondel (1587-1679)[171], converted to Catholicism late in life, who started out from the chambers of Rethoric typical of the Flemish and Dutch area, and then ascribed himself to Renaissance poetics. He based his theatrical production on a more modern dramaturgical structure, producing for the Dutch stage many dramas, mainly of istorical nature, including the masterpiece *Gysbreght van Aemstel* (1637), about the tragic capture of the city of Amsterdam on Christmas Eve 1300.

More relevant to Dante's theme in his production is the allegorical/religious drama *Lucifer* (1654)[172]. Unfortunately, at the time this drama did not receive much attention and

[170] See MARINA ROGGERO, *Le vie dei libri. Letture, lingua e pubblico nell'Italia moderna*, cit., pp. 160-169.

[171] On the author and his artistic production in the theatrical context, see: JAN BLOEMENDAL, FRANS-WILLEM KORSTEN (edited by), *Joost van den Vondel (1587–1679). Dutch Playwright in the Golden Age*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2012; MARCO PRANDONI, *P.C. Hooft, G.A. Bredero, Joost van den Vondel. Amsterdam a teatro*, in JEANNETTE E. KOCH, FRANCO PARIS, MARCO PRANDONI, FRANCESCA TERRENATO (a cura di), *Harba Lori Fa! Percorsi di letteratura fiamminga e olandese*, Napoli, Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale", 2012, pp. 237-260; LEEN SPRUIT, *Vondel difensore del cattolicesimo. Fede e ragione nei poemi didascalici*, in JEANNETTE E. KOCH, FRANCO PARIS, MARCO PRANDONI, FRANCESCA TERRENATO (a cura di), *Harba Lori Fa! Percorsi di letteratura fiamminga e olandese*, cit., pp. 275-290. For the Dutch context, see: ROBERTO DAGNINO, MARCO PRANDONI (a cura di), *Cultura letteraria neerlandese. Autori, testi e contesti dal Medioevo a oggi*, Milano, Hoepli, 2020.

[172] On the two dramas, see: MARIJKE MEIJER DREES, MARCO PRANDONI, RITA SCHLUSEMANN (onder redactie van), *De glans van Vondels Lucifer. Opvoeren, vertalen, herinneren*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2018; JOOST VAN DEN VONDEL, *Gysbreght van Aemstel. Il crollo di Amsterdam in una tragedia del secolo d'Oro olandese, edizione critica, traduzione, fortuna*, a cura di Simona Brunetti e Marco Prandoni, Bari, Edizioni di Pagina, 2018; SIMONA BRUNETTI, *Un angelo-gangster invidioso e struggente: Ken Ponzio in Lucifero (1999)*, in SIMONA BRUNETTI, *Attori in video nel secondo Novecento*, Bari, Edizioni di Pagina, 2022, pp. 165-177.

replicas in the Netherlands and abroad. Recent studies conducted by Simona Brunetti and Marco Prandoni have provided an opportunity to reflect on the literary and librarian sources used in his theatre by Vondel, who had translated Virgil's Aeneid, had read the classics and maybe Dante himself, in his Renaissance-induced change of attitude:

Per questo la tragedia scatenò la protesta di alcuni ministri della chiesa riformata, ostili in linea di principio all'"immorale" teatro, che reputavano blasfema la drammatizzazione di vicende bibliche su un palco, quello teatrale, che faceva concorrenza al loro pulpito. Ciò valeva a maggior ragione nel caso di un autore controverso come Vondel, specie dopo la sua conversione al cattolicesimo militante intorno al 1640. L'autore aveva dedicato all'opera anni di studio teologico e teatrologico, orientandosi sempre più verso il modello classicista pseudo-aristotelico dal punto di vista strutturale e nella caratterizzazione dell'eroe protagonista, personaggio complesso e frastagliato, dilaniato tra l'obbedienza a Dio e il senso acuto dell'ingiustizia subita[173].

For this reason, the play triggered protests from some ministers of the Reformed Church, hostile in principle to 'immoral' theatre, who considered it blasphemous to dramatise biblical events on a stage, the theatre stage, that competed with their pulpit. This was all the more true in the case of a controversial author like Vondel, especially after his conversion to militant Catholicism around 1640. The author had devoted years of theological and theatrological study to this work, moving more and more towards the pseudo-Aristotelian classicist model from a structural point of view and in the characterisation of the hero protagonist, a complex and jagged character, torn between obedience to God and a keen sense of the injustice suffered.

As the sources report, «Vondel, onze Vlaamsche Dante»[174] will greatly influence subsequent Romantic and 20th-century artistic production in the Dutch/Flemish area, enjoying great popularity among its compatriots and bringing with it a new wave of Dante reception, as has already been traced in some recent studies[175].

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[173] SIMONA BRUNETTI, MARCO PRANDONI, *Proporre il teatro della Repubblica delle Province Unite a un pubblico italiano: Il caso di Joost van Den Vondel*, in CINZIA FRANCHI (a cura di), *Editoria e Traduzione. Focus sulle lingue 'di minore diffusione'*, Roma, Lithos, 2016, pp. 193-214, p. 197.

[174] Reference is made to the definition given by Gustaaf Segers in the lecture, only available in Dutch, at the Royal Flemish Academy in Ghent on 18 January 1922, later published in GUSTAAF SEGERS, *Vondel, onze Vlaamsche Dante: Shakespeare's vierde eeuwfeest 1616–1916*, in «Verslagen En Mededeelingen Der Koninklijke Vlaamsche Academie Voor Taal- En Letterkunde», 1922, pp. 53-85, available at The National Library of the Netherlands website: https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_ver025192201_01/_ver025192201_01_0005.php#016 (last accessed 14/05/2025).

[175] See JAN ROCK, *'Remember Dousa!'. Literary historicism and scholarly traditions in Dutch philology before 1860*, in TON VAN KALMTHOUT AND HUIB ZUIDERVAART (editors), *The Practice of Philology in the Nineteenth-Century Netherlands*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2015, pp. 147-178. See also the recent doctoral dissertations of ANNETTE MARIE VAN DIJK, *'Welk een ketter is die vrouw geweest!'. De plaats van Albert Verwey in de Hadewijchreceptie*, Promotoren Prof. dr. P.J.A. Nissen, Prof. dr. E. Leijnse, 2009, online: https://research.tilburguniversity.edu/en/publications/welk-een-ketter-is-die-vrouw-geweest-de-plaats-van-albert-verwey- (last accessed 14/05/2025); RUUD POORTIER, *Tollens' Nagalm, Het dichterschap van Hendrik Tollens (1780-1856) in de Nederlandse herinneringscultuur*, Promotor Prof. dr. M.T.C. Mathijsen-Verkooijen, Faculteit der Geesteswetenschappen, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2014, online: https://dare.uva.nl/search?identifier=23fd95e9-4592-46fe-a458-d7bb72d93054 (last accessed 14/05/2025); also, ROBERT O. J. VAN NUFFEL, *Dante in Belgio dal 1921 ad oggi*, in VITTORE BRANCA, ETTORE CACCIA (a cura di), *Dante nel mondo. Raccolta di studi promossa dall'Associazione internazionale per gli studi di lingua e di letteratura italiana*, Firenze, L. S. Olschki, 1965, pp. 19-62; JAN H. TERLINGEN, *Dante nei Paesi Bassi*, in VITTORE BRANCA, ETTORE CACCIA (a cura di), *Dante nel mondo. Raccolta di studi promossa dall'Associazione internazionale per gli studi di lingua e di letteratura italiana*, cit., pp. 319-356; DIRK VANDEN BERGHE, HANS VANDEVOORDE, *Dante dans la poésie néerlandaise de Belgique du XX^e siècle*, in ANTONELLA BRAIDA, JOSEPH CADEDDU, GIUSEPPE SANGIRARDI (a cura di), *La mondializzazione di Dante. I: Europa*, Atti del convegno internazionale (Nancy, 7-8 Ottobre 2021), Ravenna, Longo, 2022, pp. 51-68.

To add an important piece to the general picture of the playwright's varied production, it is important to note how Vondel was linked to the sphere of influence of the Jesuits and their colleges[176], and above all was in contact with one of the most eminent playwrights in the German-speaking area, Andreas Gryphius (1616-1664)[177], who translated and revised one of his plays, decreeing its success in German:

In der Ausgabe der Werke seines Vaters, die 1698 erschien, druckte Christian Gryphius „Die Sieben Brüder/Oder Die Gibeoniter" ab, eine von Gryphius „aus Vondels Niederländischem Trauerspiel in Eyl gesetzte Dolmetschung". Das Original, Vondels Drama „De Gebroeders", war 1640 erschienen[178].

In the edition of his father's works published in 1698, Christian Gryphius printed 'Die Sieben Brüder/Or Die Gibeoniter', an interpretation by Gryphius 'set in Eyl from Vondel's Dutch Trauerspiel'. The original, Vondel's drama 'De Gebroeders', had been published in 1640.

Vondel and Gryphius were both afferent to Jesuit circles: Gryphius made even a few trips to Italy, they both established lively contacts with Italian merchants and artists. They may have met in Holland when Gryphius was in Amsterdam, and later in Leiden, to further his studies in law[179], (both cities were neuralgic centres for the transmission of Italian culture, which at that time enjoyed the highest esteem abroad [180]).

The common denominator between these two authors is to be found in the *Trauerspielen*, that is, dramas with a dense religious sense, where the reworking of the myth and the figure of the martyr in a historical key or with classical ancestry can be traced back to

[176] «è a Cornelius Nobelaer che il celebre letterato olandese Vondel dedicò nel 1666 la sua tragedia sulla Cina: *Zungchin of Ondergang der Sineesche heerschappye* (Zungchin ovvero Tramonto del potere cinese), basata, quanto alla materia, soprattutto sul *De Bello Tartarico* di Martini […] Merita di soffermarsi alquanto a indagare a quale: "giardino patrizio" presso Leida alludesse Kircher nel brano citato. Date le relazioni di Vondel con i gesuiti, ivi compresa la missione cinese, e i legami dei Nobelaer da un lato con Vondel e dall'altro con i gesuiti, non sembra azzardata l'ipotesi di un incontro personale di Vondel e Martini in questa proprietà di campagna dei Nobelaer, in occasione del ricevimento dell'ospite proveniente da terre lontane», See NÖEL GOLVERS, *Viaggio di reclutamento di M. Martini S.J. attraverso i Paesi Bassi nel 1654: a proposito di bussole geomantiche, collezioni di oggetti cinesi, proiezioni di lanterna magica e del R.P. Wilhelm Van Aelst S.J.*, in «Studi trentini di scienze storiche. Sezione prima», n. 74/4, 1995, pp. 447-474, quote on pp. 464-465.

[177] See *Andreas Gryphius*, a cura di Vittoria Gabriolo Buonanno, in Enciclopedia Italiana, 41 voll., 1929-1937 (from now on EI), vol. XVII, 1933, available at: https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/andreas-gryphius_%28Enciclopedia-Italiana%29/ (last accessed 14/05/2025).

[178] EBERHARD MANNACK, *Andreas Gryphius*, Stuttgart, J.B. Metzlersche Verlagbuchhandlung, 1968, pp. 52-53 [*2., vollständige neuarbeitete Auflage*, Stuttgart, J.B. Metzlersche Verlagbuchhandlung, 1986^2, pp. 78-79].

[179] See GUILLAUME VAN GEMERT, *Between Disregard and Political Mobilization – Vondel as a Playwright in Contemporary European Context: England, France and the German Lands*, in JEANNETTE E. KOCH, FRANCO PARIS, MARCO PRANDONI, FRANCESCA TERRENATO (a cura di), *Harba Lori Fa! Percorsi di letteratura fiamminga e olandese*, cit., pp. 171-198; HANS-JÜRGEN SCHINGS, *Großmüttiger Rechts-Gelehrter. Oder Sterbender Aemilius Paulus Papinianus*, in herausgegeben von GERHARD KAISER, *Die Dramen des Andreas Gryphius. Eine Sammlung von Einzelinterpretationen*, Stuttgart, J. B. Metzlersche Verlagbuchhandlung, 1968, pp. 170-203, reference at p. 182.

[180] See FRANCESCA TERRENATO, *Vasari e Machiavelli. Pittori e Principi Italiani nella Repubblica del Seicento*, in JEANNETTE E. KOCH, FRANCO PARIS, MARCO PRANDONI, FRANCESCA TERRENATO (a cura di), *Harba Lori Fa! Percorsi di letteratura fiamminga e olandese*, cit., pp. 181-198, in reference at p. 182.

the matrix of the Jesuit dramas that in the German-speaking context, precisely because of the constant disagreement between religions and schools, found fertile ground to spread the Catholic religion through art[181]. As for Vondel, also for Gryphius, the influence of the classics, and especially of the playwright Seneca, a Stoic and advocate of a tragedy with moralising and pedagogical traits, gives their dramas the strong hues of moral value judgement:

Die Übersetzungen schließlich eignen fremde Werke dem dichterischen Existenzentwurf Gryphius an: Causins „Felicitas" ordnet sich der Reihe der Märtyrertragödien ein, in Vondels „Gebroeders" erscheint eine Variante des aus „Leo Armenius" und „Cardenio und Celinde" geläufigen Deus-absconditus-Problems, wenn David noch dem grausamen Befehl Gottes gehorcht[182] .

Finally, the translations adapt foreign works to Gryphius' poetic concept of existence: Causin's 'Felicitas' belongs to the series of martyr tragedies, in Vondel's 'Gebroeders' appears a variant of the Deus-absconditus problem familiar from 'Leo Armenius' and 'Cardenio and Celinde', when David still obeys God's cruel command.

In Gryphius' dramas, in addition to the influence of Vondel highlighted by critics, there is a further influence, namely that of Dante. As Rita Unfer Lukoschik, Gertrude Adolf-Altenberg, Filippo Brancucci and many others have reported, Gryphius is said to have translated some tercets of the *Comedy* and inserted them as «annotations to his tragedy *Aemilius Paulus* (1659)»[183], in a German area that at that time saw some authors try to translate Alighieri more for pleasure than the result of a more programmatic intention. Unfortunately, the conditional is a must, as these sources agree in reporting the direct attestation of Dante and his works in the production of the Silesian playwright, but are also lacunose and contradict each other in reporting the nature of this artistic citation, whether an exercise in translation inserted in the margins of the texts, or verses directly taken from the *Inferno* and inserted as lines in the drama, depriving the studies of a direct attestation. The only one who seems to have seen the author's manuscript is Friedrich, when he points out the *locus* in which this material proximity of verses is located, and therefore we report it *verbatim*:

In discussing the punishment of the tyrants in III, 704, he quoted examples from *Inferno* XII, 46-48 and 100-102, both in Italian and German. He translated the former passage as follows:

> Schlag dein Gesicht, auff dises tiffe Thal
> Es rauscht daher, der Blutt-Fluss darinn kocht

[181] See WILLI GUSTAV HARRING, *Andreas Gryphius und das Drama der Jesuite*, Halle, M. Niemeyer, 1907; JOHANNES S.J. MÜLLER, *Das Jesuitendrama in den Laendern deutscher Zunge vom Anfang (1555) bis zum Hochbarok (1665)*, 2 voll., Augsburg, Dr. Benno Filser Verlag, 1930.

[182] GERHARD KAISER (Herausgeber), *Die Dramen des Andreas Gryphius. Eine Sammlung von Einzelinterpretationen*, cit., *Vorwort (VII- IX)*, p. IX.

[183] «annotazioni alla sua tragedia *Aemilius Paulus* (1659)», See RITA UNFER LUKOSCHIK, *Rassegna della ricezione di Dante in area linguistica tedesca*, in «Dante: Rivista internazionale di studi su Dante Alighieri», vol. 6, 2009, pp. 179-191; GERTRUDE ADOLF-ALTENBERG, *La Figura di Dante nei Paesi Germanici*, in «Aevum», a. 32, fasc. 5/6 (settembre-dicembre), 1958, pp. 517-536; *Germania*, a cura di Filippo Brancucci e W. Theodor Elwert, in ED.

Der mit Gewalt geschadet und gepocht,
Und nun die Straff erträgt in dieser Qual[184].

Since this is not the right place to settle a philological dispute, as Gryphius' dramas were actually staged and are a strong expression of the taste of the time, the presence of Dante's text on the stage, as verses placed alongside or as an integral part of it, in the production of one of the most influential playwrights of the German 17th century, with direct contacts abroad, is to be considered a far from secondary indicator of the expanding reception of Dante's work on the European stages.

Precisely in the same years, another play followed the strand of historical drama with a moralizing purpose and a classical Italian setting, originating from the Jesuit basin of colleges and confirming how closely the Fathers were connected to the spread of Dante's fortunes, as they used his works for the effective training of their officials. It was titled *Fortunae Ludibrium in Ugolino Principe et Tribus Filiis demonstratum. Das ist Trauriger Unglücksfall Ugolinum den Fürsten sampt seinen dreyen Sohnen erbärmlicher weiß getroffen*, staged by the students of the Jesuit gymnasium of Neuberg an der Danau (Bayern) during the autumn months (presumably in September), on the 4th and 6th, of 1657 and then printed at Ingolstadt[185], as Werner P. Friedrich and Adolf - Altenberg point out in their studies on Dante's presence in Germany[186].

The choice of the figure of Ugolino, a character already considered emblematic of the pathetism that establishes in the audience the difficult reconciliation between politician and father, in the midst of the inner conflict over his own fate and that of his children, as had already occurred in the Camerata de Bardi experiment by Galilei, not too distant chronologically from this collegiate experiment, strengthens and fortifies that network of plots that pass from extemporaneous poetry and academic declamation to the most popular context and will be destined to be one of the pivotal figures in the later spectacular reception of Dante. In the case

[184] WERNER P. FRIEDERICH, *Dante's Fame Abroad*. 1350-1850, Roma, Ed. Storia e Letteratura, 1950, p. 355. The passage where these verses are supposed to be found can be consulted in the work digitised by the Deutsches Text Archiv, ANDREAS GRYPHIUS, *Großmüttiger Rechts-Gelehrter/ Oder Sterbender Æmilius Paulus Papinianus*, Breslau, Gründer, 1659: https://www.deutschestextarchiv.de/book/view/gryphius_rechtsgelehrter_1659?p=87 (last accessed 14/05/2025).

[185] *Fortunae Ludibrium in Ugolino Principe et Tribus Filiis demonstratum.* Das ist Trauriger Unglücksfall SO Ugonlinum den Fürsen samt seinen dreyen Söhnen erbärmlicher weiß getroffen. Auf die Trawr-Bine herfürgestellt Von der studierenden Jugendt des Hochfürstl. Gymnasii der Societet Jesu zu Neüburg an der Thonaw. Den 4. und 6. Herbstmonat Anno 1675. Gedruckt zu Ingolstatt / bey Johann Philipp Zink / Academischen Buchdrucker, printed text of the Bavaric collection of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in München, available online at: https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/en/details/bsb10337344 (last accessed 14/05/2025).

[186] See WERNER P. FRIEDERICH, *Dante's Fame Abroad*, *1350-1850*, cit., p. 355 e GERTRUDE ADOLF-ALTENBERG, *La Figura di Dante nei Paesi Germanici*, cit., reference at p. 520.

of this example of *Haupt-und Staatsaktion* with as many as 154 performers, Friedrich inclines to provide a chronicle text as the source for the drama but does not conflict with the other sources available at the time, which were used depending on the specific effect one wished to achieve by quoting Dante's episode.

1.7. The century "without Dante"

In the modern era, and especially with the Enlightenment, in addition to the permanence of episodes and emblematic characters from Dante's text, there is a strong revival of the medieval *visio*, which loses the value of memory, of testimony to Christian truth, and is cloaked by the epic, together with the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice and the infernal journey of Don Juan, of those sensual and profane connotations of a journey into the afterlife, all played out on the dynamics of love, power, the prevarication of genius over the limited reality of the human, in order to strive for the dream that goes beyond the limit, immortality.

From the first attestation in the form of a tragedy with *El Burlador de Sevilla* by the Spanish playwright Tirso del Molina, through the French version of *Dom Juan ou Le festin de Pierre* by Moliere, which strongly takes its cue from the mockery and laughter of the Comici dell'Arte scenarios and becomes the basis for a comedy/tragicomedy, as well as the drama *Trauerspiel* of Count Leontius with Machiavellian influences produced by the same Jesuit gymnasium in Neuberg an der Danau (3 and 6 September 1677)[187] and finally drama for music with Mozart and Da Ponte (1787, Prague), the scholar Giovanni Macchia points out how the myth of don Juan developed across the European stage in these centuries, becoming for good measure one of the most convincing legends in the history of western theatre, with highly infernal connotations[188].

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[187] See *Leontius Comes Florentinus Machiavelli Discipulus Ab Avo Suo Ad Infernum Olim Abstractus: Nunc vero inductionibus Scenicis A Studiosis Ducalis Gymnasii Societatis Jesu Neoburgi In theatrum productus Traurspill Von Leontio einem Florentinischen Graffen/ welcher von Machiavello übel verführt/ von seinem Anherren in die Höllen entführet worden*, Von der studierenden Jugendt des Hochfürstl. Gymnasii der Societet Jesu zu Neüburg an der Thonaw. Den 3. und 6. September Anno 1677. Gedruckt zu Ingolstatt / bey Johann Philipp Zink, printed text of the Bavaric collection of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in München (Bavar. 4025,I,53/102, Text dt. und lat.), available online at: https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/en/view/bsb10382196?page=,1 (last accessed 14/05/2025).

[188] See GIOVANNI MACCHIA, *Vita, avventure e morte di Don Giovanni*, Torino, Einaudi, 1978, p. 4 [*Vita, avventure e morte di Don Giovanni: con tre scenari della Commedia dell'Arte, un'opera regia e un dramma per musica*, Bari, Laterza, 1966[1]]. Si vedano anche EDWARD J. DENT, *Il teatro di Mozart*, traduzione di Luigi Ferrari, Milano, Rusconi, 1979[ed. ingl. *Mozart's Operas. A critical study*, New York, McBride, Nast and Company, 1918];

Dante's presence as an echo, albeit a distant one, in this overlapping of mythologies and operas remains strong[189], as witnessed by the fact that Lorenzo Da Ponte, librettist of W. A. Mozart's *Don Giovanni,* is described as «always having a 'dantino' with him, which it seems he used to read and reread to draw inspiration for his librettos»[190] and he himself declares that he took inspiration from *Inferno* for the writing of Don Giovanni[191]. Besides, having arrived in the United States to escape from bad business in the Old Continent[192], like so many other artists and men of letters, it was he who initiated a flourishing American reception of Dante, putting his proverbial expertise in music and literature to good use, as well as his great flair for editorial and bookseller work[193], acting as a bridge between Italian and American culture[194]. His

ANGELICA FORTI-LEWIS, *Maschere, libretti e libertini: il mito di Don Giovanni nel teatro europeo*, Roma, Bulzoni,1992; UMBERTO CURI, *Filosofia del Don Giovanni. Alle origini di un mito moderno*, ed. riveduta e ampliata, Bollati Boringhieri, 2018 [Milano, Mondadori, 2002[1]]; LOREDANA LIPPERINI, *Don Giovanni. Il potere della seduzione, la musica, il mito*, Roma, Castelvecchi, 2006.

[189] See MARIA SORESINA, *Mozart come Dante. Il Flauto magico: un cammino spirituale*, Segrate (MI), Moretti&Vitali, 2011.

[190] «sempre con un 'dantino' appresso, che pare fosse solito leggere e rileggere per trarne ispirazione per i suoi libretti», See *Lorenzo Da Ponte,* a cura di Nicola Carducci, in ED.

[191] «A sentir lui, il libretto del *Don Giovanni* fu composto (insieme con altri due) tenendo sotto gli occhi l'*Inferno* di Dante», See GIOVANNI MACCHIA, *Vita, avventure e morte di Don Giovanni*, cit., p. 93.

[192] See CLARA ALLASIA, *Il «mio grand'Ugo Foscolo»: Lorenzo da Ponte 'esule risorgimentale'*, in «Cahiers d'études italiennes», n. 20 (*Foscolo e la cultura europea*, Sous la direction de Enzo Neppi, Chiara Piola Caselli, Claudio Chiancone et Christian Del Vento), 2015, pp. 237-250.

[193] See LEONARDO OLSCHKI, *Lorenzo Da Ponte libraio e bibliófilo*, in «La Bibliofilía», vol. 8, n. 2/3 (maggio-giugno), 1906, pp. 41-49; LAURA PAOLINO, *Lorenzo Da Ponte libraio a Londra*, in «La Bibliofilía», vol. 115, n. 2 maggio-agosto, 2013, pp. 311-326.

[194] See EMILIO FRANZINA, *Dante e gli emigranti. Esuli, profughi e lettori popolari di Dante*, in EMILIO FRANZINA, *Varcare i confini. Lettere e letture, scritture e canti dell'antica emigrazione italiana*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2023, pp. 259-290, reference at pp. 262-264. Si veda inoltre: SAMUEL G. BROWN, *Dante*, in «North American Review», n.63, 1846, pp. 323–351; THEODORE WESLEY KOCH, *Dante in America: A Historical and Bibliographic Study*, Boston Ginn (for the Dante Society), 1896; ANGELINA LA PIANA, *Dante's American Pilgrimage, 1800–1944*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1948; GLAUCO CAMBON, *Dante's Presence in American Literature*, in «Dante Studies», n. 84, 1966, pp. 27–50; KATHLEEN VERDUIN, *Dante in America: The First Hundred Years*, in MICHELE MOYLAN, LANES STILES (eds.), *Reading Books: Essays on the Material Text and Literature in America*, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1996, pp. 16–51; JOSHUA STEVEN MATTHEWS, *The American Alighieri: Receptions of Dante in the United States, 1818–1867*, Thesis Supervisor: Professor Ed Folsom, PhD dissertation in English in the Graduate College of the University of Iowa, 2012, https://iro.uiowa.edu/esploro/outputs/doctoral/The-American-Alighieri-receptions-of-Dante/9983776877902771 (last accessed 22/05/2025); KATHLEEN VERDUIN, *Emerson, Dante, and American Nationalism*, in AIDA AUDEH, NICK HAVELY (edited by), *Dante in the Long Nineteenth Century*, cit., pp. 266–283; JULIA STRAUB, *The Transatlantic Dante in the Nineteenth Century: Literary Authority and Reception Histories*, in ERIK REDLING (edited by), *Traveling Traditions: Nineteenth-Century Cultural Concepts and Transatlantic Intellectual Networks*, Berlin/Boston, De Gruyter, 2016, pp. 79-94.

translation of Byron's *Prophecy of Dante* (1821)[195], stands as a further testimony of his mediating role[196].

Again, as scholar Michele Zanobini points out, a further protagonist within the reception of the myth of Don Giovanni in Dante's perspective is undoubtedly Carlo Goldoni, who in his youth also wrote opera librettos and, precisely in 1735, before the experience of Da Ponte and Mozart, a Don Giovanni Tenorio:

> il Don Giovanni Tenorio del 1735 non solo rappresenta un tassello fondamentale nella storia della moderna evoluzione del mito – un rinnovamento che guardando al futuro attinge copiosamente dal passato – ma esso ricopre anche un'innegabile validità artistica come oggetto poetico a sé stante tanto da diventare fonte di ispirazione per Da Ponte e per la definitiva codificazione mozartiana del mito[197].
>
> the Don Giovanni Tenorio of 1735 not only represents a fundamental piece in the history of the modern evolution of the myth - a renewal that, looking to the future, draws copiously from the past - but it also has an undeniable artistic validity as a poetic object in its own right, so much so that it became a source of inspiration for Da Ponte and for Mozart's definitive codification of the myth.

The myth and the diffusion in elitist and popular circles of the myth of Don Juan, of the implications underlying the Dantesque reception to which it often winks, should give us pause for thought for the consequences they bring to spectacular praxis and, above all, for the telltale sign of the vitality that connotes theatre in these centuries.

An author such as Goldoni, interpreter of an *intelligentia* active in the social sphere, i.e. capable of understanding and intercepting what the public requires in terms of stories, characters and news within a dramaturgy that wants to be the direct expression and interlocutor of the people with whom it converses, with whom it enters into direct resonance, is central to understanding how the theatre was preparing the ground for the future reception of literary works such as Alighieri's through the acquisition and self-determination of its own internal

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[195] See GEORGE BYRON, *La profezia di Dante*, con le traduzioni di M. Leoni e L. Da Ponte, a cura di F. Bruni e L. Innocenti, Roma, Salerno, 1999 [ed. ingl. *The Prophecy of Dante. A Poem*, Philadelphia, M. Carey and Sons, 1821]. Furthermore: BEVERLY TAYLOR, *Byron's Use of Dante in "The Prophecy of Dante"*, in «Keats-Shelley Journal», vol. 28, 1979, pp. 102-119; FREDERICK W. SHILSTONE, *Byron, Dante, and Don Juan's Descent to English Society*, in «The Comparatist», vol. 8 May, 1984, pp. 43-55. On the Romantic reception of Dante see also: WILLIAM J. DE SUA, *Dante Into English: A Study of the Translation of the Divine Comedy in Britain and America*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1964; KENNETH CHURCHILL, *Italy and English Literature, 1764–1930*, London, Macmillan, 1980; STEVE ELLIS, *Dante and English Poetry: Shelley to T. S. Eliot*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983; MARTIN MCLAUGHLIN (edited by), *Britain and Italy from Romanticism to Modernism: A Festschrift for Peter Brand*, Oxford, Legenda, 2000; ANTONELLA BRAIDA, *Dante and the Romantics*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004; FREDERICK BURWICK, PAUL DOUGLASS (edited by), *Dante and Italy in British Romanticism*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011; NICK HAVELY, *Dante's British Public: Readers and Texts, from the Fourteenth Century to the Present*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014.

[196] See LORENZO DA PONTE, *Memorie e scritti vari in prose e poesia del stesso autore, compendiate da Jacopo Bernardi*, Firenze, Le Monnier, 1871.

[197] MICHELE ZANOBINI, *Il Don Giovanni Tenorio di Carlo Goldoni. Alle origini di un mito moderno*, in «Italian Studies in Southern Africa/Studi d'Italianistica nell'Africa Australe», vol. 29, n. 2, 2016, pp. 1-26, quote on pp. 23-24.

tools. It was in these years that Goldoni's Reform matured, which, together with other elements, modified the immediacy, which by then had become somewhat cloying and stereotyped, of the Commedia dell'Arte, and led, instead, to the institutionalisation in the Italian peninsula of the figure of the company poet, the author of the theatrical text who would bring forth an idea to be impersonated by the various actors and actresses, writing the script in its entirety, entrusting precise parts, bringing to the stage the dynamics and instances of a new and increasingly relevant political class, the bourgeoisie.

The French Denis Diderot, to whom we owe the writing of the famous treatise in dialogical form *Paradoxe sur le comédien* (written between 1770-1780 and only published posthumously in 1830)[198] and the paternity of the new bourgeois drama, the same to whom is attributed the reforming and compiling charge set in motion with the preparation of the mighty *Encyclopédie* together with his colleague d'Alembert (1751-1772). In the transition between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, therefore, the theatre was the place for debate, a more intimate and at the same time popular counterbalance to give space to the demands for change. The few elements of theatre history recalled here serve to give a sense of how, on the one hand, the receptive side of Dante's poetics was gradually becoming more complex and articulated in its forms, and on the other, to offer clear food for thought in understanding why Dante's reception did not yet at this chronological height touch on the complexity of the poet's major work, the *Comedy*, but was firmly present in episodes and characters in tragedy, as they had by then been rendered iconic and extremely evocative by tradition.

The eighteenth century still maintained a rigid distinction of genres, which was not in keeping with the complexity of definition attributable to the *Commedia*, excluding the possibility of passing tragic themes into comic spheres or vice versa. It is precisely in this effervescent context, at first closed, then gradually more complex and interdependent, that a mixture of styles, genres and practices is characterised. It is for this reason that it is important to return to the literary context again because it was in the 18th century that poets and artists became more interchangeable, and it is precisely in the second half of the century that certain authors played a key role as promoters of Dante's fortunes in Italy and abroad. If, on the one hand, Goldoni and the other comedy authors could not include in their 'respectable' works such a mixture, and above all ideals and ideas that did not fit in with morality and the definition of

[198] See DENIS DIDEROT, *The paradox of acting, translated with annotations fro Diderot's 'Paradoxe sur le Comédien'*, by Walter Herries Pollock, with a preface by Henry Irving, London, Chatto&Windus, 1883; DENIS DIDEROT, *Paradosso sull'attore*, saggio introduttivo e cura di Paola Degli Esposti, postfazione di Jacques Copeau, Roma, Dino Audino, 2021.

roles, as well as genres, quite a different style and work was to be had by some tragedians, who, in taking up the classic, in bringing to the stage the dissension of the human soul, dusted off that antithetical contrast between the spaces of Hell and Paradise and sometimes brought Dante himself back onto the stage.

Compared to the Counter-Reformation climate, the pleasantness of forms and styles of the 17th century, the 18th century will aim at the creation of new moral customs, aiming at the holistic formation of the good prince in a classical key, and will be inspired by Parnassian concord between knowledge in a new *pantheon* enlightened by science and measure. In an increasingly European panorama of reception, which sees France as the neuralgic centre of the new enlightened knowledge, one will see none other than Voltaire categorically lash out against Dante's production, describing it as excessively complex and unnecessarily inlaid with superabundant references of little immediate relevance that make reading impossible for any modern reader[199].

The French jibe at the Italian poet poses a problem, as there are eminent literati in his homeland who criticise him harshly, such as Lodovico Muratori, Melchiorre Cesarotti and Giuseppe Baretti, while others take his side, such as the Venetian Gasparo Gozzi, famous for writing his *Difesa di Dante* (1758)[200]. Among the latter, the difference lies in those who recognise in Dante a particular ability to make poetry, as Gozzi and Vico had already done, and those who simply want to argue back to a French poet that the Italian poet is better in every respect, as happens to the usual detractor Bettinelli, with his *Lettere virgiliane*[201]. As can be seen, national glory became an increasingly relevant and heartfelt issue, as Italy was still a long way from having that political unity that would allow a governmental allocation of funds for culture and the arts, which instead nations such as France and Prussia, in some respects, had already been able to afford.

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[199] See BRUNO BASILE, *La scoperta di Dante nella cultura europea del Sette e Ottocento*, in ENRICO MALATO, MASSIMO MIGLIO, OVIDIO CAPITANI *et al.* (a cura di), *"Per correr miglior acque...". Bilanci e prospettive degli studi danteschi alle soglie del nuovo millennio*, cit., reference at pp. 487-90; ANDREA BATTISTINI, *Dante a chiaroscuro. Requisitorie e apologie settecentesche*, cit., p. 123; FRANCO PIVA, *La (ri)scoperta di Dante in Francia tra secolo dei Lumi e primo Ottocento*, in «Studi Francesi. Rivista quadrimestrale fondata da Franco Simone», n. 158, a. LIII, fasc. II, maggio-agosto 2009, pp. 264-277, reference at pp. 265-266; WERNER P. FRIEDERICH, *Dante's Fame Abroad*, *1350-1850*, cit., pp. 92-102.

[200] See GASPARO GOZZI, *Giudizio degli antichi poeti sopra la moderna censura di Dante, attribuita ingiustamente a Virgilio; con li principj del buon gusto, ovvero Saggio di critica. Poema inglese del Sig. Pope, ora per la prima volta fatto italiano da Gasparo Gozzi*, Venezia, Zatta con licenza de' Superiori, 1758; consultable in GASPARO GOZZI, *Difesa di Dante*, a cura di M. G. Pensa, Venezia, Marsilio, 1990.

[201] See ANDREA BATTISTINI, *Il modello e le suggestioni letterarie*, cit., pp. 462-463; FABIO FORNER, *Saverio Bettinelli e Angelo Mazza: un petrarchista e un dantista per gioco?*, in «Studi sul Settecento e l'Ottocento. Rivista internazionale di italianistica», vol. XVII, 2022, pp. 147-158; SAVERIO BETTINELLI, *Lettere virgiliane, lettere inglesi, e mia vita letteraria*, a cura di Gilberto Finzi, Milano, Rizzoli, 1962.

The true eighteenth-century admirers of Dante will be recognised by the Italianist Carlo Dionisotti in Vincenzo Monti (1754-1828)[202], Vittorio Alfieri (1749-1803)[203] and Ugo Foscolo (1778-1827)[204]. Without going into a precise examination of the personal reception of these capital authors in this paper, it is also worth noting how each of these interpreters of Italian culture played a key role in the Italian and European reception of Dante with their writings first, and then with their frequentations and biographical vicissitudes. Above all, the personalities and roguish lives of Alfieri and Foscolo opened the door to the irrepressible Romantic reception of Dante. Both the poet of the *Sepolcri* and the playwright of the *Mirra* shared such an unbridled passion for Dante that led them to establish him as a national monument of poetry and an example of artistic life interpreting the strong feeling, capable of dragging the masses with him and changing the destiny of a country, as witnessed by the fundamental stage of the pilgrimage disguised as a *grand tour* that they both made to Dante's tomb in Ravenna or the fact that Foscolo in his London period called himself Lorenzo Alighieri[205].

At the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Monti took up Dante in several of his own works, exchanging numerous letters and opinions with other interpreters of the national and European literary world, in order to best describe a style to be kept, a language to be made, as Alessandro Manzoni would later do[206]. Together with a generation of artists and authors, Foscolo and Alfieri will ask themselves what role an artist, a man of letters, plays at their time. Dante's resumption will be indispensable in creating the connotations of the young revolutionary who, as an exile, is not afraid to make his art the testimony of irreproachable

[202] See *Vincenzo Monti*, a cura di Febo Allevi, in ED; VINCENZO MONTI, *Opere*, a cura di Manara Valgimigli e Carlo Muscetta, Milano-Napoli, R. Ricciardi, 1953; GINO FRANCESCO GOBBI, *Dante e Vincenzo Monti*, Milano, Hoepli, 1941; ROBERTO CARDINI, *Monti e Dante*, in JOANNA SZYMANOWSKA, IZABELA NAPIÓRKOWSKA (a cura di), *Il Dante dei moderni: la Commedia dall'Ottocento a oggi. Saggi critici*, Vicchio, LoGisma, 2017, pp. 11-20; ANNA MARIA SALVADÈ, *Dante e la prima generazione romantica*, in JOANNA SZYMANOWSKA, IZABELA NAPIÓRKOWSKA (a cura di), *Il Dante dei moderni: la Commedia dall'Ottocento a oggi. Saggi critici*, cit., pp. 21-34.

[203] See *Vittorio Alfieri*, a cura di Aurelia Accame Bobbio, in ED; VITTORIO ALFIERI, *Le Opere*, 12 voll., Padova, per Nicolò Zanon Bettoni, 1809-1811; DANTE BIANCHI, *Dante e Vittorio Alfieri*, in ANDREA NACCARI *et al.* (a cura di), *Dante e il Piemonte*, Torino, Bocca, 1922, pp. 325-342; GIUSEPPE ANTONIO CAMERINO, *Alfieri e il linguaggio della tragedia. Verso, stile, tópoi*, Napoli, Liguori, 1999; CHRISTIAN DEL VENTO, *Come leggeva e postillava Alfieri: le postille «di soglia» tra 'estrazione' e 'marginalizzazione'*, in «Prassi Ecdotiche della Modernità Letteraria», n. 3, 2018, pp. 29-80; GIUSEPPE ANTONIO CAMERINO, *Alfieri e Dante: Ancora sul linguaggio tragico*, in «Letteratura italiana antica: rivista annuale di testi e studi», vol. XX, 2019, pp. 621-626.

[204] See *Ugo Foscolo*, a cura di Mario Scotti, in DBI.

[205] See VITTORIO ALFIERI, *Vita*, a cura di G. Dossena, Torino, Einaudi, 1967, pp. 208-9 e GIUSEPPE CHIARINI, *Vita di Ugo Foscolo*, Firenze, Barbèra, 1910.

[206] See ANDREA BATTISTINI, *Il modello e le suggestioni letterarie*, cit., pp. 470-474; ANDREA BATTISTINI, *Dante a chiaroscuro. Requisitorie e apologie settecentesche*, cit., pp. 133-135.

ethics and morals. The increasingly cumbersome presence of the Vate emerges in the life and production of the new poets, who cannot depart from his figure and style even if they want to.

SECOND CHAPTER
FROM THE 17TH TO THE 20TH CENTURY

2.1. The theatrical rise of Count Ugolino

Theatrically speaking, in Italy, Dante's 18th century was inaugurated under the sign of the 33rd canto of *Inferno*, namely with the episode of Count Ugolino. Probably dating back to the late 17th century but published in Rome only posthumously by his nephew Giovanni Francesco Semproni (on behalf of his Urbino great-grandfather Giovanni Leone Semproni) is the 1724 tragedy *Il Conte Ugolino* (*Count Ugolino*), which in five acts interspersed with choruses presents a scene set in Pisa, creating singular parallelism with Gryphius and the Jesuit dramaturgies. To increase the *pathos* of the already dramatic story of the Count and his sons locked up in the tower of the Muda, an ancillary love story of his nephew Manfredi is added as the cause of the animosity between the Count and Bishop Ruggieri, and the scene of an attempt by the Count to escape from the tower is also proposed, an escape that is tragically discovered and ends with the death of the Count's possible saviours. Ugolino will return to his cell and die there in Pisa, *novella Tebe*[1]. It is worth mentioning that the Count is afflicted by blindness, which enhances the parallelism with Oedipus[2].

«In 1799 appeared anonymously at Bassano, Ugolino, Conte de' Gherardeschi. But the horror attending the circumstances of a man dying of hunger through five long acts, disgusted the readers and the auditors, and the play fell to the ground»[3]. In reality, the anonymous author

[1] See GIOVANNI LEONE SEMPRONI, *Il conte Ugolino tragedia*, dedicata ad Annibale Albani camerlengo di S. Chiesa, Roma, Appresso Giovanni Maria Salvioni, 1724.
[2] See BEATRICE CORRIGAN, *Dante and Italian Theater: A Study in Dramatic Fashions*, cit., pp. 96-97.
[3]«Nel 1779 uscì dalle stampe a Bassano, l'Ugolino conte de' Gherardeschi, d'autore anonimo. Ma l'orrida idea, per cinque atti, di un uomo che muore per fame, disgustò lettori e spettatori; e la tragedia cadde e disparve», JOSEPH COOPER-WALKER, *Historical Memoir on Italian Tragedy: From the Earliest Period to the Present Time: Illustrated with Specimens and Analyses of the Most Celebrated Tragedies and Interspersed with Occasional Observations on the Italian Theatres and Biographical Notices of the Principal Tragic Writers of Italy*, London, E. Harding, 1799, p. 275 [GIUSEPPE COOPER-WALKER, *Memoria storica sulla tragedia italiana, dai suoi primi tempi sino ai presenti con esempi ed analisi delle più celebri tragedie con osservazioni sugli italiani teatri e con biografiche notizie sopra i principali scrittori tragici dell'Italia*, versione italiana con giunta di alcune note da Bartolomeno Benincasa, Brescia, per Nicolò Bettoni, 1810, p. 244].

is none other than the Venetian Jesuit, scholar and polygraph Andrea Rubbi[4], who published his tragedy in Bassano in 1779, «dedicated to three young members of the Gritti family, who were still engaged in their studies»[5] and again in Venice in 1807[6]. Also in this case, the tragedy takes place in five acts; from the third act onwards, Count Ugolino is brought in chains before a tribunal that absolves him of his guilt, but implacable death arrives for the Count. A comparative analysis of the first and last versions reveals macroscopic differences, which are strongly influenced by the renewal taking place between the late 18th and 19th centuries.

The verisimilar and truthful subject matter of medieval-historical origin, but above all the insertion of Moral Choruses at the end of each act, acknowledges the new theatrical theories, attributable in Italy mainly to Manzoni, its own, thus making the 1807 version much more open to the European panorama, as can also be seen in the setting outside the tower, albeit with a constant morbid reprise of the atrocity of imprisonment. It is noteworthy that the antagonist is Pietro Visconti, more than the Arcivescovo Ruggeri, maybe to avoid putting on stage a clerical villain[7]. Singular is the decision to propose the shadow of Dante who, in the Prologue and in the *Commiato*, addresses the audience in chained tercets, in profile on the outer stage, as the author himself gives reason in the *Notizie storico-critiche sopra Il Conte Ugolino estese dall'Autore della tragedia*[8].

In this case, the author states that, in 1773, the first version of the tragedy was presented to and revised by the Marquis Francesco Albergati Capacelli, an illustrious Italian 'amateur' theatre man[9], who, however, was unable to persuade any of his own amateur actors to lend

[4]See *Andrea Rubbi*, a cura di Umberto Bosco, in ED. See also GUIDO MAZZONI, *L'Ottocento*, 2 voll., Milano, Villardi, 1913, vol. 1, p. 188; MARIO FERRIGNI, *Dante e il teatro*, cit., p. 21; ROSANNA MORACE, *La Tragedia del Conte Ugolino tra Alfieri e Marenco*, in PATRIZIA BERTINI MALGARINI, NICOLA MEROLA, CATERINA VERBARO (a cura di), *La funzione Dante e i paradigmi della modernità*, Atti del XVI Convegno Internazionale della MOD Lumsa (Roma, 10-13 giugno 2014), Pisa, ETS, 2015, pp. 251-260, reference at pp. 251-252.

[5] BEATRICE CORRIGAN, *Dante and Italian Theater: A Study in Dramatic Fashions*, cit., p. 97.

[6] See ANDREA RUBBI, *Ugolino conte de' Gherardeschi*, tragedia, in Bassano, a spese Remondini, 1779, later re-published in *Il Conte Ugolino*, tragedia inedita d'un pastore della colonia virgiliana, in Venezia, presso Antonio Rosa, 1807.

[7] See BEATRICE CORRIGAN, *Dante and Italian Theater: A Study in Dramatic Fashions,* cit., pp. 97-99.

[8] See ANDREA RUBBI, *Il Conte Ugolino*, tragedia inedita d'un pastore della colonia virgiliana, cit., pp. 87-92.

[9] On the figure of the Marquis, see: ELENA ZILOTTI, *Un poeta di compagnia sui generis. L'attività teatrale di Francesco Albergati Capacelli nel secondo Settecento*, Mantova, Il Rio, 2024; ELENA ZILOTTI, *Teatro a Bologna tra villeggiatura e accademie: questioni di prassi scenica dai carteggi di Francesco Albergati Capacelli*, in ISKRENA YORDANOVA, CRISTINA FERNANDES (edited by), *"Padron mio colendissimo…": Letters about Music and the Stage in the 18th century*, Wien, Hollitzer, 2021, pp. 371-388; ELENA ZILOTTI, *Osservazioni critiche di Francesco Albergati Capacelli sul teatro tra carteggi e paratesti*, in SIMONA BRUNETTI, RENZO RABBONI (a cura di), *Teatro e carteggi nel Sei-Settecento: da Aurelio Amalteo a Metastasio e oltre*, Verona, QuiEdit, 2021, pp. 133-146; ELENA ZILOTTI, *La professionalità rappresentativa nel "théâtre de société" di Francesco Albergati Capacelli*, in STEFANIA ONESTI (a cura di), *Il gesto tra messinscena e critica. Studi sulla danza e sul teatro di società nel secondo Settecento*, Padova, Esedra, 2019, pp. 75-94; ELENA ZILOTTI, *Un laboratorio di teatro*

themselves to the undertaking of staging it. In addition to other statements on the ongoing debate on the tragedy, some director's notes are given on the possible rendering of Dante's Shadow and the Choirs, suggesting that almost thirty years of work on the play had left the author hopeful of its imminent staging, perhaps in light of the new cultural and political turmoil.

The dramaturgical experience of Rubbi and that of the majority of the Italian examples reported are ascribed to the sphere of private, aristocratic, highly cultured theatre and materialised on paper rather than on stage.

Finally, it is useful to recall how Alfieri himself had an *Ugolino* in mind: «And I also tried to write a Conte Ugolino, Dramma misto, to be joined later also to the Tramelogedie, if I had performed it. But after I had conceived it, I left it, nor could I think about it anymore, nor I drafted it. The Abel, meanwhile, was finished, but not polished»[10]. As Battistini, Rossana Morace and Corrigan suggest, Dante's verses and echoes resonate powerfully in the published tragedies of Alfieri and also in this one, which he sketched out and then left behind, reverberating in the European panorama of which Alfieri was a great frequenter, animator and protagonist[11].

At the end of the century, abroad, Dante began to appear more and more frequently on the scene, taking the first steps towards establishing his pre-eminence in the future Romantic poetry. Under the sign of the education promoted by the Jesuit colleges and the reworking of classical myths, between the 17th and 18th centuries, even on French soil, despite Voltaire's authoritative opinions, the first more systematic translations of Dante's cantos and canticles began to be produced[12], taking on more of the definition of reworkings or adaptations, as attested to by critics who saw a reception more suited to their own taste and style:

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nobiliare: il caso degli Albergati Capacelli, in SIMONA BRUNETTI (a cura di), *UNICI. Le famiglie d'arte nel teatro italiano del '900*, con la collaborazione di Giorgia Penzo e Monica Cristini, Bari, Di Pagina, 2019, pp. 13-28.

[10] «E tentai anche di scrivere un Conte Ugolino, Dramma misto, e da unirsi poi anche alle Tramelogedie, se l'avessi eseguite. Ma dopo averlo ideato, lo lasciai, né vi potei più pensare, non che lo stendessi. L'Abele, intanto, era finito, ma non limato», VITTORIO ALFIERI, *Vita scritta da esso*, 2 voll., Firenze, presso Leonardo Ciardetti, 1822, vol. II, pp. 164. See also: EMILIO TEZA, *Il Conte Ugolino e Scotta. Tramelogedie ideate da Vittorio Alfieri*, in «Nuova Antologia», vol. IV, fasc. II- febbraio, 1867, pp. 289-297.

[11] See ANDREA BATTISTINI, *Il modello e le suggestioni letterarie*, cit., pp. 467-468; ANDREA BATTISTINI, *Dante a chiaroscuro. Requisitorie e apologie settecentesche*, cit., pp. 132-134; ROSANNA MORACE, *La Tragedia del Conte Ugolino tra Alfieri e Marenco*, cit.; BEATRICE CORRIGAN, *Dante and Italian Theater: A Study in Dramatic Fashions*, cit., p. 105, footnote 5.

[12] See ALBERT COUNSON, *Dante en France*, Erlangen, Fr. Junge, 1906; ALBERT COUNSON, *Dante en France*, in «Romanische Forschungen», n. 21, 1908, pp. 1-275; *Francia*, a cura di Simonetta Saffiotti Bernardi, Remo Ceserani, in ED; PAUL RENUCCI, *Dantismo francese e dantismo esoterico nel nostro secolo*, in VITTORE BRANCA, ETTORE CACCIA (a cura di), *Dante nel mondo. Raccolta di studi promossa dall'Associazione internazionale per gli studi di lingua e di letteratura italiana*, cit., pp. 155-182; STEFANIA VIGNALI, *Bibliographie des études sur Dante en France*, in «Studi Francesi. Rivista quadrimestrale fondata da Franco Simone», n. 176, a. LIX, fasc. II maggio-agosto, 2015, pp. 319-334; RICHARD COOPER, *Praise and (More) Blame of Dante in Late Renaissance*

Una traduzione letterale sarebbe stata impensabile: la lingua di Dante era troppo grossolana, troppo primitiva per poter entrare nell'elegante sintassi forgiata dal francese; pretendere di tradurla letteralmente avrebbe significato renderla ridicola, e travisare completamente non solo il senso, ma anche lo stile del poema dantesco[13].

A literal translation would have been unthinkable: Dante's language was too coarse, too primitive to fit into the elegant syntax forged by the French; to claim to translate it literally would have meant making a mockery of it, and completely misrepresenting not only the meaning, but also the style of Dante's poem.

Eighteenth-century France was on its way to becoming the most relevant artistic forge in terms of its influence on the entire European chessboard. Dante's reception is, above all, the result of contact with Italian exiles, who come to settle on French soil just at the end of the Napoleonic experience[14]. Some of these work in public contexts, as civil servants or as Italian teachers, translators and journalists, compiling and printing texts of an anthological nature that highlight the glories and beauty of Italian poetry. The *Commedia,* therefore, is known and spread mainly through selected passages, such as the famous admonition «lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch'intrate», which is quoted many times, for instance in Act V, scene III, of *La Folle Journée ou Mariage de Figaro* by Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais (1784), where Figaro himself says in the monologue «aussitôt je vois, du fond d'un fiacre, baisser pour moi le pont d'un château fort, à l'entrée duquel je laissai l'espérance et la liberté»[15].

Further examples of contact within representations are to be found in the production of Diderot himself, who in his *Jacques le Fataliste et son Maître*, a dialogical novel between teacher/master and disciple, woven around the theme of the journey during which the two entertain each other by recounting picaresque amorous anecdotes, interspersed by philosophical debates with the enunciation of numerous episodes of an aetiological nature. Published only in 1796, in the text after the episode of the Marquis d'Arcis, the Master asks Jaques if he believes in the future life, and the question gives rise to a literary digression that suggests a certain familiarity with Dante on the part of Diderot, or at least the knowledge of certain passages from Alighieri:

JAQUES: Je n'y crois ni décrois; je n'y pense pas. Je jouis de mon mieux de celle qui nous a été accordée en avancement d'hoirie.

France, in «Yale French Studies», n. 134 (*The Construction of a National Vernacular Literature in the Renaissance: Essays in Honor of Edwin M. Duval*, edited by Jessica DeVos and Bruce Hayes), 2018, pp. 67-81.

[13] FRANCO PIVA, *La (ri)scoperta di Dante in Francia tra secolo dei Lumi e primo Ottocento*, cit., p. 267.

[14] See WILLIAM SPAGGIARI*, La Commedia in Francia tra Sette e Ottocento*, in JOANNA SZYMANOWSKA, IZABELA NAPIÓRKOWSKA (a cura di), *Il Dante dei moderni: la Commedia dall'Ottocento a oggi. Saggi critici*, cit., pp. 45-58; WILLIAM SPAGGIARI*, Dante nel Sette-Ottocento. Note e ricerche*, Milano, LED- Edizioni Universitarie di Lettere Economia Diritto, 2022.

[15] See PIERRE-AUGUSTIN CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS, *Oeuvres complètes*. Nouvelle édition, augmentée de quatre pièces de théâtre et de documents divers inédits, avec une introduction par M. Édouard Fournier, Ornée de 20 portr. en pied coloriés, dessinés par M. Émile Bayard, Paris, Laplace, Sanchez et Cie, 1876, p. 156, available at: https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k62317430/f248.item.zoom (last accessed 14/05/2025).

LE MAÎTRE: Pour moi, je me regarde comme en chrysalide; et j aime à me persuader que le papillon, ou mon âme, venant un jour à percer sa coque, s'envolera à la justice divine (1).
JAQUES: Votre image est charmante.
LE MAÎTRE: Elle n'est pas de moi; je l'ai lue, je crois, dans un poëte italien appelé Dante, qui a fait un ouvrage intitulé: la *Comédie de l'Enfer, du Purgatoire et du Paradis* (2).
JAQUES: Voilà un singulier sujet de comédie!
LE MAÎTRE: Il y a, pardieu, de belles choses, surtout dans son enfer. Il enferme les hérésiarques dans des tombeaux de feu, dont la flamme s'échappe et porte le ravage au loin; les ingrats, dans des niches où ils versent des larmes qui se glacent sur leurs visages; et les paresseux, dans d'autres niches; et il dit de ces derniers que le sang s'échappe de leurs veines, et qu'il est recueilli par des vers dédaigneux... Mais à quel propos ta sortie contre notre mépris d'une vie que nous craignons de perdre?
JAQUES: A propos de ce que le secrétaire du marquis des Arcis m'a raconté du mari de la jolie femme au cabriolet.

(1) Sterne a dit dans ses *Mémoires*: «Consulte une chenille, et le papillon résoudra ta question» (BR.)
(2) «Non v'acorgete voi elle noi siam vermi | Nati a formar l'angelica farfalla | Che vola alla giustizia senza schermi?». DANTE ALIGHIERI, Purgatorio, Canto X, v. 123. (BR.)[16]

JAQUES: I don't believe in it and I don't think about it. I enjoy as best I can what has been granted to us in advancement of our inheritance. / THE MASTER: As for me, I see myself as a chrysalis; and I like to persuade myself that the butterfly, or my soul, one day piercing its shell, will fly away to divine justice (1). / JAQUES: Your image is charming. / THE MASTER: It is not mine; I read it, I believe, in an Italian poet called Dante, who wrote a work entitled: The Comedy of Hell, Purgatory and Paradise (2). / JAQUES: That's a peculiar subject for a comedy! / THE MASTER: There are, pardon me, some beautiful things, especially in his hell. He locks up the heresiarchs in tombs of fire, from which the flame escapes and carries the devastation far away; the ungrateful, in niches where they shed tears that freeze on their faces; and the lazy, in other niches; and he says of the latter that the blood escapes from their veins, and that it is collected by disdainful worms... But what is this outburst against our contempt for a life we fear to lose? / JAQUES: About what the secretary of the Marquis des Arcis told me about the husband of the pretty woman in the cabriolet.
(1) Sterne said in his Memoirs: 'Consult a caterpillar, and the butterfly will solve your question' (BR.).
(2) "Do you not see that we are worms | Born to form the angelic butterfly | That flies to justice without shields?". DANTE ALIGHIERI, Purgatorio, Canto X, v. 123 (BR.).

As Piva reports, it took the commentators some time to understand the derivation of the work, also considering the quotation taken from a canto of *Purgatorio*, a cantica that does not enjoy the spasmodic attention such as *Inferno*, giving them an understanding of how the approach to Dante was still largely anecdotal and second-hand:

Diderot a très probablement lu la *Divine Comédie*. Cette lecture correspondrait d'ailleurs à l'intérêt nouveau que suscitait l'œuvre de Dante dans les milieux littéraires français depuis quelques années[17].

Diderot very probably read the Divine Comedy. This reading would, moreover, correspond to the new interest that Dante's work had aroused in French literary circles in recent years.

[16] DENIS DIDEROT, *Oeuvres complètes: revues sur les éditions originales comprenant ce qui a été publié a diverses époques et les manuscrits inédits conservés a la bibliothèque de l'Ermitage. Notices, notes, table analytique. Etude sur Diderot et le mouvement philosophique au XVIIIe siècle*, par J. Assézat [et Maurice Tourneux], 20 voll, Paris, Garnier frères, 1875-1877, Tome 6, 1875, p. 195, available at: https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k55448751/f199.item.r=un%20poete%20%20italien%20appelle%20Dant (last accessed 14/05/2025).
[17] See DENIS DIDEROT, *Jacques le Fataliste et son maître*, édition critique par Simone Lecointre et Jean Le Galliot, Genève, Droz, 1976, p. 453.

The episode of count Ugolino enjoyed a circulation of its own. It was duly translated into Latin, and French and then circulated in *pamphlets*, securing a fortune of its own, as we have already seen in Germany:

La storia di Ugolino venne tradotta in latino da Charles Lebeau, professore di eloquenza all'università di Parigi, amico del cardinale di Polignac, in un testo che venne pubblicato nel 1782, ma che era già noto prima e fu lodato da Louis Racine; ma già una traduzione in prosa francese era uscita nel "Journal étranger" (1755); seguì una traduzione in elegante prosa settecentesca di Claude-Henri Watelet, l'artista letterato amico degli Enciclopedisti (ed essa ottenne gli elogi del Marmontel nella Poétique française, 1767)[18].

The story of Ugolino was translated into Latin by Charles Lebeau, professor of eloquence at the University of Paris and a friend of Cardinal de Polignac, in a text that was published in 1782, but was already known before and was praised by Louis Racine; but a French prose translation had already appeared in the 'Journal étranger' (1755); this was followed by a translation in elegant 18th century prose by Claude-Henri Watelet, the literary artist and friend of the Encyclopaedists (and it won the praise of Marmontel in Poétique française, 1767).

The wide circulation of this kind of text in cultured European circles allows us to clarify how, although the problems of translating the text of the *Commedia* and the difficulty in approaching it were still felt, the attention and curiosity generated in the public by the episodes and characters won out over any impediment.

Thus, on 27 July 1772, the *Comédiens François Ordinaire du Roi* staged *Roméo et Juliette*, a tragedy by Jean-Frangois Ducis[19]. The French playwright and scholar played a key role in adapting for French taste and style the main plays of Shakespeare, which were also being received in French territory at the time[20]. Although it was a reworking of the Bard, mediated by Pierre Antoine de La Place's early translations (1745-47), Ducis' knowledge of English was nil[21]. His rendition of the text, adapted to the needs of French audiences, masterfully intercepting their demands, was much criticised by Voltaire, Diderot and others, but ensured his fame on the stage and marked Shakespeare's success in France and in all those countries where the French style was taken as a model and rewritten again[22]. In the wake of his adaptation

[18] *Francia* in ED, cit.
[19] See JEAN-FRANGOIS DUCIS, *Roméo et Juliette*, tragédie. Représentée, pour la première fois par les Comédiens François Ordinaires du Roi, le 27 juillet 1772. Paris, Chez P.F. Gueffier, au bas de la rue de la Harpe, a la Liberté, 1772, available at: https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k8594644/f1.item.zoom (last accessed 14/05/2025).
[20] About the author, see: LAURENCE MARIE, *L'entrée de Shakespeare au répertoire de la Comédie Française au xviiie siècle*, in «Dans Littératures classiques», n. 95, vol. 1, 2018, pp. 181-190; ISABELLE SCHWARTZ-GASTINE, *Romeo and Juliet on the French stage. From the early versions to the English production at the Odéon Theatre in 1827*, in JUAN F. CERDÁ, DIRK DELABASTITA, KEITH GREGOR (edited by), R*omeo and Juliet in European Culture*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2017, pp. 77-100; JOHN GOLDER, *Shakespeare for the age of Reason. The earliest stage adaptations of Jean-François Ducis 1769-1792*, Oxford, Voltaire Foundation, 1992 (specifically pp. 73-111); JOHN A. GREEN, *French Reaction to Shakespeare*, in «Brigham Young University Studies», vol. 8, n. 2 winter, 1968, pp. 147-157; SYLVIE CHEVALLEY, *Ducis, Shakespeare et les Comédiens français (I-II)*, in «Revue d'Histoire du Théâtre», [article en 2 parties], oct.-déc. 1964, pp. 327-335, et 1965, pp. 5-37.
[21] See JOHN A. GREEN, *French Reaction to Shakespeare*, cit., reference at p. 152.
[22] Ivi, pp. 152-154.

of *Hamlet* (1769), Ducis decided to make a decisive choice for the success of his *Roméo et Juliette*: in addition to the changes that led to the cutting of some characters, such as Mercutio, Paris, Lady Capulet and others, Ducis chose to interpolate the text and especially the character of the Montague father with Count Ugolino[23]. The following is a significant extract from Act IV, scene V, in which Montague tells Romeo how and where the death of his sons occurred and from where his desire for revenge originates, verses in which the echo of the Canto dell'*Inferno* leaks out in all its force:

MONTAIGU:	Loin de ces murs affreux
	Je crus chez les Pisans devoir fuir avec eux.
	Hélas! disois je enfin, voici donc un asyle
	Pour moi, pour mes enfans, rempart sûr & tranquille,
	D'où n'approcheront plus les piéges du trépas:
	La vengeance attentive y marcha sur mes pas.
	Un expositions ingénieux, un tigre impitoyable
	D'un complot supposé me fit juger coupable,
	Et sans que du forfait on daigna s'informer
	Dans une tour fatale on me vint enfermer.
ROMEO:	Avec vos enfans?
MONTAIGU:	Oui: prête l'oreille au reste.
	Déja depuis trois jours dans mon cachot funeste,
	Je sentois dans mon sein s'amasser la terreur,
	Quand d'un songe effrayant la prophétique horreur
	Offrit a mes esprits la plus fatale image:
	Je m'éveillai tremblant, plein d'un affreux présage.
	Je cherchois dans moi-même, immobile & glacé,
	Quel étoit ce malheur par mon songe annoncé:
	Mes fils dormoient, j y cours; leurs gestes, leurs visages
	Sur mon fort, tout-à-coup, éclairant mes présages,
	De la faim sur leur lit exprimoient les douleurs;
	Ils s'écrioient, "mon père", & répandoient des pleurs.
	Nous nous levons, on vient; nous attendions d'avance
	L'aliment qu'on accorde à la simple existence.
	Chacun se tait, j écoute, & j'entens de la tour
	La porte en mur épais se changer sans retour.
	Je fixai mes enfans sans parole & sans larmes;
	J'étois mort.... Ils pleuroieut ..., je cachai mes allarmes;
	Mais lorsqu'enfin (Soleil devois tu te montrer)
	Dans eux tous à la fois je me vis expirer,
	Je dévorai ces mains. Renaud me dit "mon pere",
	"Vis, tu nous vengeras. Raymond, Dolcé, Sévere,
	M'offrirent à genoux leur sang pour me nourrir,
	Et chacun d'eux ensuite acheva de mourir[24].

MONTAGUE: Far from these dreadful walls, I thought I should flee to the Pisans. Alas! I said at last, here is an asylum for me, for my children, a safe and peaceful stronghold, where the traps of death will no longer approach: Attentive vengeance will follow in my footsteps. An ingenious exhibition, a merciless tiger of a supposed plot I was found guilty, and without anyone deigning to find out about the crime I was shut up in a fatal tower. / ROMEO: With your children? / MONTAGUE: Yes: listen to the rest. Already for three days in my fatal dungeon, I felt terror

[23] See ISABELLE SCHWARTZ-GASTINE, *Romeo and Juliet on the French stage. From the early versions to the English production at the Odéon Theatre in 1827*, cit., pp. 83-84.
[24] JEAN-FRANGOIS DUCIS, *Roméo et Juliette*, cit., pp. 53-54.

gathering in my breast, when the prophetic horror of a frightening dream offered my mind the most fatal image: I awoke trembling, full of an awful omen. I searched within myself, motionless and frozen, what was this misfortune my dream had foretold. My sons slept, I ran to them; their gestures, their faces on my fort, suddenly, illuminating my omens, of hunger on their beds expressed the pain. They cried out, 'My father', and shed tears. We arose, they came; we awaited in advance the nourishment granted to simple existence. Everyone is silent, I listen, & I hear from the tower the door in thick wall changing without return. I stared at my children without words or tears; I was dead.... They wept ..., I hid my tears. But when at last (Sun should you show yourself!) in them all at once I saw myself dying, I devoured these hands. Renaud said to me "My father, live! You will avenge us'. Raymond, Dolcé, Sévere, offered me on their knees their blood to feed me, and then each of them finished dying.

As Schwartz-Gestine and Golder report, the tragedy was a great success with the public, thanks also to the choice of Montague's interpreter, who in the reported parts made onlookers wince, with the presence full of dignity, pathos and charisma of the imposing actor Jean-Baptiste Britard, known as Brizard[25], a personal friend of Ducis[26], and later of the young Larive, pseudonym of Jean Mauduit, who, thanks to the immense work of preparing the character, make-up and costumes, could be recognized only by his voice and gave an exemplary performance of the old Montague, despite being only twenty-nine-years old[27]. Moreover, by analysing how the playwright in those years forged a close relationship with painters and artists of the calibre of Jacques-Louis David, bringing about a new era of collaboration between the visual and performing arts in the perspective of the classical revisionism of tragedy, the figure of Ducis and his shrewd choices in the field of dramaturgy and staging clarify how he is an exemplary interpreter for understanding the change that was taking place within the theatre and, for our study, how this was even more connected to Dante's reception:

what really seemed to have gripped audiences were the ways in which Shakespeare and Dante were pretext for the exploitation, via acting and costume and stage *tableaux*, of a delicious *frisson* of horror, combined with undoubtedly 'gothic' aesthetic, which in its tombs and dim lighting deliberately echoed the fashionable decor of the *Roman noir*, in the service of an aim that Ducis was to label in 1775, 'extraordinary situations'[28].

At a different latitude, but in the same years, and a century after the previous German attestation, Dante's theatrical reception in Europe, which passes through contamination with other myths and other authors, reappears, openly declaring how the French experience should not be declared singular at all, but the result of what Hegel a little later would define as the fruit of the *Zeitgeist*.

[25] See ISABELLE SCHWARTZ-GASTINE, *Romeo and Juliet on the French stage. From the early versions to the English production at the Odéon Theatre in 1827*, cit., 83-84; JOHN GOLDER, *Shakespeare for the age of Reason. The earliest stage adaptations of Jean-François Ducis 1769-1792,* cit., pp. 103-106.
[26] See JOHN GOLDER, *Shakespeare for the Age of Reason. The earliest stage adaptations of Jean-François Ducis 1769-1792,* cit., p. 106.
[27] Ivi, pp. 106-108.
[28] MARK LEDBURY, *Visions of Tragedy: Jean-François Ducis and Jacques-Louis David*, in «Eighteenth-Century Studies», vol. 37, n. 4 (Artistic Interactions-Summer), 2004, pp. 553-580, quotation at p. 562.

Even in Germany, Dante remained the subject of purely literary translations and criticism until the 1770s. According to Friedrich, Arturo Farinelli, Adolf-Altenberg, Unfer Lukoschik, Tomas Sommadosi, Milena Contini, and Daniel DiMassa[29], the Swiss scholar Johann Jakob Bodmer (1698-1783) was the first to translate some cantos of the *Commedia* into prose, focusing his attention precisely on the episodes of Paolo and Francesca and Count Ugolino. A friend of the Dantophile Pietro dei Conti di Calepio (1693-1762) of Bergamo, from whom he had a copy of the *Commedia* sent to him, Bodmer is famous for having begun the work of translating Dante along with the study of Shakespeare, Milton and Homer. In contrast to what Ducis, together with Johann Jakob Breitinger (1701-1776), did in the French sphere, the Swiss began with studies on art related to poetry, the bursting power of images in relation to the power of words, and precisely in conjunction with Dante studies: in open contrast to the poetic theories of the Leipzig School of Johann Christoph Gottsched and the dramatist Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, the two call for a different conception of *mimesis* between poetry and art and find a valid example of this in Dante's *visibil parlare*, enucleating the concept of *poetische Gemahlende* in his *Critische Betrachtungen über die poetischen Gemählde der Dichter*[30]. Their studies and theories, which form the basis of the future fiery theories of *Sturm und Drang* and historical relativism, converge for Bodmer in the play *Der Hungerthurm in Pisa* [*The Tower of Hunger in Pisa*], published in 1769[31], where the Count's myth is elaborated for the stage from a singular perspective, namely from the outside, among the people of Pisa, the Archibishop Ruggieri who imprisoned him, his daughter Laura and his trusted friend Azzo[32].

DiMassa emphasises how this drama came at a key moment and was expressly written to counter the methodological and dramaturgical assumptions made by Lessing in his *Laokoon* (1766): against the advocated use of the classics, Bodmer declares his legitimacy in using Dante, a writer from the Middle Ages, as a source of inspiration, his imaginative richness of

[29] See GERTRUDE ADOLF-ALTENBERG, *La Figura di Dante nei Paesi Germanici*, cit.; WERNER P. FRIEDERICH, *Dante's Fame Abroad*, *1350-1850*, cit., pp. 341-522; *Johann Jakob Bodmer*, a cura di W. Theodor Elwert, in ED; ARTURO FARINELLI, *Dante in Spagna, Francia, Inghilterra, Germania. Dante e Goethe*, Torino, Fratelli Bocca, 1922, pp. 370-372; TOMAS SOMMADOSSI, *Due Saggi su Dante di Johann Jakob Bodmer. Introduzione, Traduzione e Commento*, in «Dante: Rivista internazionale di studi su Dante Alighieri», vol. 7, 2010, pp. 93-111; MILENA CONTINI, *Ugolini Mors. Traduzioni latine di Inferno XXXIII*, in «Dante: Rivista internazionale di studi su Dante Alighieri», vol. 8, 2011, pp. 97-102; DANIEL DIMASSA, *Envisioning Ugliness and Arousing Compassion: Lessing, Bodmer, and Dante's Ugolino*, in «Lessing Yearbook/Jahrbuch», vol. XLVI, 2019, pp. 49-70.

[30] See JOHANN JAKOB BODMER, *Critische Betrachtungen über die poetischen Gemählde der Dichter*, Zürich, Orell, 1741, p. 30 e sgg. per Ugolino, p. 43 e sgg. per Francesca da Rimini.

[31] See JOHANN-JACOB BODMER, *Der Hungerthurm in Pisa, ein Trauerspiel*, Chur und Lindau, bey den typographischen Gesellschaft, 1769.

[32] See DANIEL DIMASSA, *Envisioning Ugliness and Arousing Compassion: Lessing, Bodmer, and Dante's Ugolino*, cit., pp. 59-63.

language dense with mystery and the sublime, in no way inferior to the Virgil who was its first foundation. Bodmer is, therefore, the harbinger of a dramaturgy that not only wants to move the audience to a *Mitleid*, a composed compassion, but to a real emotional fury that awakens in the listener the desire and the strength to act for an ideal[33].

Once again, although the prominence of the playwright Lessing's opinion is not insignificant, it can be understood that there were still many grey areas, especially between the 1760s and 1780s in the Leipzig-Zurich axis, which saw a rapid succession of events and direct and indirect correspondences between members of different schools and literary circles that determined the future of practices in literature and art. Bodmer is undoubtedly an extremely valuable interpreter of his time, for his own writings and also for the action he took in discovering and cultivating talents in the wake of Dante's metaphorically defined 'pictorial' talent and the influence of the reception of English poetics, such as the playwright Klopstock and the painter Füssli to name but a few.

Coinciding with this release, Heinrich Wilhelm von Gerstenberg (1737-1823)[34], a Geman-Danish playwright and poet with a pietist background, also decided to use the figure of Count Ugolino to create a drama that would clash with the classicist conception, possibly moving from the circulating prose and Latin translations of Dante's poem, thanks to a «Latin translation into Virgilian hexameters by Jacobi's teacher, Christoph Adolf Klotz, in 1764»[35]. He, too, was a promoter of the reception of Shakespeare's plays in German and of the ensuing debate on theatre in opposition to Hamburg's classicist dramaturgy. Von Gerstenberg identified himself with the revision of the Aristotelian units and the structuring of the drama, in order to maintain a perfect coherence in the arguments and cohesion of the different parts[36].

While providing a perfectly classicist structure of five acts, Gerstenberg acts on his drama *Ugolino: eine Tragödie in fünf Aufzügen* (1768)[37] from the inside: by choosing the protagonist of Canto XXXIII of *Inferno as his* subject, openly declaring his take on Alighieri, he eludes the unities of time and space, circumscribing them to the tower in which Ugolino and

[33] Ivi, pp. 59-63.
[34] See LADISLAO MITTNER, *137. Gerstenberg*, in LADISLAO MITTNER, *Storia della Letteratura tedesca. Dal Pietismo al Romanticismo (1700-1820)*, Torino, Einaudi, 1964, p. 306; ANTON REININGER, *Storia della letteratura tedesca fra l'Illuminismo e il Postmoderno 1700-2000*, Torino, Rosenberg&Sellier, 2005, pp. 91-92 [*Profilo della letteratura tedesca*, Torino, Rosenberg&Sellier, 1986[1]]; *Heinrich Wilhelm von Gerstenberg*, a cura di W. Theodor Elwert, in ED.
[35] WERNER P. FRIEDERICH, *Dante's Fame Abroad*, 1350-1850, cit., p. 370.
[36] See KARL S. GUTHKE, *Gerstenberg und die Shakespearedeutung der deutschen Klassik und Romantik*, in «The Journal of English and Germanic Philology», vol. 58, n. 1 Januar, 1959, pp. 91-108.
[37] HEINRICH WILHELM VON GERSTENBERG, *Ugolino: eine Tragödie in fünf Aufzügen*, Hamburg/Bremen, J. H. Cramer, 1768.

his sons are imprisoned, and determines the unity of action by projecting the entire unfolding of the drama onto the characters' last terrible hours of life. In contrast to the perspective outside Bodmer's tower, Gerstenberg adopts a writing style of "bold idealistic naturalism"[38], where ample space is given to the influence of the grotesque in delineating the terrible hunger that assails the characters in the tower, and forces them to impious thoughts and acts of cannibalism and suicide.

Given the fortuitous coincidence of the release of the two plays, some considerations are to be made about the different treatments given to them. Bodmer scoffed at accusations of plagiarism on the grounds of a totally different approach and wrote a further parody drama, *Das Parterre in der Tragödie Ugolino* (unpublished)[39], but his drama did not enjoy the appreciation of the public at the time[40], being openly discredited by Goethe[41]. Gerstenberg's Ugolino, on the other hand, was received with great fervour by the interpreters of the *Sturm und Drang*, being translated twice into Italian (in 1779, and in 1843 by Riccardo Ceroni, and in 1815 into French)[42]. It elicited negative comments, as expected, from Lessing and Herder[43], and, more than anything, was received with disfavour in its Berlin performances in 1769[44].

It is therefore legitimate to speak in this historical period of *Ugolinomania*[45], indirectly increased by the growing importance of the name of the poet Dante:

> La drammatizzazione dell'episodio di Ugolino ebbe una lunga sequela di imitatori; il nome di Ruggieri fu dato a dei caratteri maligni, e il Burger, satiricamente, paragona nel *Musenalmanach* di Gottinga gli editori che... succhiano il cervello degli autori, a Ugolino che si nutre nell'Inferno del cervello di Ruggieri... II Farinelli suggerisce che forse la torre della fame dei Masnadieri dello Schiller sia presa dalla torre di Ugolino[46].

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[38] «ardito naturalismo idealistico», LADISLAUS MITTNER, *137. Gerstenberg*, cit.

[39] DANIEL DIMASSA, *Envisioning Ugliness and Arousing Compassion: Lessing, Bodmer, and Dante's Ugolino*, cit., p. 59; ERICH MEISSNER, *Bodmer als Parodist*, Naumburg, Sieling, 1904, pp. 90-105.

[40]See GERTRUDE ADOLF-ALTENBERG, *La Figura di Dante nei Paesi Germanici*, cit., p. 521.

[41] See DANIEL DIMASSA, *Envisioning Ugliness and Arousing Compassion: Lessing, Bodmer, and Dante's Ugolino*, cit. p. 59.

[42] See GERTRUDE ADOLF-ALTENBERG, *La Figura di Dante nei Paesi Germanici*, cit., p. 522; MILENA CONTINI, *Ugolini Mors. Traduzioni latine di Inferno XXXIII*, cit., p. 99; WERNER P. FRIEDERICH, *Dante's Fame Abroad*, 1350-1850, cit., p. 368.

[43] WERNER P. FRIEDERICH, *Dante's Fame Abroad*, 1350-1850, cit., pp. 369-370.

[44]Ivi, p. 368.

[45] See *Ugolino della Gherardesca, conte di Donoratico*, a cura di Simonetta Saffiotti Bernardi, Umberto Bosco, in ED; FRANCES A. YATES, *Transformations of Dante's Ugolino*, in «Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes», vol. 14, n. 1-2, 1951, pp. 92-117; SANDRO MORACHIOLI, *Ugolino e gli artisti. Da Botticelli a Rodin*, Presentazione di Claudio Ciociola, Premessa di Stefano Carrai, Pisa, ETS, 2020.

[46] GERTRUDE ADOLF-ALTENBERG, *La Figura di Dante nei Paesi Germanici*, cit., p. 522. Furthermore it continues as it follows: «Altri autori sono: Al. Gleich, *Der Hungerturm, oder Edelsinn und Barbarei der Vorzeit,* Vienna, 1805; K. A. Bughholtz*, Ugolino Gherardescas*, Fall, Amburgo, 1807; Fr. Eckstein, *Der Kampf um Pisa*, Heidelberg, 1813; F. von Biedenfeld, *Ugolino oder der Hungerturm*, Bamberg, 1822. Tutte queste opere hanno solo un interesse storico».

The dramatisation of Ugolino's episode had a long succession of imitators; Ruggieri's name was given to malicious characters, and Burger, satirically, compares in Göttingen's *Musenalmanach* the editors who ... suck the brains of authors, to Ugolino who feeds in Inferno on Ruggieri's brains.... Farinelli suggests that perhaps the tower of hunger in Schiller's *die Räuber* is taken from Ugolino's tower.

In 1776, Ludwig Philipp Hahn published *Der Aufruhr zu Pisa: Ein Trauerspiel in fünf Aufzügen*[47], marking his debt to Bodmer and Gerstenberg, of whom he wished to offer a sort of prequel, trying to explain in his drama the origin of the quarrel between the Count and Bishop Ruggeri[48]. Casimir Ulrich Böhlendorff published his *Ugolino Gherardesca, ein Trauerspiel* in 1801[49], also little esteemed by Goethe. He astutely took up the story of Ugolino, weaving it with references to Schiller's *Wallenstein* and setting the initial scene in front of the Laocoon statue depicted by Lessing, thus succeeding in a work of juxtaposition that, like the previous ones, had no further response[50].

Theatrically speaking, the 18th century seems to closed under the sign of Ugolino, and this emerges from most of the texts of Dantean reception and dramaturgy used as sources thus far. And yet, in these very texts and above all in the *Encyclopaedia of Dante* (where he is just mentioned in passing and has not his own entry)[51], an author is missing from the list, an exceptional interpreter and forerunner of Romanticism, as well as the one who through his own life and his literary, poetic, dramatic and even philological production has been rightly compared to the great author of Weimar, acting as the key to the closure of a century of reception and experimentation with new arrangements to open up the 19th century, the century of the undisputed and overflowing spectacular reception of Dante.

2.2. The case of Ludwig Tieck

Tieck ist ein Talent von hoher Bedeutung, und es kann seine außerordentlichen Verdienste niemand besser erkennen als ich selber; allein wenn man ihn über ihn selbst erheben und mir gleichstellen will, so ist man im Irrtum. Ich kann dieses gerade heraussagen, denn was geht es mich an, ich habe mich nicht gemacht. Es wäre

[47] LUDWIG PHILIPP HAHN, *Der Aufruhr zu Pisa: Ein Trauerspiel in fünf Aufzügen*, Mainz, in der Verlage der heraugegebende Gesellschaft, 1790, available available at: https://digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/werkansicht?PPN=PPN747851433&PHYSID=PHYS_0003&DMDID= (last accessed 14/05/2025).
[48] See WERNER P. FRIEDERICH, *Dante's Fame Abroad*, 1350-1850, cit., p. 372.
[49] CASIMIR ULRICH BÖHLENDORFF, *Ugolino Gherardesca, ein Trauerspiel*, Dresden, bey heiurig Verlag, 1801.
[50] WERNER P. FRIEDERICH, *Dante's Fame Abroad*, *1350-1850,* cit., pp. 372-373.
[51] Brief mention about Tieck and his dramatic tale *Prinz Zerbino, oder Die Reise nach dem guten Geschmack* can only be traced in CARLO DEL BALZO, *Poesie di mille autori intorno a Dante Alighieri: raccolte ed ordinate cronologicamente con note storiche, bibliografiche e biografiche*, 15 voll., Roma, Forzani e C. Tipografi del Senato, 1889-1909, vol. VII, 1903, pp. 421-452; CESARE LEVI, *Dante "Dramatis Persona"*, in «Archivio Storico Italiano», vol. 79, n. 1 (301), 1921, pp. 123-166; MARIO FERRIGNI, *Dante e il teatro*, cit., p. 20; *Teatro*, a cura di Giovanni Antonucci, in ED.

ebenso, wenn ich mich mit Shakespeare vergleichen wollte, der sich auch nicht gemacht hat, und der doch ein Wesen höherer Art ist, zu dem ich hinaufblicke und das ich zu verehren habe[52].

Tieck is a talent of great importance, and no one can recognise his extraordinary merits better than I myself; but if one wants to elevate him above himself and put him on a par with me, one is mistaken. I can say this outright, for what is it to me, I have not made myself. It would be the same if I wanted to compare myself with Shakespeare, who also did not make himself, and yet is a being of a higher kind, to whom I look up and whom I have to revere.

With these words, Goethe describes Berlin-born Ludwig Tieck (1773-1853), a writer, playwright, translator, active and in contact with the most important German circles of the time, thus showing a certain sense of superiority towards the young author, nevertheless revealing the undoubted consideration he had for him.

Tieck's life was led under the banner of the most romantic artistry, as he was one of its most influential inspirers. Friend of influential personalities, traveller, adventurer, voracious reader and scholar of the world, there is no subject or point of view from which he cannot be examined[53]. As far as our study of Dante's reception is concerned, Tieck emerges as an innovator of German theatre; not only does he stage Dante alongside the other poets of the literary canon, but in his versatility he also constitutes a significant juncture for the reception of Alighieri in the theatrical world.

A friend of the Schlegel brothers and a close confidant and collaborator of Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder[54], Tieck collaborated with Friedrich Nicolai, was a friend of Novalis (a leading interpreter of the Jena circle) and frequented Goethe's house. After being received into the coterie of the patron and Dante philologist *Philaletes* (literary pseudonym of Prince John of Saxony), from 1825, in the latter part of his life, he was also asked to be *dramaturg* at the Dresden Theatre[55].

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[52] JOHANN PETER ECKERMANN, *Gespräche mit Goethe in den letzten Jahren seines Lebens*, ausgewählt und eingeleitet von Dr. Anselm Ruest, Berlin und Leipzig, Verlag von Hermann Seemann Nachfolger, 1907, p. 186, also available available at Projekt Gutemberg.de: https://www.projekt-gutenberg.org/eckerman/gesprche/gsp1036.html (last accessed 14/05/2025).

[53] See EVA HÖLTER, *Dante's long road to the German library: Literary reception from Early Romanticism until the late Nineteenth century*, in AIDA AUDEH, NICK HAVELY (editors), *Dante in the long Nineteenth century*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press Inc., 2012, pp. 225-247; CLAUDIA STOCKINGER, STEFAN SCHERER (herausgegeben von), *Ludwig Tieck. Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, Berlin/Boston, De Gruyter, 2011; ANTON REININGER, *Storia della letteratura tedesca fra l'Illuminismo e il Postmoderno 1700-2000*, cit., pp. 171-175; WALTER SCHMITZ (herausgegeben von), *Ludwig Tieck. Literaturprogramm und Lebensinszenierung im Kontext seiner Zeit*, Tübingen, Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1997; KLAUS GÜNZEL, *König der Romantik: das Leben des Dichters Ludwig Tieck in Briefen, Selbstzeugnissen und Berichten*, Tübingen, Wunderlich, 1981; LADISLAO MITTNER, *359-367 Tieck*, in LADISLAO MITTNER, *Storia della Letteratura tedesca. Dal Pietismo al Romanticismo (1700-1820)*, cit., pp. 751-769.

[54]See LADISLAO MITTNER, *Wackenroder e Tieck. La formazione della sensibilità romantica*, Venezia, Dr. Francesco Montuoro, 1944.

[55] See JOCHEN STROBEL, *Der Theaterkritiker*, in CLAUDIA STOCKINGER, STEFAN SCHERER (Herausgegeben von), *Ludwig Tieck. Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, cit., pp. 401-407; PETER REINKEMEIER, *Der Dramaturg*, in CLAUDIA STOCKINGER, STEFAN SCHERER (Herausgegeben von), *Ludwig Tieck. Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, cit., pp. 408-423.

During his early formative years between Berlin, Erlangen, Nuremberg and Jena, Tieck translated Shakespeare and Cervantes and enjoyed the presence of eminent friends and interlocutors who fed his insatiability for studying German and international authors. A fine connoisseur of English, Spanish, Italian and French, during the customary *Grand Tour* (he spent a year in Italy between 1805 and 1806), he absorbed artistic elements that were to crystallise vividly in his writings.

In the last decade of the 18th century, under the sign of Shakespeare translations, eager study and reflections on art developed with Wackenroder, at the Jena circle Tieck elaborated a trilogy of theatrical fairy tales in the manner of Carlo Gozzi[56]: *Der gestiefelte Kater* (1795-97), *Prinz Zerbino, oder Die Reise nach dem guten Geschmack* (1796-98) and *Die verkehrte Welt* (1798)[57]. Presented by Tieck as dramatic fairy tales that stage animals and unreal worlds to develop a critique of the customs of the time, they condense into the still relatively malleable container of the comedy a mixture of styles and practices that acknowledge both the marvellous and the grotesque:

Die Einführung des Wunderbaren in seine Schauspiele, war eines der Mittel, wodurch Gozzi seinen talentvolleren Vorgänger Goldoni vom Italienischen Theater zu verbannen suchte. Das Unregelmäßige seiner Stücke gab einigen reisenden Engländern Gelegenheit, ihm den Namen eines Italienischen Shakespeare zu geben. Diese beiden Dichter sind sich aber durchaus unähnlich, sowohl was die Darstellung der Charaktere und Leidenschaften, als auch die ganze Anlage ihrer Stücke betrifft. Gozzi hat keinen andern Plan, als zu unterhalten, und Lachen zu erregen; der größte Teil seiner Schauspiele ist nur Farce, er dramatisiert irgend ein orientalisches Märchen, besetzt einen Teil der Rollen mit komischen Personen, und fügt das Wunderbare hinzu, um seine Komposition noch bizarrer und grotesker zu machen. [...] In der Art, wie Gozzi das Wunderbare in seinen Stücken benutzt, zeigt es sich vorzüglich, wie wenig er neben Shakespeare genannt zu werden verdient, denn bei ihm ist es nur ein Spielwerk für die Augen des Zuschauers, der durch Verwandlungen oft genug überrascht wird[58].

The introduction of the miraculous into his plays was one of the means by which Gozzi sought to banish his more talented predecessor Goldoni from the Italian theatre. The irregularity of his plays gave some travelling Englishmen the opportunity to call him an Italian Shakespeare. But these two poets are quite dissimilar, both in the representation of characters and passions, and in the whole design of their plays. Gozzi has no other plan than to entertain and to excite laughter; the greater part of his plays is only farce, he dramatises some Oriental fairy tale, fills some of the parts with comic characters, and adds the marvellous to make his composition even more bizarre and grotesque. [...] The way Gozzi uses the marvellous in his plays shows excellently how little he deserves to be

[56] See ACHIM HÖLTER, *Apoll und die Göttin der Poesie. Urteilsinstanzen in der literarischen Tradition und ihre Aktualisierung bei Ludwig Tieck*, in WALTER SCHMITZ (herausgegeben von), *Ludwig Tieck. Literaturprogramm und Lebensinszenierung im Kontext seiner Zeit*, cit., pp. 17-41; LUDWIG TIECK, *Die Märchen aus dem Phantasus. Dramen*. Berücksichtigung der Erstdrucke, herausgeben sowie mit Nachwort und Anmerkungen versehen von Marianne Thalmann, VI voll., München, Winkler Verlag, 1964, vol. II, pp. 869-926.

[57] See LUDWIG TIECK, *Fiabe teatrali. Il gatto con gli stivali, Il mondo alla rovescia*, traduzione e cura di Enrico Bernard, Genova, Costa&Nolan, 1986. All Tieck's texts can be consulted available at: https://www.projekt-gutenberg.org/autoren/namen/tieck.html (last accessed 14/05/2025).

[58] LUDWIG TIECK, *Schriften in zwölf Bänden* (vol. 1 hg. von Achim Hölter, vol. 6 hg. von Manfred Frank, vol. 7 hg. von Ruprecht Wimmer, voll. 11 und 12 hg. von Uwe Schweikert), Frankfurt am Main, 1985–1995, vol. 1, p. 706; See STEFAN SCHERER, *Italienisches und dänisches Theater des 18. Jahrhunderts (Gozzi, Goldoni, Holberg)*, in CLAUDIA STOCKINGER, STEFAN SCHERER (Herausgegeben von), *Ludwig Tieck. Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, cit., pp. 247-260, especially pp. 247-258.

mentioned alongside Shakespeare, for with him it is only a play for the eyes of the spectator, who is often enough surprised by transformations.

What Tieck devised in these three plays proposes a dramaturgy that can hardly be defined as Romantic and can be compared to the pre-Romantic and anti-Classicist context of the time. The choice of the fantastic theme, developed for example in *Der gestiefelte Kater*, in which a theatre within a theatre is presented with the constant staging of the audience in a frenzy commenting on the play, is more easily understood in the 20th century where it can be compared to Pirandello's metatheatre[59].

Dante, along with Petrarch, Boccaccio, Ariosto, Tasso, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Swift and many other Europeans, is compared to the provinciality of German literary production, of which only Hans Sachs would be saved, and the contemporary Goethe, the only German capable of a universality applied to a strong structure. Ideally, this universality in multiplicity is the goal to which this play aims. The dimension within which the dramatic tale *Prinz Zerbino is* written, i.e. the ideal continuation of the *Kater*, is intended to give this sense of complex unity of a canon in which to recognise oneself by reaffirming one's own singular authorship. Written and presented in the Jena cenacle[60], and subsequently published in Berlin only after 1828, *Prinz* further develops the themes already addressed in *Kater*, creating what has been called an *Anti-Faust* of Goethe[61].

As Elisabeth Stopp and Antonie Magen[62] report, Dante was always present within Tieck's artistic journey, becoming an undercurrent in his writings that unconsciously exerted its influence whenever the German interfaced with other authors, who had taken even tangential inspiration from Dante and recalled his atmospheres.

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[59] See ENRICO BERNARD, *Pirandello e Tieck: Plagio o ispirazione?*, in «Italica», vol. 91, n. 2- Summer, 2014, pp. 243-254.

[60] See CLAUDIA STOCKINGER, *Der Jenaer Kreis und die frühromantische Theorie*, in CLAUDIA STOCKINGER, STEFAN SCHERER (Herausgegeben von), *Ludwig Tieck. Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, cit., pp. 50-68, reference at pp. 61-65.

[61] The scholar and editor of the Italian edition, Enrico Bernard, reports how, in those years in Jena, Tieck was listened to directly by Goethe and Novalis, and how, perhaps, it was precisely his decision to deepen and declare his own poetics in the *Prince* in its entirety that opened the path to Goethe for writing the second part of *Faust*, See LUDWIG TIECK, *Il Principe Zerbino. La seconda parte de Il gatto con gli stivali*, prima traduzione e cura di Enrico Bernard, Roma, E&A, 1988, pp. 7-10.

[62] See ELISABETH STOPP, *Ludwig Tieck: Unveröffentlichte Aufzeichnungen zu Purgatorio VI-XXXIII anläßhch der deutschen Übersetzung von Philalethes, ediert und erläutert*, in «Deutsches Dante-Jahrbuch», vol. 60, Issue 1, 1985, pp. 7-72; ELISABETH STOPP, *Ludwig Tieck and Dante*, in «Deutsches Dante-Jahrbuch», vol. 60, Issue 1, 1985, pp. 73-96; ANTONIE MAGEN, *Romanische Literatur des Mittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit (Calderón, Cervantes, Dante, Ariost, Tasso, Camões)*, in CLAUDIA STOCKINGER, STEFAN SCHERER (Herausgegeben von), *Ludwig Tieck. Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, cit., pp. 234-246.

In defining *Prinz Zerbino* a fairy tale, while also recalling Gozzi's *fantastico*[63], as well as opera in the manner of Mozart's *Singspiel*[64], Tieck fits into the polemic then present in Italy, France and Germany, on the use of masks and fixed types taken from the Commedia dell'Arte, on the need to switch to a dramaturgy that was an expression of the changed reality of the times, as Goldoni advocated, but which did not leave behind the fantastic, the unknown, what for the Germans is classified under the heading of *Ironie.* Therefore, the structure of *Prinz*'s *fabula* is interwoven with skilful mechanisms of *flash-backs*, reprisals of other texts, glimpses beyond the fourth wall, episodes of theatre within the theatre, as well as puppets that create character doubles and expressive surrealism.

In the play, the protagonist is Prince Zerbino, the son of the peasant who had become the New King in *Kater*, who wants to find a meaning to a reality that is now upside down by setting off on a journey in search of the ultimate meaning, "the good taste". As Achim Hölter points out, the motif of the *quest* is enriched in this singular play with important quotations, starting from the staging in translation of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, from the classical revival of Aristophanes' cutting irony, from Cervantes' *Viaje al Parnaso*, in which beauty is identified as the only utopian force capable of salvation by presenting it as a parade or unfolding of the Parnassus of the Poets. In *Prinz,* the labyrinth that is life, the *non-sense*, is regulated and appeased only in the vision of the Garden of Art, symbolised by the flowers with which the protagonist speaks, and by the subsequent procession of poets[65].

In Act V, after a classical intermezzo, a pastoral/bucolic scene in which a shepherd and a hermit speak to nature in the solitude of their existence, parodically recalling the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century climate that staged total confusion between the poet and the world, the preceptor Nestor finds himself in a forest and is asked if he wants to have access to the Garden of Poetry. From his encounter with the different flowers, all the sanctimoniousness of which the literary fanatic is a proponent emerges. Undaunted by the arrival of the tutelary Goddess of the place, Nestor is brought by the flowers, the very symbol of poetry, in front of the poets in

[63] See the chapter on Gozzi's reception in Romanticism in Giulietta Bazoli's doctoral thesis, GIULIETTA BAZOLI, *L'officina Gozziana: dal testo alla scena. Nuovi studi sulle fiabe*, Relatrice Prof.ssa Elena Randi, Scuola di Dottorato di Ricerca in Storia e Critica dei Beni Artistici, Musicali e dello Spettacolo, Indirizzo: Storia del Teatro e dello Spettacolo, Ciclo XXI, Università degli Studi di Padova, 2009, pp. 133-141, available available at: https://www.research.unipd.it/bitstream/11577/3426865/1/tesi_Giulietta_Bazoli.pdf.pdf (last accessed 14/05/2025).

[64]See CHRISTINE LUBKOLL, *Musik*, in CLAUDIA STOCKINGER, STEFAN SCHERER (Herausgegeben von), *Ludwig Tieck. Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, cit., pp. 272-283.

[65] ACHIM HÖLTER, *Apoll und die Göttin der Poesie. Urteilsinstanzen in der literarischen Tradition und ihre Aktualisierung bei Ludwig Tieck*, cit., pp. 17-41, reference at pp. 33-41.

the flesh, in which he neither believes nor practises, among whom Dante Alighieri himself stands out for the number of lines and indirect quotations in the text[66].

In his experience at the court of Philaletes[67], Tieck was the reader par excellence, the one who, with the sound of his own voice, was able to fully capture the meaning of the verse and convey to Schlegel and the Prince how to move in order to give it the most appropriate translation into German:

> His attitude to Dante is therefore of particular interest in the context of the Prince's translation and of his discussion circle where Tieck not only contributed his poetically informed views on individual renderings but also had the important role of reading aloud the proposed translation, and, where this was indicated, the Italian original. Reading as Tieck read - his one-man readings of plays, poetry and prose were famous throughout Europe - is not possible without true insight into the text: 'Der Dichter tat mehr als Vorlesen ... Indem er las, schaffte er dichterisch von neuem"[68].

Both as a playwright and in his activity as a scholar and man of letters, Tieck engages in a personal poetic tussle with Dante, supported by the mocking parody-satirical manner typical of the classical agon. As we have already seen in the Renaissance context of Raineri's *Pompa dei poeti amorosi,* a certain freedom is in vogue at this turn of the century, both in acting on Dante's material, playing with the evocative power that the Poet's name alone had on the audience, and in adapting this parody to the *medium* of theatre.

In his person, in his way of being a poet and understanding poetry, comes to be intrinsic that increasingly urgent disagreement between actor *Sprecher* and actor *Spieler*, i.e. an adherence to the presence of the voice, of melisma, of beautiful presence in the service of a melic virtuosity of singing, which for the most part found its counterpart in the revival of classical tragedy and in a more rigid approach of the actor, contrasted instead with the unbridled unconventionality of the actor who relies upon art and assiduous exercise on the training of the body to find the appropriate gesture and the most suggestive pantomimic performance.

What Artioli and Grazioli photograph of German theatre, taking up the theories of Bernhard Diebold, is the development of an acting and dramaturgical praxis that, for the most part, has to choose what to keep of the experience shared with the customs and masks of the Commedia dell'Arte (first and foremost the *Hanswurst*, the counterpart of the Harlequin who is always present in Tieck's comedies), and how to mix it with the new perspectives given by

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[66]See LUDWIG TIECK, *Il Principe Zerbino. La seconda parte de Il gatto con gli stivali*, cit., pp.135-147; the German text can be found at: https://www.projekt-gutenberg.org/tieck/zerbino/akt5.html (last accessed 14/05/2025).

[67] See PETER WOLFGANG WAENTIG, *Giovanni Di Sassonia – Il Re Dantista*, in GIUSEPPE OSTI (a cura di), *Atti della Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati*, a. 260, ser. VIII, vol. X, fasc. I, Rovereto, Accademia degli Agiati, 2010, pp. 311-335.

[68] ELISABETH STOPP, *Ludwig Tieck and Dante, cit.*, p 74; the reference in the quotation is from RUDOLF KÖPKE, *Ludwig Tieck. Erinnerungen aus dem Leben des Dichters*, 2 Teile, Leipzig, Brockhaus, 1855, vol. 2, p. 178.

the Characters, articulated in fixed and mixed roles, completely written by poets, expressing a new way in conceiving tragedies and comedies[69].

2.3. Dante champion of *Risorgimento*

If the end of the 18th century witnessed a tendency to adapt Dante's subject matter to the theatrical context in ferment, the 19th century opened and closed under the sign of Alighieri, giving rise to a veritable *Dantemania* that can be traced back to two matrices: the uprisings for independence that burst across Europe acclaiming the Poet as an icon and symbol of free thought and the stubborn struggle for liberation from oppression, decreeing his pervasive use at a popular level; the tensions for the codification and definition of genres in the artistic field, which are fully articulated in hierarchical companies, with their own different places of production and representation, ensure that Dante's revival finds more accomplished theatrical forms and determines the unfailing presence of his verses within the preparation and bravura test of the Great 19th-century actor.

At the historical and artistic juncture represented by the playwright and poet Tieck, we understand how the basic problem of 'saying Dante' lies in the progressive and necessary differentiation of the dramatic-dramaturgical part from the merely literary component of his reception.

The 19th-century *Lecturae Dantis,* whether dramatised or not, are perhaps the form that comes closest in means and methods to the contemporary way of reading Dante even today, regardless of the technological tools available to the actor. For the first time, therefore, Dante becomes an icon, the symbol of a new political awareness, detached from his main sphere of interest, literature, to move to the social and political dimension, transfigured in a secular and a-confessional key.

In Stefano Jossa's analysis of the political reception of Dante, based on the thought centred on the Hegelian *Aufhebug*, the equation that brings Dante as a bourgeois and secular hero to clash with his literary antithesis, the expression of an oppressive Catholic aristocracy, produces a new and enriching result, through Italian Risorgimento thought, a Dante emblem of

[69] See BERNHARD DIEBOLD, *Il sistema dei ruoli nel teatro tedesco del Settecento*, a cura di Umberto Artioli e Cristina Grazioli, Firenze, Le Lettere, 2001[trad. ita. *Das schauspielerische Rollenfach im deutschen Theaterbetrieb der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Leipzig, L. Voss, 1913].

the birth of a new type of literature (but also of all the arts) that wanted to be promoters of a united and modern Italy[70]. In a tension that blossomed fully with the Unification and the first celebrations of 1865[71], under the impetus of aligned and militant poets such as Ugo Foscolo, Vittorio Alfieri and later Giosuè Carducci, the Florentine poet was identified with the very idea of freedom, embodying in his figure of man and poet, with his actions and works, the unity to be pursued in the existing fragmentation of Italy still in the process of becoming a Nation: «Of Dante I will not tell you anything: he was the idol of scholars: he represents the great idea of our nationality, the thought, the genius, the glory, the language of Italy»[72].

The process of distancing the signifier from the signified of Dante as an icon is a typical product of the 19th century and of the fiery risings of the Risorgimento, which will not be confined to the peninsula but will spread with its exiled interpreters throughout Europe, and even overseas. The figure of the political *leader* Giuseppe Mazzini encapsulates in its own emblematic biography how the Italian *intelligentsia* had decided to mirror itself in Dante's bust and make him its champion, making use of his popularity and using the widespread familiarity of the more and less well-off classes with his tercets to support identification with the cause and its idealisation as a noble and lofty common heritage:

O Italiani! Studiate Dante; non su' commenti, non sulle glosse; ma nella storia del secolo in ch'egli visse, nella sua vita, nelle sue opere. – Ma badate! V'ha più che il verso nel suo poema; e per questo non vi fidate ai grammatici, e agli interpreti: essi sono come la gente che dissecca cadaveri; voi vedete le ossa, i muscoli, le vene che formavano il corpo; ma dov'è la scintilla che l'animò? […] Avete voi un'anima di fuoco? – Avete mai provato il sublime fremito, che destano le antiche memorie? – Avete mai abbracciato le tombe dei pochi grandi, che spesero per la patria vita e intelletto? – Avete versato mai una lacrima sulla bella contrada, che gli odii, i partiti, le dissensioni, e la prepotenza straniera ridussero al nulla? Se tali siete, studiate Dante; da quelle pagine profondamente energiche succhiate quello sdegno magnanimo, onde l'esule illustre nudriva l'anima; che l'ira contro i vizi e le corruttele è virtù. – Apprendete da lui, come si serva alla terra natìa, finchè l'oprare non è vietato, come si va nella sciagura. – La forza delle cose molto ci ha tolto; ma nessuno può torci i nostri grandi…[73].

[70] See STEFANO JOSSA, *The Myth of Dante and Italian National Identity*, in AIDA AUDEH, NICK HAVELY (editors), *Dante in the long Nineteenth century*, cit., pp. 30-50, reference at p. 44.

[71] See ANTONELLA BRAIDA, *Dante and the creation of the poeta vate in Nineteenth-century Italy*, in AIDA AUDEH, NICK HAVELY (editors), *Dante in the long Nineteenth century*, cit., pp. 51-69; ROSSELLA BONFATTI, *Dante e le Esposizioni universali*, in «Bollettino dantesco», n. 3 settembre, 2014, pp. 45-59; ROSSELLA BONFATTI, *Performing Dante or building the Nation? The Divine Comedy between dramaturgy of exile and public festivities*, in «Mediaevalia», vol. 38, 2017, pp. 37-67; ROSSELLA BONFATTI, *Sale dantesche attraverso (e oltre). I Centenari: lo spazio giubilare e lo spazio civico*, in LORENZO BALDACCHINI, PAOLA DEGNI, CLAUDIA GIULIANI (a cura di), *Il Refettorio Camaldolese di Classe. Da refettorio monastico a Sala Dantesca della Biblioteca Classense. Storia arte e restauri*, Bologna, Bononia University Press, 2019, pp. 25-44.

[72] «Di Dante non vi dico nulla: era l'idolo degli studiosi: egli rappresenta la grande idea della nostra nazionalità, egli il pensiero, l'ingegno, la gloria, la lingua d'Italia», LUIGI SETTEMBRINI, *Ricordanze della mia vita*, a cura di Adolfo Amodeo, 2 voll., Bari, Laterza, 1934, vol. 1, p. 41, in STEFANO JOSSA, *The Myth of Dante and Italian National Identity*, cit., p. 39. The English translation belongs to the text of Jossa.

[73] GIUSEPPE MAZZINI, *Scritti editi e inediti*. Edizione diretta dall'autore, 6 voll., Milano, G. Daelli, 1861-1863, vol. 2 (1862), pp. 39-40.

O Italians! Study Dante; not in commentaries, not in glosses; but in the history of the century in which he lived, in his life, in his works. - But beware! There is more than verse in his poem, and for this reason, do not trust grammarians and interpreters: they are like people who dig up corpses; you see the bones, the muscles, the veins that formed the body, but where is the spark that animated it? [...] Have you a soul of fire? - Have you ever felt the sublime thrill that ancient memories arouse? - Have you ever embraced the tombs of the few great men who spent life and intellect for their country? - Have you ever shed a tear over the beautiful district which hatred, parties, dissensions, and foreign arrogance have reduced to nothingness? If you are such person, study Dante; from those profoundly energetic pages suck that magnanimous indignation, from which the illustrious exile nourished his soul; as anger against vices and corruptions is virtue. - Learn from him, how one serves the native land, as long as one's work is not forbidden, how one goes in misfortune. - The force of things has taken much from us; but none can take our great ones away from us...

Mazzini hoped for a non-academic and non-formal approach, essentially aimed at giving voice and body to the man Dante and his all Italian genius. This task will be carried out by the artists, men and women, who chose to use Alighieri and his works as popular subjects to enter into dialogue with their audience. Nineteenth-century performers became a sounding board in Italy and abroad for the patriotic ideals that praised Italy, and for this very reason they shared with Mazzini and Dante himself the trait of exile:

For Italian political exiles of the 19th century, Dante's experience has been said to have "provided legitimacy for their own condition, dignity to their status, and consolation for their sense of defeat and alienation, thus boosting their patriotic beliefs with the example of a noble forerunner"[74].

The 19th century, more than any other, was the century in which theatre and its performative declinations staged the ideological war for independence and freedom of thought. Dante in his own right, inside and outside professional acting, then became the European warhorse for liberation from the oppressor, establishing his international fame and praxis for the stage.

2.4. Dante and the Improvisers

As Andrea Simone points out, the end of the 18th century saw the emergence of various contexts and private and public performative moments in which *performers* were specifically hired to 'sing Dante' in a perspective of cultural interchange that oscillated between amateurism and professionalism. As self-taught or coming from privileged families, many had cultivated their passion for reciting and learned by heart verse after to captivate the audience of the salon

[74] MICHAEL CAESAR, NICK HAVELY, *Politics and Performance: Gustavo Modena's dantate*, in AIDA AUDEH, NICK HAVELY (edited by), *Dante in the Long Nineteenth Century. Nationality, Identity, and Appropriation*, cit., pp. 111-140, quotation at p. 115; the internal reference is to MAURIZIO ISABELLA, *Exile and Nationalism: The Case of the Risorgimento*, in «European History Quarterly», vol. 36, n. 4, pp. 493–520, quotation at p. 498.

gathered for the occasion[75]. In this auroral moment, Dante's reception converges and becomes manifest in its various spectacular meanings.

Extemporaneous poetry, starting with the ballad-singers of the 14th-15th centuries, and especially within the circuit of popular culture that fed on Dante's sources even in the liturgical and preaching context, is characterised by presenting a double track, popular and cultured, going on to encourage more and more authors to create repertoires to be used when necessary for the poetry-hungry public.

The intense study activity before the performance and the challenge with the audience, unjustly considered to be the result of the performer's extemporary genius, become an integral part of schools and institutes of a public and private nature, forming the leading figures of orality, leaving ample room for the direct transmission of the art in the family of origin, as in any context of craftsmanship:

L'ammirazione per la poesia estemporanea nasce dal falso e triviale concetto, che confonde e identifica la geniale spontaneità con la cortezza del tempo impiegato per la produzione… Al volgo non entra in mente che la vera spontaneità e sincerità è di solito una lenta e faticosa acquisizione e gli sembra perfino che coloro, che a lungo meditano l'espressione dei loro affetti e rimutano e correggono meticolosamente le loro poesie e le loro lettere, siano poco sinceri. Ma la spontaneità vera è un ripiegarsi sopra se stessi per iscoprire il meglio di se stessi; laddove l'improvvisazione è la forma rettorica e teatrale della spontaneità[76].

Admiration for impromptu poetry stems from the false and trivial notion that confuses and identifies ingenious spontaneity with the shortness of the time taken to produce it ... It does not occur to the vulgar mind that true spontaneity and sincerity is usually a slow and laborious acquisition, and it even seems to them that those who ponder the expression of their affections for a long time and meticulously rehash and correct their poems and letters are insincere. But true spontaneity is folding over oneself to discover the best of oneself; as improvisation is the rhetorical and theatrical form of spontaneity.

The myth of false spontaneity and the gulf between written and oral poetry persisted until the 18th century, despite the fact that a large percentage of the literate and cultured had more and more opportunities to take pleasure in getting together as a group and witnessing poetry in Academies and private circles. Fundamental, therefore, are the salons, the parlours, the custom of meticulously constructing private spaces sometimes also open to the public, in

[75] See ANDREA SIMONE, *Dante "improvvisato" fra XVIII e XIX secolo: prassi esecutive e influenze culturali in evoluzione*, in «Dante e l'Arte», vol. 9, 2022, pp. 41-58, reference at pp. 42-43. In addition to his previously mentioned doctoral thesis, see: ANDREA SIMONE, *Performances dantesche del XIX secolo: tra poeti improvvisatori e Grandi Attori*, in MARIO CIMINI (a cura di), *L'altro Dante. Processi di attualizzazione della Commedia*, Atti del Seminario Internazionale di Studi online - Università "G. d'Annunzio" di Chieti-Pescara (24-25 novembre 2021), Lanciano, Carabba, 2022, pp. 75-90; ANDREA SIMONE, *Dante e la scena dell'esilio. Ricezione e performatività di un classico nel primo Ottocento inglese*, in «Carte di viaggio», 14, 2021, pp. 55-69; ANDREA SIMONE, *Dante in scena. Percorsi di una ricezione: dalla fine dell'Ancien Régime al Grande Attore*, in «Atti e Memorie dell'Accademia di Toscana di Scienze e Lettere "La Colombaria"», vol. LXXXIV, n.s. LXX, 2019, pp. 316-326.
[76] BENEDETTO CROCE, *Conversazioni critiche*, Bari, Laterza, 1924, p. 220, presente in BRUNO GENTILI, *Cultura dell'improvviso. Poesia orale colta nel Settecento italiano e poesia greca dell'età arcaica e classica*, in «Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica», vol. 6, 1980, pp. 17-59, pp. 18-19.

which to offer art as a pastime and recreation, but also as a coterie for promoting art itself and its interpreters[77]. In the salons and homes, Dante's poetry flows and becomes a cultured community of transmission of knowledge still strongly anchored to the credit of the person who offers its reading or invites its resumption, as the case of the Baroness Madame de Stäel, undisputed lady of the European salons, who during her trip to Italy and her frequentation of poets such as Vincenzo Monti and Giuseppe Parini, rediscovers Dante and gives an enthusiastic account of it in her *Corinne, ou l'Italie* (1807)[78].

Eighteenth-century extemporaneous poetry, or lyric improvisation, which develops and takes up classical themes proposed by myth, reworking and acquiring Renaissance and later sources, uses «a mnemonic repertoire that finds [...] in the metres and rhythms the indispensable support»[79]. It is a poetic production that is still very conservative in form, because it is distant from a fragmentary reality and linked to the various dialectal realisations in vogue, but extremely creative, in that it moves from a literary tradition that cannot yet be defined as 'Italian', and that will result in the pervasive 19th-century practice of 'saying Dante' in public.

In the early 19th century, this trend seemed to gain more momentum, becoming a phenomenon of not only Italian, but European scope, as from the salons, still very much present, there was a shift to theatres as places for poetic rehearsals, and, especially abroad, these gatherings became an occasion for Italians in exile to get together and promote ideas and reflections on the distant homeland: «the flowery improvising poets of his time, self-taught and unpretentious, instead made it one of their workhorses, as befitting their semi-popular culture, close to that of the storytellers»[80].

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[77] For a more in-depth examination of the premises and evolution of improvised poetry, making a reconnaissance of the most recent studies on the subject and a systematic presentation of new data that have emerged, see MARCO CAPRIOTTI, *L'improvvisazione poetica nell'Italia del Settecento. La storia e le forme*, Roma, Accademia dell'Arcadia, 2022. Also worth mentioning are the following sites, resulting from research groups on improvised poetry and its performers, one dedicated to *Women in Arcadia (1680-1800)* edited by Tatiana Crivelli *et al.* (https://www.arcadia.uzh.ch/ last accessed 14/05/2025) and the other more specifically dedicated to improvisation in the Romantic era *The Improvisation of Poetry, 1750-1850*, edited by Angela Esterhammer and John E. Kozub (romanticimprov.utoronto.ca), of which there is also an outcome in the volumes ANGELA ESTERHAMMER, *Romanticism and Improvisation, 1750-1850*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008 and ANGELA ESTERHAMMER, *Print and performance in the 1820s. Improvisation, Speculation, Identity, Cambridge*, Cambridge University Press, 2020.

[78] See FRANCO PIVA, *La (ri)scoperta di Dante in Francia tra secolo dei Lumi e primo Ottocento*, cit., p. 272; MADAME DE STAËL, *Corinne ou l'Italie*, Paris, Garnier Frères, Libraires Éditeurs, 1849, p. 31-36 (*Corinne au Capitole*).

[79] «un repertorio mnemonico che trova […] nei metri e nei ritmi l'indispensabile supporto», BRUNO GENTILI, *Cultura dell'improvviso. Poesia orale colta nel Settecento italiano e poesia greca dell'età arcaica e classica*, cit., p. 35.

[80] «i poeti improvvisatori fioriti del suo tempo, autodidatti e senza troppe pretese, ne fecero invece uno dei loro cavalli di battaglia, quanto mai confacente alla loro cultura semipopolare, vicina a quella dei cantastorie», ANDREA

Teresa Bandettini (1763-1837) constitutes a perfect example for this turn of the century and the subsequent multiplication in different forms of Dante's fortunes among improvisers and professional declamatory actors. Initiated by her family into the profession of dancer, it was her husband who encouraged her unbridled passion for literature and her future dazzling career as a verse improviser. Admired and known even by Napoleon, the literary dancer, who was often described as intent on reading Dante in the intervals of performances[81], became the Arcadian Amarilli Etrusca in 1794, going down in history for her extemporaneous re-elaborations and public interpretations of Dante's cantos, such as the following excerpt from the composition *L'Addio* (1795):

Il divin Dante Alighieri
Nella sede dannata,
ove son le peccata,
e l'orrido dolor,
vedeste che piagneva
sovra il crudo destino
del misero Ugolino
che il teschio lacerò![82]

The divine Dante Alighieri, in the cursed seat where are the sins and horrid sorrow, you saw him weeping over the cruel fate of the wretched Ugolino who the skull lacerated!

Bandettini became famous not only for her dazzling mnemonics, which allowed her to easily juxtapose verses, but also for her prowess in the field of Dante, since in her private and then public *performances* in theatres it was precisely the audience gathered to assist her that delighted in proposing requests for improvisations related to the Florentine poet to then acclaim her verses[83]. It is not surprising that the improviser takes her cue from the thirty-third canto of *Inferno*, so overused between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and adds to her prowess a certain flair for juggling Alighieri's poetry. To her assembled audience, she offers a

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BATTISTINI, *Il modello e le suggestioni letterarie: Dante nella tradizione della letteratura e nella cultura popolare*, cit., p. 468.

[81] See *Teresa Bandettini*, a cura di Arianna Scolari Sellerio, in DBI. See also: ALESSANDRA DI RICCO, *L'inutile e maraviglioso mestiere: poeti improvvisatori di fine Settecento*, Milano, Angeli, 1990, pp. 163-188; ANDREA BATTISTINI, *Il modello e le suggestioni letterarie: Dante nella tradizione della letteratura e nella cultura popolare*, cit., pp. 467-469; ANDREA BATTISTINI, *Dante a chiaroscuro. Requisitorie e apologie settecentesche*, cit., pp. 127-129; ANDREA SIMONE, *Dante "improvvisato" fra XVIII e XIX secolo: prassi esecutive e influenze culturali in evoluzione*, cit., pp. 43-45; ANDREA SIMONE, *Dante in scena. Percorsi di una ricezione: dalla fine dell'ancien régime al grande attore*, cit., pp. 108-128; TATIANA CRIVELLI, *Me fida alunna tua: Dante riletto dalle poetesse arcadiche*, in «Lectura Dantis Lupiensis» (2015, a cura di Valerio Marucci, Valter Leonardo Puccetti), vol. 4, 2016, pp. 43-72.

[82] Excerpt taken from the poetry *L'Addio* from *Gl'Improvvisi della Signora Teresa Bandettini cittadina di Lucca nominata Amarilli Etrusca recitati in patria l'anno 1795*, copied from Ms. 3055 of the Biblioteca statale di Lucca and inserted in ALESSANDRA DI RICCO, *L'inutile e maraviglioso mestiere: poeti improvvisatori di fine Settecento,* cit., pp. 247-248.

[83] See TATIANA CRIVELLI, *Me fida alunna tua: Dante riletto dalle poetesse arcadiche*, cit., pp. 52-66.

paraphrase and a sort of explanation of the reprised canto, recalling Dante «with words, and colours»[84], changing the running verse to octosyllables[85] and finally taking care for the Pisan *audience* present not to include the Poet's strong invectives addressed to the city:

Arrecò poi stupor maggiore che in ogni altro canto con l'Istoria del Conte Ugolino tratta da Dante in cui trasportò Amarilli questo più bel pezzo della Cantica di quel Divino Poeta in versi Ottonarj senza scostarsi dalla descrizione che esso ne dà, e facendo uso costantemente del Robusto Stile, e delle immagini di Esso. In questo Tema ebbe la delicatezza la gentile Amarilli di evitare tutto quel che di spiacente dice il Dante dei Pisani e non fece menzione del Monte «Perch'e Pisani veder Lucca non ponno». Nel modo stesso che nell'allocuzione di Virgilio schivò tutte quelle espressioni sonanti Libertà, e Patriottismo, che ai nostri giorni son sentimenti equivoci perché portati al fanatismo[86].

She then drew greater amazement than in any other canto with the Istoria del Conte Ugolino (History of Count Ugolino) taken from Dante, in which Amarilli conveyed this most beautiful piece of that Divine Poet's Canticle in Ottonarj verse without deviating from the description it gives and making constant use of the robust style and images of it. In this Theme, the kind Amarilli had the delicacy to avoid everything that Dante says about the Pisans and did not mention the Mount 'Perch'e Pisani veder Lucca non ponno'. In the same way as in Virgilio's speech, she avoided all those resounding expressions of Liberty and Patriotism, which are equivocal sentiments in our times because they are led to fanaticism.

Alongside the shining and often extolled star of Bandettini, writes Tatiana Crivelli, there are other improvisers belonging to Arcadia, perhaps less celebrated but numerous, who attest to a very wide female attendance of Dante's poetry. Often associated with bravura, freedom and charisma, Alighieri's lyric poetry is preferably intended for the training of men, but it also offers female interpreters a model with which to compare themselves and demonstrate their expertise in poetry. These women, who approach declamation and poetry, are often associated in the collective imagination with the poetess Sappho or the Muses, as is the case with Bandettini herself, painted by the painter Angelica Kauffmann in 1794, cloaking their production with an aura of mystery and grace transcending the human and supporting their growing stardom[87]:

l'improvvisazione rappresentava per una donna una strada alternativa, meno scandalosa, più accettabile, rispetto a una carriera nel mondo della poesia ufficiale, anche in quanto connotata dalla dimensione dell'effimero, dell'intrattenimento e del "decoro", sia nel senso di dimessa accettazione dei limiti sociali previsti, sia nel senso di "ornamento" destinato al palcoscenico salottiero, territorio riservato agli uomini[88].

improvisation represented for a woman an alternative, less scandalous, more acceptable, than a career in the world of official poetry, also insofar as connoted by the dimension of the ephemeral, of entertainment and of "decorum", both in the sense of a resigned acceptance of the expected social limits as well as in the sense of "ornament" destined for the salon stage, territory reserved for men.

[84] «con le parole, e i colori», ALESSANDRA DI RICCO, *L'inutile e maraviglioso mestiere: poeti improvvisatori di fine Settecento,* cit. p. 203.
[85] See MAURIZIO AGAMENNONE (a cura di), *Cantar Ottave. Per una storia culturale dell'intonazione cantata in ottava rima*, Lucca, Libreria Musicale Italiana, 2017.
[86] Ivi, p. 214.
[87] See ROSSELLA BONFATTI, *Frammenti del corpo-voce: le poetesse improvvisatrici fra Sette e Ottocento*, in «Enthymema», n. XXVIII, 2021, pp. 92-105.
[88] MARCO CAPRIOTTI, *L'improvvisazione poetica nell'Italia del Settecento. La storia e le forme*, cit., p. 178.

From the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, Dante then became the most significant author with whom to compare oneself, especially for female performers, to see one's name restored to the Olympus of greatness:

I componimenti delle "fide alunne" arcadiche ci raccontano dunque di un Dante che funge da inatteso riferimento per l'immaginario poetico in aree tradizionalmente considerate aliene dalla sua influenza: nel primo Settecento, nella forma lirica del sonetto, nella scrittura delle donne, nell'effimera arte della poesia estemporanea; e raccontano una storia originale di appropriazione del modello dantesco nell'Italia del XVIII secolo, alla quale tutto spetta, tranne che la qualifica di pseudopoesia[89].

The compositions of the Arcadian 'faithful students' therefore tell us of a Dante who serves as an unexpected reference for the poetic imagination in areas traditionally considered alien to his influence: in the early 18th century, in the lyrical form of the sonnet, in women's writing, in the ephemeral art of extemporary poetry; and they tell an original story of appropriation of Dante's model in 18th century Italy, to which everything but the qualification of pseudo-poetry belongs.

It is worth emphasising, however, that once again Dante's reception and fortune pass mainly through specific cantos and particular characters, who develop a specific secondary reception, of which Count Ugolino, between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, probably has the undisputed primacy:

During the first half of the nineteenth century, and even later, what one might almost call an Ugolino fever spread to France, Belgium, Denmark, Switzerland, and other countries. Verse translations of the story, plays on it, poems inspired by it, appear in various European languages. [...] Roughly speaking, it may be said that the European Ugolino craze coincides with the trend of that epoch towards liberalism[90].

The turn of the century is a flourishing of more or less well-known figures of improvisers who mix elitist practices with popular metres, rhythms, music and settings, exporting the pleasantness of accompanied poetry out of the simple salon and academic context. In this way they renew the practice of 'declaim poetry' and rework the tradition of the canon, enriching it with innovative elements.

In spite of his humble origins, Francesco Gianni (1750-1822) was an eclectic improviser and author of the Decalogue *Legislazione poetico-estemporanea*. To increase his skill, at Vincenzo Monti's suggestion, he familiarised himself with Dante's lyric poetry and reformed the repertoire of extemporaneous poetry, making it converse with current events contemporary to him[91]. Equally well known and significant is the experience as improviser of Rosa Taddei

[89] TATIANA CRIVELLI, *Me fida alunna tua: Dante riletto dalle poetesse arcadiche*, cit. p. 72.
[90] FRANCES A. YATES, *Transformations of Dante's Ugolino*, cit., p. 100.
[91] See FRANCESCO GIANNI, *Legislazione poetico-estemporanea,* in FRANCESCO GIANNI, *Leda e Giove Canto estemporaneo con metro e rime obbligate*, proposto in Siena il dì 12 agosto 1795, Firenze, Cambiagi, 1795, pp. 3-4; ADELE VITAGLIANO, *Storia della poesia estemporanea nella letteratura italiana dalle origini ai nostri giorni*, Roma, Ermanno Loescher, 1905, pp. 116-130; *Francesco Gianni*, a cura di Guido Gregorio Fagioli Vercellone, in DBI.

(1799-1869)[92], renamed among the Arcadi as Licori Partenopea, in whose *performances* stand out the reprise of Ugolino's Cantos, already frequented by Bandettini, enriched by a new lash of interpretations in octonaries of the fifth canto of *Inferno*[93]. Making the most of the acting skills she had learnt and practised with her family until the age of seventeen[94], Taddei went down in history for her ability to rework Dante's themes, promptly responding to the requests of the audience in the auditorium, who were enraptured by her dexterity in mixing Ugolino and Francesca da Rimini:

> Tutto è grande nell'opra sublime
> Che a ragione divina chiamasti,
> Ma Francesca, e Ugolin fia che basti
> L'alt' idea per serbarci di te[95].

All is great in the sublime work | Which with divine reason thou callest, | But Francesca, and Ugolin will suffice | the other idea to preserve us of thee.

One of Taddei's first admirers and discoverers, according to Luigi Rasi[96], was the equally multifaceted Bolognese improviser Filippo Pistrucci, a former painter and engraver (1782-1859)[97]. His career as an improviser developed on solid traditional training and a repertoire composed of classical, romantic and mythological-historical subjects; in the 1810s, he began to bring new and more mature political inspiration to the fore.

Like so many others, previously a wanderer in various Italian cities, Pistrucci found himself an exile in a foreign land as a Carbonaro and Mazzinian, constructing a parallelism with Dante in the figure of the *exul immeritus* that would become a recurring *leitmotif* among Italian artists, literati and thinkers who would find in Alighieri their own exceptional *alter ego.* In the early nineteenth century, London, like Paris and Brussels where exiles of different natures converged, found itself to be the favourite stage for a new and freer way of associating the figure of Dante the Poet with that of Dante the Politician, giving improvisers and actors the possibility of constructing a new character, capable of impersonating all the instances of

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[92] See *Rosa Taddei*, a cura di Francesca Romana Rietti, in DBI.
[93] See ROSA TADDEI, *Improvvisi*, fra gli Arcadi Licori Partenopea, Cantati in Torino nei Teatri D'Angennes e Sutera. Raccolti e scelti dallo stenografo Filippo Delpino, Torino, Giuseppe Pomba, 1830.
[94] See ANDREA SIMONE, *Dante in scena. Percorsi di una ricezione: dalla fine dell'ancien régime al grande attore,* cit., pp. 97-101.
[95] ROSA TADDEI, *Nuovi estemporanei*, *tra le pastorelle d'Arcadia Licori Partenopea raccolti senza l'ajuto di stenografia da G. B. Trabalza di Fuligno*, Spoleto, dalla Tipografia Bassoni con permesso, 1826, p. 54.
[96] See LUIGI RASI, *Taddei Rosa*, in LUIGI RASI, *I comici italiani. Biografia, bibliografia, iconografia*, 2 voll., Firenze, Fratelli Bocca, 1897, vol. II, pp. 564-567, reference at p 565.
[97] ANDREA SIMONE, *Dante in scena. Percorsi di una ricezione: dalla fine dell'ancien régime al grande attore,* cit., pp. 326-344; ROSSELLA BONFATTI, *Pedagogia dell'azione nella Scuola Madre Gratuita. Filippo Pistrucci maestro e improvvisatore*, in «Annali di storia dell'educazione», n. 26, 2019, pp. 41-60.

freedom and insurrection that were then so pressing: «It offered [...] the image of an Italy outside of Italy, recreated as a small clandestine homeland ("a miniature Italy" for a fledgling Italy), against the backdrop of the cosmopolitanism of the exiles»[98].

As Simone recalls, the improviser's skill is appreciated both home and abroad, where Dante's poem and its characters are a powerful attraction for a heterogeneous audience, made up not only of English intellectuals with an in-depth knowledge of the Italian literary canon, but also of many compatriots and exiles, an audience that pours into the theatre essentially to witness the performance of these Dantean subjects, articulated in a sort of 'dramaturgy of exile':[99]

gli episodi danteschi in primo piano, degli *italian refugees* a Londra tra la fine del '700 e i primi decenni dell''800. Il canto, la lettura, la declamazione, l'improvvisazione, l'inno, il verso tragico sono i principali canali comunicativi attraverso i quali i nostri compatrioti si esibirono, per un pubblico d'*élite*, in *morning concert*, *matinée musicale et declamatoire*, *vocal concert* e *improvisations* durante serate di beneficenza o ritrovi d'occasione molto spesso organizzati in loro favore dalle autorevoli personalità di un'attenta, filantropica e influente *gentry* e *nobil class* londinese[100].

Dante's episodes are in the foreground of Italian refugees in London in the late 18th and early 19th century. Singing, reading, declamation, improvisation, the hymn, and tragic verse are the main channels of communication through which our compatriots performed, for an elite audience, in morning concerts, *matinée musicale et declamatoire*, vocal concerts and improvisations during charity evenings or occasion gatherings very often organised in their favour by the authoritative personalities of an attentive, philanthropic and influential London gentry and nobil class.

In addition to his practice as an improviser, Pistrucci combined his artistic activity with teaching throughout his life. On the one hand, he gave his *lectures* and improvisations in prestigious venues, such as King's College and in Willi's Rooms, and on the other hand, he became a teacher and director (1841) of the Italian Free School founded by Mazzini at 5 Greville Street. In the latter seat, under the attentive gaze of Dante's bust, he imparted free tuition to those Italian boys called "white mice"[101], poor exploited orphan boys, a scourge of the London of the time that witnessed their circulation as pedlars with organ and casts, as the

[98]«Essa offriva […] l'immagine di un'Italia fuori d'Italia, ricreata come piccola patria clandestina ("un'Italia in miniatura" per un'Italia ventura), sullo sfondo di un cosmopolitismo degli esuli», ROSSELLA BONFATTI, *Pedagogia dell'azione nella Scuola Madre Gratuita. Filippo Pistrucci maestro e improvvisatore*, cit., p. 56.

[99] See ROSSELLA BONFATTI, *Drammaturgia dell'esilio. Il Risorgimento italiano fuori dai confini*, Ravenna, Giorgio Pozzi, 2015.

[100] ANDREA SIMONE, *Dante in scena. Percorsi di una ricezione: dalla fine dell'ancien régime al grande attore*, cit., p. 297.

[101] See ROSSELLA BONFATTI, *Pedagogia dell'azione nella Scuola Madre Gratuita. Filippo Pistrucci maestro e improvvisatore*, cit.; MICHELE FINELLI, *Il prezioso elemento. Giuseppe Mazzini e gli emigrati italiani nell'esperienza della Scuola Italiana di Londra*, Verucchio, Pazzini, 1999.

favourite seat of a traffic of people destined to the wicked exploitation and violence of their own scroungers [102]:

Pistrucci incarnò davvero l'immagine suggestiva di poeta del passato, quando, durante gli anni del suo esilio, per conquistare le scene inglesi, egli passò dalle improvvisazioni moderne alla declamazione dei classici, alla drammaturgia, al canto, alla versificazione per musica, senza per questo tralasciare mai l'insegnamento e le iniziative di beneficenza per gli *Italian refugees*[103].

Pistrucci truly embodied the evocative image of a poet from the past, when, during his years of exile, in order to conquer the English stage, he switched from modern improvisations to declamation of the classics, dramaturgy, singing, and versification for music, without ever neglecting teaching and charity work for the Italian refugees.

His figure thus offers itself as the *trait d'union* of a new practice, certainly not a singular one, of uniting pedagogy (the teaching of Italian and its culture) with the artistic practice of improvised poetry declamation, which in this international context evolves, acquiring a more hybrid character with entertainment, becoming more theatrical and grafting itself onto the practices of declamation accompanied by music and gestures that are increasingly sustained: «[Pistrucci] introduced to the British scene a true entertainment format, colourful and fashionable, capable of both satisfying the expectations of an Italianophile, cultured and refined audience, and promoting the political message of the Risorgimento through a ductile performance practice enhanced by successful "Italian" subjects»[104].

The improvisers Giuseppe Regaldi (1809-1883) and Giannina Milli (1825-1888) worked along the same lines. Deployed in the front line to support patriotic ideals with their art, Regaldi and Milli used their compositions woven on the literary canon and cloaked in the veil of poetry as manifestos during their tours to support political dissent and liberation from foreign oppressors.

In addition to representing an obligatory passage, the reference to Dante and his production constituted for Regaldi a necessity and a declaration of political activism as «the

[102] On the terrible implications of child trafficking from the Italian Apennines to capital cities such as Paris and London, read LUCIO SPONZA, *Italian Immigrants in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1988; JOHN E. ZUCCHI, *The Little slaves of the Harp. Italian child street musicians in Nineteenth-century Paris, London, and New York*, Montreal&Kingston/London/Buffalo, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992; MARY ANN SMART, The *Traffic in Voices: The Exchange Value of Italian Opera in Giuseppe Mazzini's London*, in ROGER PARKER, SUSAN RUTHERFORD (editors), *London Voices, 1820-1840: Vocal Performers, Practices, Histories*, Chicago, Chicago Press University, 2019, pp 35-50.

[103] See ANDREA SIMONE, *Dante "improvvisato" fra XVIII e XIX secolo: prassi esecutive e influenze culturali in evoluzione*, cit., p. 46.

[104] «[Pistrucci]introduce sulle scene britanniche un vero e proprio format di intrattenimento, variopinto e fashionable, in grado sia di soddisfare le attese di un uditorio italofilo, colto e raffinato, sia di promuovere il messaggio politico risorgimentale attraverso una prassi esecutiva duttile e valorizzata da soggetti "italiani" di successo», ivi. p. 48.

intertwining of Italian glories of the past and "ultra-liberal" topics of close relevance»[105] offered his *performances* that media resonance that served to support the common cause and establish the fame of the fine *dicitore*. Even in his later role as a university lecturer, Regaldi was able to extol the popular nature and unifying character of Dante's poetry[106].

Following in the footsteps of so many other poets and improvisers, Milli, a child-prodigy originally from Teramo, also made her charisma, her exceptional memory and ability to compose verse the cornerstone of her success, against all cultural and gender prejudices, securing the public's favour. An intelligent interpreter of the patriotic instances of the exiles, so common in Dante's repertoire, her art became a vehicle for freedom, both evoking the purity of soul of the characters and their tragic fates and creating a liturgical atmosphere «capable of creating intense involvement, both in public theatres and in private salons»[107]. After having already impersonated the hero-martyr Pier delle Vigne and other characters from the Poem, in 1863 at the Corradi Theatre in Teramo she impersonated the Poet Dante who, looking out from the Alps, in octaves called on the onlookers to recognise in Victor Emmanuel II the much hoped-for *veltro*[108]. After having participated in the 1865 Dante celebrations in Florence, where an enthusiastic Edmondo De Amicis sang her praises as a simple and ageless interpreter[109], she crowned her career with a position as director at the *Scuola Normale per le allieve e le maestre* in Rome (1872).

2.5. 19th-century stage adaptations for theatre and dance

As can be seen from the analysis of hybrid figures such as the improvisers, the 19th century presents itself as the century of a conscious and more mature revival of Dante's work. Unlike the latter, however, which followed the political/educational facets of a millenary practice, theatre and dance adopted innovative strategies and modes.

The protagonists of this new activity are, on the one hand, authors, who write plays along the lines of Dante's, adapting them to the new dramatic genres, and, on the other hand,

[105] «l'intreccio fra glorie italiane del passato e argomenti "ultraliberali" di strettissima attualità», ANDREA SIMONE, *Performances dantesche del XIX secolo: tra poeti improvvisatori e Grandi Attori*, cit., p. 78.
[106] Ivi, p. 80.
[107] «in grado di creare intenso coinvolgimento, sia nei teatri pubblici sia nei salotti privati», *Dante "improvvisato" fra XVIII e XIX secolo: prassi esecutive e influenze culturali in evoluzione*, cit., p. 52.
[108] Ivi, p. 53.
[109] EDMONDO DE AMICIS, *Nuovi ritratti letterari ed artistici,* Milano, Treves, 1908, p. 68.

actors and actresses, who, following practices of actorial excellence, sew the most congenial dress to their skills in order to meet the public's taste. Not infrequently, real traditions of writing or interpretative methods are developed that are then handed down from generation to generation, from masters to disciples.

The result is a variegated European panorama, which relentlessly rewrites and rethinks Dante, bringing him on stage as a character, investigating his personal vicissitudes more thoroughly, and reworking more closely those various figures and cantos of the *Comedy*, which the 17th century first, and the late 18th century later, had already made extremely popular with the public on the old continent.

Before delving into the territory of personal entrepreneurial skill applied to art, which marked the success and supremacy of certain actors' practices in dramatically reading Dante and bringing him to the stage, it is useful to dwell on the theatre industry, which from the last decades of the 18th century onwards openly declared its interest in Dante and largely took its cue from him to produce new theatre and dance productions.

Thanks to a series of compilation studies drawn up in the early 20th century that map the phenomenon, it is possible to take a detailed look at Italian theatre production. Among others, Carlo Del Balzo, Cesare Levi and Mario Ferrigni[110] list and comment on the necessity and relevance of adapting Dante to the dramatic genre, giving interesting examples with different opinions. Ferrigni, for example, writes:

> Dovremmo perciò respingere tutto il teatro di ispirazione dantesca? Musica e drammatica? Non credo. È mediocrissimo, nella massima parte; d'accordo. Ma il teatro, sola fra le arti, consente o almeno tollera – non esteticamente ma praticamente – la mediocrità; la utilizza; quando non crea nulla di sublime, può diffondere qualcosa di utile; quando non diletta, può istruire; quando non tocca le vette del Bello può deambulare con dignità nella plaga del Vero e del Buono[111].

> Should we therefore reject all theatre inspired by Dante? Music and drama? I do not think so. It is mediocre, for the most part; agreed. But theatre, alone among the arts, allows or at least tolerates - not aesthetically, but practically - mediocrity; it utilises it; when it does not create anything sublime, it can disseminate something useful; when it does not delight, it can instruct; when it does not touch the heights of the Beautiful, it can walk with dignity in the road of the True and the Good.

In the transition between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in particular, certain characters and episodes from the *Commedia* became so popular among theatre authors that they not only became the protagonists of *ad hoc* plays, but also included the figure of the poet Dante

[110] See CARLO DEL BALZO, *Poesie di mille autori intorno a Dante Alighieri, raccolte e ordinate cronologicamente con note storiche, bibliografiche e biografiche*, cit.; CARLO DEL BALZO, *Dante nel teatro*, in «Nuova Antologia. Rivista di Lettere, Scienze ed Arti», a. 38, fasc. 755, 1° giugno 1903, pp. 389-415; CESARE LEVI, *Dante "Dramatis Personae"*, cit.; MARIO FERRIGNI, *Dante e il teatro*, cit.
[111] MARIO FERRIGNI, *Dante e il teatro,* cit., p. 16.

himself on stage. While many tragedies are still being written about the well-established episode of Count Ugolino, the story is gradually being supplanted by the growing interest in the equally pathetic and highly erotic story of Paolo and Francesca (*If.* V). It seems only right to recall here the first poem dedicated to Francesca, produced by the improviser Francesco Gianni in 1795, in order to emphasise how the diversification between the historical character of the girl from the Romagna region and her fictional version of the unfortunate woman has been growing, of which the reception produces innumerable outcomes that have a firm and unchanging hold in the collective popular imagination: «The name Francesca da Rimini enters into current use starting from Gianni's poem to identify the *heroine* and not the lustful woman who, only after a few decades, will also assume the new denomination»[112].

Francesco Gianni operates a transfiguration of the figure remembered by Dante also on the basis of Foscolo's words on the historical Francesca d'Arminio[113], turning her from being damned for lust to a heroine of love, chaste and purified by sentiment. In the early 19th century, a new variant of the story was thus created, which warmed the hearts of the Romantic public and sanctioned its productivity also in Jacobin and later Risorgimento circles:

> Purezza e castità sono infatti le virtù indispensabili per aver successo, per entrare nel cuore non solo dei ribelli giacobini ma anche dei tanti buoni borghesi italiani certamente desiderosi di nuove libertà e di giustizia, ma rispettosi della morale e della religione dei padri. Che potranno così gioire e soffrire con la nuova eroina condividendone i sentimenti e le azioni senza sensi di colpa[114].

> Purity and chastity are in fact the indispensable virtues to succeed, to enter the hearts not only of the Jacobin rebels but also of the many good Italian bourgeois, certainly desirous of new freedoms and justice, but respectful of the morals and religion of their fathers. They will thus be able to rejoice and suffer with the new heroine, sharing her feelings and actions without guilt.

Although some attestations can already be found in an earlier period, in the early 19th century[115], the conjunction of the aforementioned planes takes place in the imperishable tragedy

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[112] «Il nome Francesca da Rimini entra nell'uso corrente a partire dal poemetto di Gianni per identificare l'*eroina* e non la lussuriosa che, solo dopo qualche decennio, assumerà anch'essa la nuova denominazione», FERRUCCIO FARINA, *Da Polenta a Rimini: il nome e la storia di Francesca negli antichi commentatori della Commedia*, in «Romagna Arte e Storia», n. 98, a. XXXIII, 2013, pp. 5-28; FERRUCCIO FARINA, *Desiderio di libertà. Francesca da Rimini tra poesia e teatro nel primo Risorgimento*, in «Rivista di Filologia e Letterature Ispaniche», n. XVI, 2013, pp. 266-287, reference at p. 268, footnote 3.

[113] «L'episodio di Francesca d'Arimino […] Quell'amore è narrato con arte attentissima a non lasciar pensare all'incesto. La colpa è purificata dall'ardore della passione, e la verecondia abbellisce la confessione della libidine; e in tutti que' versi la compassione pare l'unica Musa», UGO FOSCOLO, *Ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis e Discorso sul testo della Commedia di Dante*, Terza ed. stereotipata, Milano, Edoardo Sonzogno Editore, 1887, p. 308.

[114] FERRUCCIO FARINA, *Desiderio di libertà. Francesca da Rimini tra poesia e teatro nel primo Risorgimento,* cit., p. 271.

[115] «Risalente a solo un anno prima della tragedia di Pellico, troviamo l'opera del pisano Ulivo Bucchi (Nistri, Pisa 1814), seguita da quella del cesenate Edoardo Fabbri nel 1821 (ma in realtà composta nel 1801) per la quale il suo primo editore moderno (Fiorentino, Napoli, 1962), Mario Frezza si spinse sino a decretarne la assoluta centralità, affermando che "il teatro romantico nasce col Fabbri", e quella inedita di Francesco Saverio Salfi», FRANCESCO

Francesca da Rimini[116], written between 1813 and 1815 by Silvio Pellico and staged at the Teatro Re in Milan on 18 August 1815 by an incomparable actress, Carlotta Marchionni (1796-1861)[117]. Already famous for Alfieri's interpretations, her contribution to the various drafts and characterisations of the character of Francesca, which was expressly elaborated on her chords, was invaluable. From this artistic collaboration, in fact, Pellico came to overlap the tragic story of the lovers with the Risorgimento claim to identity, which from the script found its way into the stage directions suggested by the scenic/actor skill of Marchionni, who would be on stage together with her company.

The character of Francesca earned Marchionni an imperishable identification until the palm passed to what can be considered her most famous pupil, Adelaide Ristori, who played her in her world *tour*, decreeing her universal fortune. Pellico, on the other hand, will only pass the baton to D'Annunzio's 1901 tragedy of the same name, written once again to pay homage to an exceptional actress, Eleonora Duse[118].

SAVERIO MINERVINI, *Dante a teatro. Drammaturgia dantesca tra Ottocento e Novecento*, in «Sinestesieonline/Il Parlaggio», a. V (Numero Speciale "Tavolozza Teatrale All'italiana: Omaggio A Dario Fo"), novembre 2016, pp. 1-13, quotation at p. 6, with internal references to EDUARDO FABBRI, *Francesca da Rimini*, a cura di Mario Frezza, Fiorentino, Napoli 1962; CLARA BORRELLI, *Francesca da Rimini nella fruizione ottocentesca mediata da F. S. Salfi*, in MATTEO PALUMBO, VINCENZO PLACELLA (a cura di), *Miscellanea di Studi in onore di R. Sirri*, Napoli, Federico & Ardia, 1995, pp. 47-62. Further information on this can be found in PAOLO CASCIO*, Francesca da Rimini: un libretto di Felice Romani, tra Dante e Mazzini*, in «Dante e l'arte», n. 3, 2016, pp. 143-166, especially at pp. 148-157.

[116] See SILVIO PELLICO, *Francesca da Rimini. Tragedia*, Bologna, Tipografia Borghi, 1861; GIOVANNA FINOCCHIARO CHIMIRRI, *La Francesca da Rimini nella produzione teatrale del Pellico*, Catania, Cuecm, 1996. For the critical edition and an in-depth study of the manuscripts, see GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO, *Francesca da Rimini*, a cura di Donato Pirovano, Roma, Salerno Editrice, 2018; GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO, *Francesca da Rimini*, edizione critica a cura di Elena Maiolini, Gardone Riviera, Il Vittoriale degli Italiani, 2021; ALICE AVANZI, *Il testo della "Francesca da Rimini" di Silvio Pellico*, in «Prassi Ecdotiche della Modernità Letteraria», n. 2, 2017, pp. 223-253.

[117] See *Carlotta Marchionni*, a cura di Alessandra Favino, in DBI; STEFANO GERACI, *Carlotta Marchionni in effige*, in «Teatro e Storia», a. 25, n. XVIII, 2004, pp. 347-376. See also the entries: LUIGI RASI, *Carlotta Marchionni*, in LUIGI RASI, *I comici italiani. Biografia, bibliografia, iconografia*, 2 voll., Firenze, Bocca-Lumachi, vol. 2, 1905, pp. 132-141; *Carlotta Marchionni*, a cura di Silvio D'Amico, in *Enciclopedia italiana di scienze, lettere ed arti*, diretta da G. Treccani, I-XXXVI, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, XXIII, 1934, pp. 520-521; *Carlotta Marchionni*, a cura di Giuseppe Pastina, in *Enciclopedia dello Spettacolo*, fondata da Silvio D'Amico, 10 voll., Roma, Le Maschere, vol. 7 (1960), coll. 107-108.

[118] See FRANCESCA BUGLIANI-KNOX, *Galeotto fu il libro e chi lo scrisse: Nineteenth–Century English Translations, Interpretations and Reworkings of Dante's Paolo and Francesca*, in «Dante Studies», n. 115 with the Annual Report of the Dante Society, 1997, pp. 221-250; TEODOLINDA BAROLINI, *Dante and Francesca da Rimini: Realpolitik, Romance, Gender*, in «Speculum», vol. LXXV, 2000, pp. 1-29; FERRUCCIO FARINA, *Una Francesca ritrovata: Francesca da Rimini in una sconosciuta composizione poetica del 1795*, in «Romagna Arte e Storia», vol. 73, n. XXV, 2005, pp. 17-40; FERRUCCIO FARINA, *Francesca da Rimini, sulle tracce di un mito*, Rimini, Romagna Arte e Storia, 2006; ANTONELLA BRAIDA, *Dante's Inferno in the 1900s: From Drama to Film*, in ANTONELLA BRAIDA, LUISA CALÈ (editors), *Dante on View. The reception of Dante in the visual and performing arts*, Burlington, Ashgate, 2007, pp. 39-51; FERRUCCIO FARINA, *Da Polenta a Rimini: il nome e la storia di Francesca negli antichi commentatori della Commedia*, cit.; FRANCESCO SAVERIO MINERVINI, *Dante a teatro. Drammaturgia dantesca tra Ottocento e Novecento*, cit.; FEDERICA FORTUNATO, IRENE COMISSO (a cura di), *«Meravigliosamente un amor mi distringe». Intorno a Francesca da Rimini di Riccardo Zandonai*, Rovereto,

Francesca is undoubtedly the Dantesque character that most succeeded in making its way into 19th century thought, spreading like wildfire in European culture, so much so that it earned the author of the drama, Pellico, attempts to translate the drama into other languages (think of Lord Byron's incomplete one) and subsequent international adaptations in the various arts. From Pellico's historical tragedy to productions for opera in music[119], to adaptations by the future German Nobel Prize winner Paul Heyse (1850)[120], by the American poet, patriot and playwright George Henry Boker (1855)[121], gradually moving away from the Italian historical setting to a more international outlook. This leads to the two-act version *Francesca da Rimini. A Dramatic Fantasy* by academic Mario Rapisardi (1894), which sets its vision in the context of Hell («La Scena è nell'Inferno»), in which, in addition to the two lovers, it includes as characters «Lanciotto - Un Angelo. Coro d'angeli, di diavoli, di beati» (Choir of angels, devils, and the blessed), and stages Francesca's final choice, who is asked to choose whether to be taken by the angels into eternal bliss or remain in the eternal damnation of the infernal storm[122].

It is not insignificant, in the final analysis, to observe how the parable of Francesca's character has a long reach and is the subject not only of tragedies but also of parodic rewritings

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Edizioni Osiride, 2017. For precise references to D'Annunzio's work, see the first part of the second chapter of this text.

[119] See ARNALDO BONAVENTURA, *Musiche su parole di Dante*, in ARNALDO BONAVENTURA, *Dante e la musica*, cit., pp. 331-336; GUIDO SALVETTI, *Il mito di Dante nella musica della Nuova Italia (1861-1914)*, Milano, Guerini Studio, 1994. See the entire issue of «Dante e l'arte», v. 2 (*Dante e La Musica. Il Sinfonismo*, a cura della Direzione della Rivista), 2015, open access.

[120] The German playwright Paul Heyse wrote a *Francesca von Rimini: Tragödie in 5 Akten* to offer his own and different vision of the type of Dantean adaptation that should be written (he had seen the *Francesca* of Pellico in Italy, starring Adelaide Ristori, but it did not match his own taste), See FRANCESCO SAVERIO MINERVINI, *Dante a teatro. Drammaturgia dantesca tra Ottocento e Novecento*, cit., 8; PAUL HEYSE, *Francesca von Rimini: Tragödie in 5 Akten*, Berlin, Wilhelm Herz, 1850 [trad. ita. *Francesca da Rimini. Tragedia in cinque atti*, introduzione e traduzione di R. Bertozzi, LED, Milano 2003]. Indicative, in this regard, are the connections between Dante's poetics and the adaptations reported in his memoir of his journey to Italy, See ROBERTO BERTOZZI, *L'immagine dell'Italia nei diari e nell'autobiografia di Paul Heyse*, Firenze, Leo S. Olschki, 2011.

[121] The American playwright, poet and patriot George Henry Boker (1823-1890) is remembered for a *Francesca da Rimini*, a tragedy in five acts, which was staged at the Broadway Theatre in New York for nine evenings from 26 September 1855 and is considered one of his most successful theatrical productions, the result of his cultural apprenticeship in Europe and his work as a diplomat in Turkey, which enabled him to cultivate continuous dialogues with the old continent. See GEORGE HENRY BOKER, *Francesca da Rimini: a tragedy*, in GEORGE HENRY BOKER, *Plays and Poems*, 2 voll., Boston, Ticknor and Fields, 1856, vol. 1, pp. 349-474; RICHARD MOODY, *Francesca da Rimini. George Henry Boker*, in RICHARD MOODY (edited by), *Dramas from the American Theatre 1762-1909*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1966, pp. 423-473; PAUL C. SHERR, *George Henry Boker's Francesca Da Ramini, a Justification for the Literary Historian*, in «Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies», vol. 34, n. 4, oct. 1967, pp. 361-371; PAUL D. VOELKER, *George Henry Boker's "Francesca da Rimini": An Interpretation and Evaluation*, in «Educational Theatre Journal», vol. 24, n. 4, Dec. 1972, pp. 383-395; OLIVER H. EVANS, *Shakespearean Prototypes and the Failure of Boker's "Francesca da Rimini"*, in «Educational Theatre Journal», vol. 30, n. 2, May 1978, pp. 211-219.

[122] See MARIO RAPISARDI, *Francesca da Rimini. Fantasia drammatica*, in MARIO RAPISARDI, *Opere ordinate e corrette da esso*, 6 voll., Catania, Giannotta, 1894-1897, vol. 1, 1894, pp. 269-307. Also, *Mario Rapisardi*, a cura di Nunzio Dell'Erba, in DBI.

in the second half of the 19th century, highlighting even more the appropriation of Dante's episode by all the different cultural fabrics. In Piedmont, for example, Giovanni Toselli adapted the story of Francesca in Piedmontese for Federico Garelli and Tommaso Villa, who together staged *Cichina 'd Moncalè* (the Franceschina of Moncalieri) in Turin in March 1859, changing the protagonist's name, making her an ordinary girl, and setting the story in the nearby town of Moncalieri (TO), as he had previously done for *Margritin dle violette*, a parody of the equally famous drama by Alexandre Dumas fils, *La dame aux camélias*[123]: «In Turin, Piedmontese theatre established itself in the second half of the 19th century. As in Genoa, dialect masks originated in the sphere of figure theatre, moving later to the actual prose stages»[124].

In addition to the dialect version, and perhaps because of the company's need for greater circulation, Garelli also wrote *L'infelice sì, ma sventurata Francesca. Parodia tragica a vapore in un solo convoy* (datable to around 1867)[125]. In the drama, instead of the chivalrous novel of Dante's memory, in the seventh scene Paolo shows Francesca another text, which is supposed to spark the flame of love for him: it is the «book of the *Piedmontese cook*, which we used to read one day in your country»[126]. The high elements of chivalrous poetics and Dante's citation are in this case overturned according to the logic of the carnivalesque: during the one-act play, the low elements, expressed in the sexual theme of the couple, connect the sin of lust to that of gluttony, for example starting with the change of name of the gulled husband from Lanciotto to Panciotto. A copy of the play, attributed to one Romualdo Ghirlanda, was found in the

[123] See FEDERICO GARELLI, *Margritin dle violette: dramma in 3 atti: imitazione della nota produzione francese di A. Dumas La signora delle camelie*, in FEDERICO GARELLI, *Teatro comico in dialetto piemontese*, 10 voll., Torino, Stamperia Gazzetta del Popolo, 1873-1876, vol. 10, 1876, pp. XXX. Per approfondire la versione parodizzata del testo di Dumas, si consiglia SIMONA BRUNETTI, *Il palcoscenico del secondo Ottocento italiano: La signora delle camelie*, Padova, Esedra, 2004, pp. 129-133.

[124] «A Torino il teatro piemontese si afferma nella seconda metà dell'Ottocento. Come a Genova, le maschere dialettali nascono nell'ambito del teatro di figura, spostandosi in un momento successivo ai palcoscenici di prosa veri e propri», ARMANDO PETRINI, *Il Piemonte e i territori liguri*, in FRANCO PERRELLI (a cura di), *Storia europea del teatro italiano*, Roma, Carocci, 2016, pp. 33-50, quotation at p. 49 and also ARMANDO PETRINI, *L'attore italiano dall'Ottocento agli inizi del Novecento*, in FRANCO PERRELLI (a cura di), *Storia europea del teatro italiano*, Roma, Carocci, 2016, pp. 272-292, reference at p. 291. Indicative for understanding the nature of the operation is the description in GIUSEPPE DEABATE, *Il giubileo di "Monssù Travet"*, in «La Lettura, Rivista mensile del Corriere della Sera», a. XIII, aprile 1913, pp. 457-462. In relation to the use of infernal themes and its implications within the dramaturgy of figure theatre, see the entire issue «Skenè. Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies», vol. 8, n. 1 (*Puppet, Death, and the Devil: Presences of Afterlife in Puppet Theatre*, edited by Nicola Pasqualicchio), 2022.

[125] Initial documentary research shows that there are two prints at the foundation of the Collegio San Carlo and at the Vittorio Emanuele III National Library in Naples, one of which also bears annotations in pen and pencil by the *Suggeritore*, having the same text. Unfortunately, it is difficult at present to indicate a certain date and place when the play was first staged, but it can be argued that the printing and, thus, the creation of the work gravitated around the date of Dante's centenary in 1865 and was a direct consequence of it, See FEDERICO GARELLI, *L'infelice sì, ma sventurata Francesca: parodia tragica a vapore in un solo convoglio, scherzo in versi*, Milano, Bettoni, circa 1867.

[126] «libro della *cuoca piemontese*, che leggevamo un giorno al tuo paese», Ivi.

Ariostesca library of Ferrara, and a comparison of the printed texts reveals its full filiation from Garelli's "Italianised" text[127].

In the same period, as proof of how the theatre of Dante's subject matter was capable of capturing the most diverse scenic innovations, a similar parodic transposition of Francesca's story can also be found in Naples. In this case, the author is Antonio Petito, an actor and author linked to the mask of Pulcinella. Thanks to Simone's archival research at the Biblioteca teatrale del Burcardo in Rome and the Fondo Niccolini of the Historical Archives of the City of Florence, it was possible to identify «the announcement of a *Francesca da ridere, birbonata a vapore in 1 atto con musica*, performed in April 1886 at the Niccolini in Florence by the Compagnia Milanese Comico-Cantante directed by Edoardo Ferravilla; and the autograph script *Francesca da Rimini, Commedia Parodia in 2 acts*, by Antonio Petito»[128], which bears the date «20 gennaio 1897, Catania» at the bottom, later brought forward by scholars to 1866[129].

The dating is further corroborated by what Isabella Innamorati establishes regarding Petito's methods for conceiving and staging his parodies, namely «firstly, the search, during programming, for close timing between farce and reference model, in order to enhance the parodistic effect; secondly, the strategic approach to comedy, the result of calibrated planning», as Pellico's *Francesca* had been staged at the Teatro dei Fiorentini in Naples on 13 July 1860[130]. The metatheatrical matrix with which Petito's staging is handled once again recalls Shakespearian texts and Tieck's Dantean example, where a real division is created on stage between those who are part of the story of Francesca (the characters) and those who should be

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[127] See ROMUALDO GHIRLANDA, *Francesca ... da ridere! Tragi-commedia in un atto e 7 quadri, in versi*, Roma, Tipografia editrice romana, 1900.

[128] «l'annuncio di una *Francesca da ridere, birbonata a vapore in 1 atto con musica*, rappresentata nell'aprile del 1886 al Niccolini di Firenze dalla Compagnia Milanese Comico-Cantante diretta da Edoardo Ferravilla; e il copione autografo *Francesca da Rimini, Commedia Parodia in 2 atti*, di Antonio Petito», ANDREA SIMONE, *Dante in scena. Percorsi di una ricezione: dalla fine dell'ancien régime al grande attore,* cit., pp. 530-531, footnote 1549. For the texts, refer to the *Documentary Appendix*, pp. 614-631 and 632.

[129] See FRANCESCO COTTICELLI, *Di Dante, Pellico, Petito e Francesca da Rimini. Qualche divagazione*, in «Dante e l'arte», vol. 1, 2014, pp. 85-96. See also ANTONIO PETITO, *Francesca da Rimini, tragedia a vapore stravesata da Pulicenella cetrulo, da D. Asdrubale Barilotti, da Monzù Patrecutenella e da Schiattamuorton. Bizzarria comica scritta dal Signor Antonio Petito*, Napoli, Stabilimento Tipografico de' fratelli De Angelis, 1867; ANTONIO PETITO, *Petito-Pulcinella: una maschera della storia*, in FRANCO CARMELO GRECO (a cura di), *Pulcinella. Una maschera tra gli specchi*, Napoli, E.S.I., 1990, pp. 473-502; FRANCO CARMELO GRECO, *La scena illustrata. Teatro, pittura e città a Napoli nell'Ottocento*, Napoli, Tullio Pironti, 1995; ANNAMARIA SAPIENZA, *Parodia e metateatro. Francesca da Rimini di Antonio Petito*, in «Misure critiche, nuova serie», a. II, n. 1-2, 2003, pp. 45-59.

[130] «in primo luogo la ricerca, in sede di programmazione, di tempi ravvicinati tra farsa e modello di riferimento, allo scopo di potenziare l'effetto parodistico; in secondo luogo, l'impostazione strategica della comicità, frutto di una calibrata progettazione», ISABELLA INNAMORATI, *Napoli: un cosmo*, in FRANCO PERRELLI (a cura di), *Storia europea del teatro italiano*, Roma, Carocci, 2016, pp. 144-170, quotation at p. 168; ANNAMARIA SAPIENZA, *Parodia e metateatro. Francesca da Rimini di Antonio Petito*, cit., p. 47.

its direct beneficiaries, who are: «Un Inglese, Un Signore, Un Suggeritore, D. Asdrubale - artista comico, D.Cutenella, D. Schiattamorton, Pulcìnella, butta fuori del teatro». What emerges is a one-act play with a strong impact on the audience, characterised by the desire to make fun of the theatre itself and its actors using farce and metatheatre, through a skilful and rich writing for the stage, which is fully aware of its timing and measures. Moreover, for the new "buffo" of the Neapolitan scene, expressed by the character working with Pulcinella, namely D. Felice Sciosciammocca, played by rising star Eduardo Scarpetta and his future heir at the San Carlino, Petito decided to write *Inferno Purgatorio e Paradiso di D. Felice Sciosciammocca with Pulcinella negoziante di panni*, performed on 20 July 1872[131].

The second female figure in the *Commedia* to gain its own interest in the 19th century is Pia de Tolomei. Once again, hers is an episode full of patheticism, despite the fact that within the *Commedia*, Dante reserves her only a few tercets, in which her ethereal figure is tainted by the lethal gesture of her executioner husband (*Pg.* V, vv. 130-136). The fantasies that this female character always manages to inspire, despite the uncertainty as to her real historical identity, offer a different but equally illustrative example of female virtue and more widely shared ideals for a Risorgimento audience.

The printing in 1822 of the octave poem *La Pia, a romantic legend, preceded by a report on the Tuscan Maremma by* the Pistoiese Bartolomeo Sestini[132] soon allowed the general public to become passionate about the woman's sincere dignity, sowing the seeds for the drama *Pia de Tolomei* by Carlo Marenco[133], a playwright from Pavia who had previously worked on Dantean characters such as Ugolino, Buondelmonte and Corso Donati, decreeing its success at the Carignano in Turin in 1837[134]. The actress Adelaide Ristori was to be the outstanding interpreter of Pia and, more generally, of the women of the *Commedia* in the international artistic panorama. The next step was an operatic adaptation of the figure of Pia, composed by Gaetano Donizetti to a libretto by Salvadore Cammarano, staged at the Teatro Apollo in Venice on 18 February 1837[135].

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[131] ANTONIO PIZZO, *Scarpetta e Sciosciammocca: nascita di un buffo*, Roma, Bulzoni, 2009, p. 46. See also the entry *Eduardo Scarpetta*, a cura di Isabella Innamorati, in AMAtI (Archivio Multimediale degli Attori Italiani) online.

[132] See SERENA PAGANI (a cura di), *La Pia, leggenda romantica di Bartolomeo Sestini*, Firenze, Consiglio regionale della Toscana, 2015.

[133] See *Carlo Marenco*, a cura di Antonio Carrannante, in DBI, vol. 70, 2008, available at: https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/carlo-marenco_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/ (last accessed 14/05/2025).

[134] See CARLO MARENCO DA CEVA, *La Pia. Tragedia*, in CARLO MARENCO DA CEVA, *Tragedie*, 4 tomi, Torino, presso G.I. Reviglio e Figlio librai in Doragrossa, 1837-1844, tomo I, 1837 pp. 1-96.

[135] See GIULIO FERRONI, *Pia De' Tolomei. Sestini, Marenco, Niccheri*, in «Nuova corrente: rivista di letteratura e filosofia», n. 165 (Best seller dimenticati: l'Ottocento italiano), fasc. 1, 2020, pp. 23-36, reference at p. 26.

The life of Dante, his historical figure, with all the contradictions of the case, became an example and *alter ego* of the romantic, Risorgimento man fighting for freedom. Together with the character of Dante, who in the history of adaptations has not had any particular antecedents so far, the two figures of women he loved during his life and who later became legends are brought onto the stage: Beatrice Portinari and his wife Gemma Donati. Referring once again to the studies of Del Balzo and Levi, after Tieck's undertaking, the first attestations of theatrical representations of Dante's life can be traced back to the early 1820s.

From the point of view of content, the various vicissitudes staged are grafted onto poorly articulated recollections of facts from Dante's life, or by resorting to undue literary digressions, with more or less successful attempts to offer the audience a verisimilar chronology of his major political travails, first, and of the harsh exile later. In the 19th century, Dante's lives conceived in this way failed to provide a satisfactory picture of the man, attempting in a decidedly clumsy manner to create a bridge between the author and his work, resorting to fanciful territorial proximities between characters (such as Francesca and Guido da Polenta), and so on. The historical verisimilitude demanded by the Italian theatrical context of the time fails to prevail, and the majority of the plays that are popular with audiences once again focuses on the characters of the *Commedia.* The episodes at the time of the priory, the struggle to have Beatrice, his final decision for Gemma Donati, and even the death of the poet are elements of great interest, which, however, do not result in satisfactory compositions for the stage.

Reflecting on the motivation that led, in this precise historical moment, to this particular attention for Dante's life and its theatrical rewriting, one can perhaps find a precedent in the practice of "dramatising the life of the poet" operated by Carlo Goldoni in *Torquato Tasso* in 1755[136]. In this case, as Marzia Pieri[137] reports, it is the life of the poet of *Gerusalemme Liberata* that is staged, which has remained a constant source of inspiration for the improvisations of the Comici dell'Arte and European artists of the 17th and 18th centuries. This drama was followed

[136] See CARLO GOLDONI, *Il Torquato Tasso: commedia di cinque atti in versi*, rappresentata per la prima volta in Venezia il carnevale dell'anno 1755, Stamperia di G. di Domenico, e V. Manfredi, ed a spese di G.A. Venaccia, 1758.

[137] See MARZIA PIERI, *Dalla Commedia dell'Arte al sillabo: varie sorti di Torquato Mattatore*, in «Italianistica: Rivista di letteratura italiana», vol. 24, n. 2/3 (Torquato Tasso e la sua Fortuna), maggio/dicembre 1995, pp. 593-614. For further readings: ILARIA GALLINARO, *La non vera Clorinda. Tradizione teatrale e musicale della «Liberata» nei secoli XVII-XIX*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 1994; MARZIA PIERI, *Il «Pastor Fido» e i comici dell'Arte*, in «Biblioteca teatrale», n. 17, gennaio-marzo 1990, pp. 1-15; MARZIA PIERI, *Interpretazione teatrale del «Torrismondo»*, in «La Rassegna della Letteratura Italiana», vol. XC, 1986, pp. 397-413; MARZIA PIERI, *Tasso e l'opera*, Parma, Zara, 1985; FERDINANDO TAVIANI, *Bella d'Asia. Torquato Tasso, gli attori e l'immortalità*, Firenze, Sansoni, 1984.

by dramatisations by other European authors such as Goethe[138] and, later, by the Italian Francesco de Sanctis[139].

The temporal proximity of Goldoni's drama to Tieck's stage writing, and above all the proven influence that the playwright, together with Gozzi, had on the German writer, who staged precisely the Parnassus of the Poets with Dante, not to mention his proximity to Goethe and his poetic magisterium, seem at least to leave room for the hypothesis of a resumption of method and subject matter, at the moment not otherwise demonstrable.

Therefore, analogous to the creative path using the life of the poet Tasso as dramaturgical material, it is possible to think that at some point this dramatic *topos* of the "death of the poet/last hours of the poet's life" was also applied to the most fashionable poet of the 19th century, hence to the figure of Dante, and thus found the perfect subject for that century to stage his adventures and make him a romantic hero. If the poet Tasso serves as the forerunner to the appearance of poets on the scene, Dante will rightly be the true prince of this flourishing artistic production.

Del Balzo declares how, within this rich harvest of dramas, in his opinion, the only play worthy of special mention is *Dante Alighieri* by Pompeo di Campello staged in 1855, and printed in 1856[140]. Also singular is the drama devised by the Alfierian actor and declamation master Antonio Morrocchesi, who wrote a *Dante in Ravenna* full of *pathos* but shaky from the point of view of dramaturgical architecture, hypothetically evaluating his work as a *sequel* to Pellico's previous and successful *Francesca da Rimini*: an opera orchestrated to offer the main

[138] JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE, *Torquato Tasso: Ein schauspiel*, mit Zeichnungen von Paul Shumann, in Holz geschnitten von R. Brend'amonur, und einer Einleitung von G. Wendt, Berlin, G. Grote'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1885. For a more up-to-date edition, see also JOHANN W. GOETHE, *Torquato Tasso*, a cura di Eugenio Bernardi, traduzione di Cesare Lievi, Venezia, Marsilio, 2001.

[139] The illustrious man of letters and critic Francesco De Sanctis wrote his own drama about Tasso during his imprisonment (1850-1853). Starting with a fictitious *incipit* based on historical elements of the poet's life, the drama declares the discovery of a document containing disconcerting and unpublished revelations about Torquato Tasso. The author has the acumen to connect Dante's tercets, his invectives, with Tasso's affliction: for example, in Act I, second scene, Tasso's character laments his own miserable condition and quotes Dante's verses of Cacciaguida's political prophecy in the seventeenth canto of *Paradise* (vv. 58-59): «Oh Dante! Io ora comprendo i tuoi dolori. Ahi quanto sa di sale lo pane altrui!». Although the drama would never find the stage, writing multiple editions of the drama, to play Tasso De Sanctis pondered the possibility of having none other than Dante's actor par excellence, Gustavo Modena (whose figure will be discussed in greater detail below), see FRANCESCO DE SANCTIS, *La crisi del Romanticismo. Scritti del carcere e primi saggi critici*, in FRANCESCO DE SANCTIS, *Opere*, a cura di Carlo Musetta, XXIV voll., Torino, Einaudi, 1951-1993, vol. IV, 1972, p. 24.

[140] See POMPEO DI CAMPELLI, *Dante Alighieri. Dramma in cinque atti e in versi*, Torino, Tip. Nazionale di G. Biancardi, 1856; *Teatro*, a cura di Giovanni Antonucci, cit.; CARLO DEL BALZO, *Dante a teatro*, cit., pp. 405-407.

performer an opportunity to show off his dramatic qualities, and the audience that constant sting towards the new stage stunt to release the tension accumulated by the plot[141].

Emblematic, however, is the case of the five-act play *Dante a Verona*, written by Paolo Ferrari and sent to the 1862 drama competition at the Teatro Carignano in Turin. Although the play was deemed unsuitable for the stage, it was subsequently performed in Milan in 1875 by Luigi Bellotti-Bon's company, as his son Vincenzo reports: «it was performed in the Teatro Ciniselli [...], was liked, was repeated for six or seven evenings... and then returned to obscurity»[142]. As Simona Brunetti argues, Ferrari, from Modena, was at the time an author on whom «the hopes of a national response to the invading and prevailing power of French dramaturgy on the Italian stage converge», especially after winning the competition of the Society for the Encouragement and Improvement of Theatre Art in Florence in 1852 with *Goldoni e le sue sedici commedie nuove*[143]. In the historical comedy dedicated to Dante, the poet becomes an emblem of the troubled but salvific path that everyone is led to take by committing themselves to their political and moral integrity, being seen by Ferrari as «il vero Veltro del suo tempo»[144]. Unlike the other dramas, as Brunetti points out, it appears peculiar how Ferrari transposes and integrates within his own stage directions, and thus in the very conception of the character, the acting practice that came to be stabilised with the example of the *dantate* brought on stage by the actor Gustavo Modena.

In this rich harvest of dramaturgies, few but present are the women authors of dramas about Dante of which memory remains. They punctually bring the public's attention back to the poet's love vicissitudes, as in Angelica Bartolomei Palli's 1872 play *Dante a Verona,* in which Dante is harassed by the improper and unlikely love of a Beatrice, daughter of the Duke of Mantua[145], or in the later writing of the American Heloïse Durant Rose, who created «a script

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[141] See ANTONIO MORROCCHESI, *Dante in Ravenna. Tragedia*, Firenze, Leonardo Ciardetti, 1822; CESARE LEVI, *Dante "dramatis personae"*, cit., pp. 9-10; IGNAZIO CASTIGLIA, *Tra alfierismo e romanticismo: il Dante in Ravenna di Antonio Morrocchesi*, in «Sinestesieonline», n. 20, a. VI, giugno 2017, pp. 1-9.

[142] «recitato nel Teatro Ciniselli […] piacque, fu replicato per sei o sette sere… e poi ritornò nell'ombra», VITTORIO FERRARI, *Paolo Ferrari. La Vita- Il Teatro. Dal sommario autobiografico di lui e da altri documenti inediti*, Milano, Baldini, Castoldi & Co., 1899, p. 123.

[143] «confluiscono le speranze di una risposta nazionale all'invadente e imperante potere della drammaturgia francese sulla scena italiana», see SIMONA BRUNETTI, *Due esempi di drammatizzazione di Dante nell'Ottocento italiano*, in EDOARDO FERRARINI, PAOLO PELLEGRINI, SIMONE PREGNOLATO (a cura di), *Dante a Verona 2015-2021*, Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Verona (8-10 ottobre 2015), Ravenna, Longo, 2018, pp. 183-198.

[144] PAOLO FERRARI, *Dante a Verona. Commedia in cinque atti*, seconda edizione riveduta dall'autore, Milano, Sanvito, 1862, XIII.

[145] CESARE LEVI, *Dante "dramatis personae"*, cit. pp. 139-141; ALESSANDRA D'ALESSANDRO, *Vivere e rappresentare il Risorgimento. Storia di Angelica Palli Bartolomei, scrittrice e patriota dell'Ottocento*, Roma, Carocci, 2011; FRANCESCA FAVARO, *Il 'teatro dantesco' di Angelica Palli: Dante a Verona*, in «Rivista di Letteratura italiana», vol. XXXV, fasc. 2, 2017, pp. 67-82.

tailor-made for the interpretative talents of Ermete Novelli, who performed it with his company on 20 October 1908 at the Teatro Filarmonico in Verona»[146].

Dwelling on the singular role played by these women authors in the reception of Dante at the end of the 19th century, which has some final offshoots in the early 20th century, it is necessary to emphasise how these productions were conceived purely for a less affluent, interclass audience, thus succeeding in intercepting the taste and fashion of an era to a greater extent. In the English example of Emily Underdown (1863-1947), writing with the pseudonym of Norley Chester, one can trace creations intent on recounting, reworking and offering the complexity of Dante's work within educated literary circles, intended mainly for a female audience, but not only, in Victorian England[147]. Her many publications in periodicals and texts with a wide circulation in the United Kingdom, also resulted in a short play, again dedicated to the figure of Beatrice and her relationship with the man Dante.

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[146] «un copione su misura per le doti interpretative di Ermete Novelli, che lo rappresentò con la sua compagnia il 20 ottobre 1908 al Teatro Filarmonico di Verona», *Teatro*, a cura di Giovanni Antonucci, cit. Further documents show that the author had already written and published a first version of the drama in London in 1889: «Miss Heloïse Durant of this city has written a drama of which Dante is the hero, and published it in London through Kegan Paul, Trench &Co. Reviewing it *The Athenæum* says: For the rest it may be said that Miss Durant knows her Dante fairly well (though we hardly think that Dante could have been called 'a lion among the learned' at the time of the battle of Campaldino); that she is orthodox on the Beatrice question; that she thinks Gemma was probably better than later times have supposed; that she is a follower of the late Dean of Westminster in holding that Alfred founded Oxford University, and of the present Dean of Wells in believing that Dante visited it; and that she takes Mr. Browning rather than the Elizabethans as her model for dramatic composition. Many people will probably read her drama with pleasure», «The Critic», n. 288, 6 July 1889, p. 12 e «The Athenaeum», n. 3216, 15 June 1889, p. 755. References to both articles could be traced in *American Dante Bibliography*, «Annual Reports of the Dante Society», n. 15, 19 May 1896, pp. 75-143, reference at p. 122. Moreover, the drama would be one of the first to be translated into Italian and subsequently staged by Novelli in Verona.

[147] See PAGET JACKSON TOYNBEE, *Britain's Tribute to Dante in Literature and Art. A chronological record of 540 years (c. 1380-1920)*, London, Oxford University Press, 1921, p. 166; EMILIO TEZA, *Dantiana. Notarelle del socio effettivo*, in «Atti e memorie dell'Accademia di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti di Padova», vol. 19, 1903, pp. 131-153, reference at pp. 143-148. See also the picture of Dante's female reception in English circles proposed in ANNE LAURENCE, *Exploiting Dante: Dante and his women popularizers, 1850-1910*, in NICK HAVELY (edited by), *Dante in the Nineteenth Century: Reception, Canonicity, Popularization. Cultural Interactions: Studies in the Relationship between the Arts*, Oxford/Bern, Peter Lang, 2011, pp. 281-301. Further insights into the particular flourishing of writings and works dedicated to the Florentine poet by women in Victorian England can be found in ALISON MILBANK, *Dante and the Victorians*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1998; JULIA STRAUB, *A Victorian Muse: The Afterlife of Dante's Beatrice in Nineteenth-Century Literature*, London, Continuum, 2009; JULIA STRAUB, *Dante's Beatrice and Victorian Gender Ideology*, in AIDA AUDEH, NICK HAVELY (editors), *Dante in the Long Nineteenth Century: Nationality, Identity, and Appropriation,* cit., pp. 204-222; FEDERICA COLUZZI, *Dante beyond influence. Rethinking reception in Victorian literary culture*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2021; FEDERICA COLUZZI, JACOB BLAKESLEY (editors by), *The Afterlife of Dante's Vita Nova in the Anglophone World: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Translation and Reception History*, London/New York, Routledge, 2022. The scholar Coluzzi is continuing her research by constructing an open-access database in which data on these authors is beginning to be collected and interwoven. We, therefore, refer to the site for a more comprehensive overview, aware of its *work in progress:* https://mint-shrew.lnx.warwick.ac.uk/s/dante-s-female-public/page/homepage (last accessed 14/05/2025).

Elaborating on the dramaturgical material detectable in the *Vita Nova*, the author accompanies her drama with detailed stage notes, from the lighting apparatus, to the position of the performers in the various scenes, to the definition of the costumes and various director's notes, which she says should support the action of a group of amateur performers[148]. In the preface, Underdown thanks three particular individuals for their providential and knowledgeable help, who provide the initial elements for understanding the scope of this work: Miss Anne Elizabeth 'Elsie' Fogerty (1865-1945)[149], a playwright herself, speech therapist *ante litteram*, voice theorist, theatre pedagogue and founder of a girl' boarding school, Central School of Speech and Drama, dedicated to the initiation of elocution, the art of declamation and the theatrical stage, in the future the promoter of the Royal National Theatre; Miss Mary Isabel Bonus (1875-1941), an illustrator and close collaborator of Fogerty; Mr. Rutland Boughton (1878-1960), composer and author of some pieces specially written for the drama[150]. The amateur and scholastic production of dramas on Dante's subject matter, previously encountered with the Jesuit fathers, is, in this case, re-proposed in a secular key, reflecting a new-found decision on the part of some subjects to use Dante and rework him for a varied audience.

Moreover, a comparison between Underdown's printed drama and some of Fogerty's plays shows how a singular artistic *liaison* was created: the former's creativity and expertise in Dante mingles with the latter's scenic and dramaturgical wisdom, revealing a yet-to-be-discovered history between literature and theatre. The choice of the same publishing house for the publication of the dramas of both provides the yardstick for observing the Dantean drama of Underdown. Future research will have to investigate the extent to which the artistic union between the two was instrumental in perhaps bringing the drama onto the stage within the drama school circuit of Fogerty's students and how it affected amateur theatre.

The real freedom for the Italian scene lay in being able to play with the characters, rendered verisimilar by Dante himself in his own drafting of the *Commedia,* which, by referring to a substratum of medieval historical actuality coeval with, or close to, the poet, acted as legitimisers for the writing of the various 19th-century authors in search of the verisimilar and historical reconstruction. Elaborating themes and legends that were by now consolidated in the

[148] See EMILY UNDERDOWN (aka Norley Chester), *Dante and Beatrice, a play founded on incidents in Dante's Vita Nuova*, London, S. Sonnenschein & co., 1903.
[149] See the entry *Elsie Fogerty* (1865-1945), by Michael Sanderson, in «Oxford Dictionary of National Biography», DOI: 10.1093/ref:odnb/33187.
[150] For the English composer, see the works cited and many others within site dedicated to him and followed by the foundation named after him, Rutland Boughton Music Trust: https://rutlandboughtonmusictrust.org/compositions/ (last accessed 14/05/2025).

European collective imagination, also thanks to a powerful iconographic and artistic apparatus, 19th-century Italian authors worked on the instances that Dante's imagery could help support, such as fostering the emergence of a new ideological responsibility, the bursting forth of Italian identity and unitary instances, the creation of moral/social icons on which to focus the hopes of the new people for an Italy to be unified.

Outside the borders, on the other hand, interpretative work on the character Dante, who freed from the sacred aura that oppresses him in his homeland, is reworked by authors such as the Viennese Ignaz Kollmann (1775-1837), with his drama *Dante. Ein dramatisches Gedicht in fünf Aufzügen* in 1826[151], which followed his compatriot Joseph Alois Gleich's *Ugolino* of 1805[152]. Austrian artistic production applied to Dante saw its golden age in the 19th century, increasingly involving local artists, as was the case with the playwright Franz Grillparzer. The Dante proposed by Kollmann is imaginative, to say the least, with no less than eighteen characters, including Giotto, as well as Beatrice and Gemma, anachronistically fighting for the love of Alighieri. Although Del Balzo supports the structure of the first three acts of the drama, he then declares all the difficulty in following the excessively convoluted way that leads Beatrice to ask Dante to write the *Commedia* on her dying bed[153].

A further example of reworking on the theme of Dante is provided by the Polish writer Zygmunt Krasiński (1812-1859) who, inspired by the strong esoteric lesson within the reception of Dante at that time by, among others, the English poet and artist William Blake[154], and faced

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[151] See IGNAZ KOLLMANN, *Dante. Ein dramatisches Gedicht in fünf Aufzügen*, im Verlag den Johann Andreas Kienreich, Gratz, 1826; author profile in «OBL-Österreichisches Biographisches Lexikon»: http://www.biographien.ac.at/oebl/oebl_K/Kollmann_Ignaz_1775_1837.xml (last accessed 14/05/2025).

[152] See DANIEL DIMASSA, *Dante in Deutschland: An Itinerary of Romantic Myth*, cit., p. 22; *Austria*, a cura di Adolfo Cecilia e Georg Rabuse, in ED; GERTRUDE ADOLF-ALTENBERG, *The Figure of Dante in Germanic Countries,* cit., p. 522, footnote 20.

[153] See CARLO DEL BALZO, *Dante nel teatro,* cit., pp. 393-394.

[154] More discussion of esoteric poetry in relation to Dante's reception, especially at the turn of the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries, will be provided in the following 2.7, where the mature fruits operating in the artistic and theoretical production of many twentieth-century authors will be described. For the time being, we recall the importance of Dante's poetry in the English Blake citing his famous engravings and illustrations for the *Commedia* and his admiration for the Florentine: NICK HAVELY (edited by), *Dante's Modern Afterlife: Reception and Response from Blake to Heaney*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 1998; ANTONELLA BRAIDA, *Dante and the Romantics*, cit.; LUISA CALÈ, *Blake and the literary galleries*, in SARAH HAGGARTY, JON MEE (edited by), *Blake and Conflict*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, pp. 185-209; LUISA CALÈ, *Gendering the margins of Gray: William Blake, classical visual culture, and the alternative bodies of Ann Flaxman's book*, in HELEN P. BRUDER, TRISTANNE J. CONNOLLY (edited by), *Blake, Gender and Culture*, London, Pickering and Chatto, 2012, pp. 133-143; SEBASTIAN SCHÜTZE, MARIA ANTONIETTA TERZOLI, *William Blake. The drawings for Dante's Divine Comedy*, Köln, Taschen, 2014; SILVIA DE SANTIS, *Blake & Dante: A Study of William Blake's Illustrations of 'The Divine Comedy' including critical notes*, Rome, Gangemi, 2017; LUISA CALÈ, *The reception of Blake in Italy*, in MORTON PALEY, SIBYLLE ERLE (eds.) *The Reception of William Blake in Europe*, 2 voll, London, Bloomsbury, 2019, vol. 1, pp. 125-154; LUISA CALÈ, *Blake and Exhibitions, 2020*, in «Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly», vol. 55, issue 1, 2021; LUISA CALÈ, *Blake and exhibitions, 2022*, in «Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly», vol. 57, issue 1, 2023.

with the terrible plight of the Polish people oppressed by the Russian Empire, found himself composing a drama in 1835 that subverted the salvation-oriented structure of Dante's *Comedy*, presenting himself as its negative rewriting, *Nie-boska komedia* (The Non-Divine Comedy)[155].

Not to be outdone is the Dane Christian Knud Frederik Molbech (1821-1888), author of a very successful translation of The *Comedy* into Danish, written after a trip to Italy, and in the same years of the drama *Dante: tragisk drama* in 1852[156]. The son of the man of letters Christian Molbech, his literary and theatrical skills were by no means secondary, as he enjoyed a cosmopolitan following in his homeland and did not fail to translate into a fashionable drama with romantic overtones, all played out on the love between Dante and Beatrice, poetic contrasts and improbable pseudo-historical events[157].

At the apex of this dramatic production dedicated to the life of the poet and made even more intriguing by the aura of mystery that the author assumes abroad is the drama by Vincent Sardou and Emile Moreau, staged by the English company of actor Henry Irving in 1903 in

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[155] See ZYGMUNT KRASIŃSKI, *Nie-Boska komedia,* Paris, A. Pinard, 1835 [trad. ita. SYGMUNT KRASINSKI, *La non Divina Commedia*, tradotto dal polacco e note di M. Antonietta Kulczycka, con proemio del prof. R. Pollak. Roma, Anonima Romana Editoriale, 1926]; ZYGMUNT KRASIŃSKI, *La commedia non divina*, tradotta da G. Pampiglione, La Fenice, 2006; MAGDALENA BIZIOR-DOMBROWSKA (oprac.), *Nie-Boska komedia. Wydanie krytyczne pierwodruku z 1835 roku Zygmunt Krasiński*, Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika W Toruniu, 2015; MIECZYSLAW BRAHMER, *Dante in Polonia*, in VITTORE BRANCA, ETTORE CACCIA (a cura di), *Dante nel mondo. Raccolta di studi promossa dall'Associazione internazionale per gli studi di lingua e di letteratura italiana*, cit., pp. 357-364; JAN W. WOŚ, *Sulla fortuna di Dante in Polonia*, in «Aevum», a. 42, fasc. 3/4 (MAGGIO-AGOSTO), 1968, pp. 306-315; PIOTR SALWA, *Dante in Polonia: una presenza viva?*, in «Dante Studies», with the Annual Report of the Dante Society, n. 119, 2001, pp. 187-202; LUCA BERNARDINI, *Alla ricerca del sasso di Dante: la Firenze dantesca nelle memorie dei viaggiatori polacchi dell'Ottocento*, in EMILIA PERASSI, SIMONE FERRARI, ALICE NAGINI (a cura di), *Dante nelle letterature straniere. Dialoghi e percorsi*, Milano, Ledizioni, 2021, pp. 93-110; ANDREA DE CARLO, *La Divina Commedia nella Polonia del XIX secolo: le prime traduzioni polacche del poema dantesco a confronto*, in JOANNA SZYMANOWSKA, IZABELA NAPIÓRKOWSKA (a cura di), *Il Dante dei moderni. La Commedia dall'Ottocento a oggi*, Vicchio (FI), LoGisma, 2017, pp. 125-144; LUIGI MARINELLI, *Noster hic est Dantes. Su Dante e il dantismo in Polonia*, Lithos, 2022; CHIARA TARABORRELLI, *Un Dante polacco. Saggio sulla ricezione della figura e dell'opera dantesca in Polonia, dal Quattrocento a Miłosz*, Varsavia, Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2022. What is fascinating to notice is that even today this drama is staged and goes on to inflame revolutionary spirits, providing directors with a pretext for further criticism of the social condition of the Polish people. In this sense, read the recent essay on the staging, later censored, of the play for the National Stary Theatre in Krakow, directed by Olivier Frljić, in November 2013: AGNIESZKA JAKIMIAK, *Un-Divine Comedy. Remains and Self-Censorship as Work-In- Progress* in *Poland*, in ANNE ETIENNE, CHRIS MEGSON (edited by), *Theatre Censorship in Contemporary Europe. Silence and Protest*, Exeter, Exeter University Press, 2024, pp. 119-136.

[156] See ANDREA MEREGALLI, *Una commedia per voci danesi. Il romanzo Komedie I Firenze di Poul Ørum*, in EMILIA PERASSI, SIMONE FERRARI, ALICE NAGINI (a cura di), *Dante nelle letterature straniere. Dialoghi e percorsi*, cit., pp. 231-240, reference at p. 232; NICOLA MANGINI, *Sulla fortuna del teatro goldoniano nei secoli XVIII e XIX*, in «Annali di Italianistica», vol. 11 (edited by Franco Fido & Dino S. Cervigni), 1993, pp. 15-24, reference at p. 20; HANS SØRENSEN, *Dante in Danimarca*, in VITTORE BRANCA, ETTORE CACCIA (a cura di), *Dante nel mondo. Raccolta di studi promossa dall'Associazione Internazionale per gli Studi di Lingua e Letteratura Italian*a, cit., pp. 129-150, reference at pp. 145-149; CHRISTIAN KNUD FREDERIK MOLBECH, *Dante: tragisk drama*, Risbenhavn, I den Goldendalste Boghandling Thieles Bogtrytteri, 1852. For a more accurate profile of the author see: https://kalliope.org/da/bio/molbech (last accessed 14/05/2025) and *Christian Knud Frederik Molbech*, edited by Paolo Ravacchioli, in ED.

[157] See CARLO DEL BALZO, *Dante nel teatro, cit.,* pp. 399-400; CESARE LEVI, *Dante "dramatis personae"*, cit. 132-133.

London[158]. The text took root in an English environment extremely receptive to the figure of the Florentine poet. Giving rise to amorous vicissitudes, political intrigues, and duels to the death for salvation, the drama traces what was proposed on stage in the artful construction of the *climaxes* of the *pièce bien faite* and gives spectators rare pearls of historical misrepresentation and, not by chance, with its twelve *tableaux* is defined by Del Balzo as a «choreographic, dancing, pantomimic work»[159].

Before moving on to a brief examination of the real protagonists of this century and how grand actor training was necessary to sanction Dante's fortune in the form of *lecturae* - recitals and declamations, it will be useful to outline how it was in the 19th century that dance too began to appropriate authors such as Dante, thanks to full awareness and intention in its own expressive codes. Even on the danced side, the first performances adapting Dante's work were conceived on iconic figures from the *Comedy*, following what has already been described for spoken word theatre.

An early example dates back to the end of the 18th century, when in 1794 the ball *La morte di Ezzelino III. Tiranno di Padova* by Domenico Ballon with music by Vittorio Trento, a «ballo analogo»[160], a form of hybrid performance, typical of the transition between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with a debated value[161], which intersperses the choreographic composition with the opera in music, firmly linking music and dance in an essential dramaturgy:

> Il carattere tragico è certamente l'aspetto più importante del primo ballo, al quale si volgeva la maggiore attenzione degli autori per un continuo sviluppo della pantomimica. L'esaltazione delle virtù, la valorizzazione dei personaggi eroici e condanna degli empi, sono i primi elementi drammatici che il ballo, come le azioni tragiche letterarie o teatrali, deve esaltare sulla scena, anche a costo di suscitare violente emozioni nel pubblico[162].

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[158] See VICTORIEN SARDOU, EMILE MOREAU, *Dante. Drame en cinq actes dont un prologue et douze tableaux*, Représenté pour la première fois a Londres au théâtre Royal de Drury Lane, le 30 avril 1903, in EMILE MOREAU, *Théâtre en collaboration avec Victorien Sardou de l'Académie française*, Paris, Libraire Paul Ollendorff, 1912, pp. 237-346; VICTORIEN SARDOU, EMILE MOREAU, *Dante presented at Drury Lane Theatre by Henry Irving. Some explanatory notes by an Italian student*, London, George Bell and Sons, 1903. 1903 was an extremely prolific year, as it also saw the publication of the play produced by two Welsh scholars working concurrently on the translation of The *Comedy*, DANIEL REES, THOMAS GWYNN-JONES, *Dante and Beatrice*. A play, London, Carnarvon House, 1903, together with the drama by Emily Underdown, whose interesting publication has already been discussed before, See PAGET JACKSON TOYNBEE, *Britain's Tribute to Dante in Literature and Art. A chronological record of 540 years (c. 1380-1920)*, cit. pp. 166-167.

[159] «lavoro coreografico, danzante, pantomimico», CARLO DEL BALZO, *Dante in the Theatre,* cit., p. 412. See the contribution up to p. 415.

[160] MARIA NEVILLA MASSARO, *Il Ballo pantomimo al Teatro Nuovo di Padova (1751-1830)*, in «Acta Musicologica», vol. 57, fasc. 2 (Jul. - Dec.), 1985, pp. 215-275, reference on p. 220.

[161] See ANDREA CHEGAI, *Sul "ballo analogo" settecentesco: una drammaturgia di confine fra opera e azione coreutica*, in GIOVANNI MORELLI (a cura di), *Creature di Prometeo, Il ballo teatrale dal divertimento al dramma. Studi offerti ad Aurel M. Milloss*, Firenze, Olschki, 1996, pp. 139-175.

[162] MARIA NEVILLA MASSARO, *Il Ballo pantomimo al Teatro Nuovo di Padova (1751-1830),* cit. p. 220.

The tragic character is certainly the most important aspect of the first dance, to which the greatest attention of the authors was turned for a continuous development of pantomime. The exaltation of the virtues, the valorisation of heroic characters and the condemnation of the impious, are the first dramatic elements that the dance, like literary or theatrical tragic actions, must exalt on stage, even at the cost of arousing violent emotions in the audience.

In Padua, therefore, the story of the cruel and bloodthirsty tyrant is a source of interest, once again insisting on historical matter to create a link with the present and recalling Dante's verses from the twelfth canto of the *Inferno*, in which the damned man is found among the violent against one's neighbour, immersed in the Flegetonte indicated by the centaur Nessus and recognised by the black hair that the chroniclers reported as a denotative trait[163]. The character is quite successful as it is performed several times in the city of Pavia:

La morte di Ezzelino III (Domenico Ballon, 1794), *Ezzelino III ovvero Padova liberata* (Giovanni Monticini, 1800), […] *Ezzelino sotto le mura di Bassano* (Giacomo Serafini, 1814). Il Monticini dichiara nel primo caso di aver preso il soggetto dalla tragedia omonima, 'produzione già veduta in questa Nobile, e colta Città di recente', nell'altro ricorda che questo 'fatto Patrio [...] fu per la prima volta trattato da valente Compositore sulle Venete Scene e ne riportò un compiuto Trionfo' (riferendosi forse al precedente di D. Ballon)[164].

La morte di Ezzelino III (Domenico Ballon, 1794), Ezzelino III ovvero Padova liberata (Giovanni Monticini, 1800), [...] *Ezzelino sotto le mura di Bassano* (Giacomo Serafini, 1814). In the first case, Monticini declares that he took the subject from the tragedy of the same name, 'a production already seen in this noble and cultured city recently', while in the other he recalls that this 'patriotic event [...] was treated for the first time by a skilful composer on Venetian scenes and was a complete triumph' (perhaps referring to the preceding work by D. Ballon).

These dances, with a strong presence of pantomime, participated in the formation of a new gestural repertoire, in which the dance gradually acquired its own dramaturgical autonomy and coherence between the elements composing it, such as music, gesture, the occasional word and scenography. Therefore, a constant input of subjects and elements was necessary in order to be able to compete with the rest of the shows in vogue at the time, such as opera, for example, requiring, moreover, new musical compositions on which to create *ad hoc* choreographies that could then constitute a repeatable heritage for the composer, who could have been the ballet master or choreographer, who not infrequently was also the principal dancer in his own works[165].

With Antonio Landini's ballet in five acts, with music by Pietro Romani, staged in the autumn of 1817 in Florence[166], the line of historical subjects that must also refer to the criteria

[163] See *If.* XII and *Ezzelino III da Romano*, a cura di Giorgio Varanini, in ED.
[164] MARIA NEVILLA MASSARO, *Il Ballo pantomimo al Teatro Nuovo di Padova (1751-1830),* cit., p. 224. The file for each of the cited performances can be found in the same contribution on pp. 253, 266, 272.
[165] See ROSA CAFIERO, *Ballo teatrale e musica coreutica*, in FRANCESCO COTTICELLI, PAOLOGIOVANNI MAIONE (a cura di), *Storia della Musica e dello Spettacolo a Napoli. Il Settecento*, Napoli, Turchini, 2009, pp. 707-732.
[166] See ANTONIO LANDINI, *L'origine delle fazioni dei Guelfi e Ghibellini in Firenze ovvero la morte di Buondelmonte. Ballo tragico composto e diretto dal Sig. Antonio Landini da rappresentarsi nell'I. e R. teatro di via della Pergola nell'autunno del 1817*, Firenze, Nella stamperia Fantosini, 1817.

of verisimilitude is continued. In this case, the episode of Buondelmonte dei Buondelmonti, presented by Dante in the sixteenth canto of *Paradise,* is presented, illustrating the cause of town discord in Florence due to offences between families, namely that between the Amidei and Buondelmonti families, which was to receive much success both in the sphere of prose theatre (e.g. with Marenco in 1828) and ballet[167].

As Stefano Tomassini argues, «Dante's subject matter functions [...] as a constellation through which dance spreads wonder and dismay just as it promises happiness»[168]. At this time, dance, like theatre, reflects on issues of identity and nationality, mixing pleasantness and beauty of form with topics that can create an effective resonance with cogent social demands. In this case too, in addition to the arguments inherent in the spectacular subject matter, the criteria of verisimilitude, of compliance or otherwise with Aristotelian unities, the literary and historiographical sources are appropriately indicated for the conception and characterisation of the subject, interweaving their artistic work with the events narrated by the great authors of the international canon, as in the case of Machiavelli, Ariosto or Foscolo, not by chance authors closely linked to Dante's teaching.

Not dissimilar is the decision to stage in the autumn of 1827 in Padua a tragic ballet in five acts centred *on Mastino della Scala* by Filippo Bertini[169], which would later provide inspiration for the lyrical tragedy *Mastino I della Scala* composed with poetry by Giovanni Fontebasso and music by Antonio Buzzola[170]. Given the relevance of La Scala's commission for Dante's life and work, it was decided to stage the vicissitudes of the Veronese warlord, once again proposing a historical subject that is inextricably linked to the diametrically opposed reality of the time; a reality in which foreign oppression and the desire for liberation are stimulated by the memory of past glories. As already seen in the theatre, dance continues along this line by focusing on Dantean subjects with a strong exemplary or pathetic impact.

Even the choreographic sphere, for example, appropriates Dante's characters, as happens with *Francesca d'Arimino*, a tragic action in five acts choreographed by Giacomo Serafini in 1825, one of the first attestations in printed choreographic sources of the title of

[167] For an overview of subsequent *Buondelmonte* in dance, see: STEFANO TOMASSINI, *Sempre in piedi. Dante e la danza*, cit., 2023, pp. 53-55.
[168] «la materia dantesca funziona […] come costellazione attraverso la quale la danza diffonde meraviglia e sgomento proprio mentre promette la felicità», ivi, p. 52.
[169] See MARIA NEVILLA MASSAR *, Il Ballo pantomimo al Teatro Nuovo di Padova (1751-1830),* cit. p. 274.
[170] See ANTONIO BUZZOLA, GIOVANNI FONTEBASSO, *Mastino I dalla Scala*. Tragedia lirica in tre atti da rappresentarsi nel teatro S. Benedetto la primavera 1841, Venezia, Tipografia di Giuseppe Molinari, 1841, available available at: www.loc.gov/item/2010659093/ (last accessed 14/05/2025).

"choreographer"[171]. As Stefano Tomassini and Roberto Fratini-Serafide write, moreover, the fortunes of the figure of Francesca in dance received much attention in Italy[172].

On the international stage, this figure also spread thanks to the numerous artists, intellectuals and politicians who had fled Italy. Together with Francesca, characters such as Pia, Manfredi and Ugolino[173] also found space in the dance scenes, corroborating many of the research tracks analysed above and constituting with melodrama an unequivocal attestation of the constant interest in historical-Dantesque themes articulated in the various genres and dramaturgical styles[174].

In the choreographic sphere, too, the circle is ideally closed with a production specially designed for the 1865 Dante celebrations: *Dante. Azione coreografica fantastica in 5 atti e 12 quadri* by Gioacchino Coluzzi[175]. The chronicles report that the first scene was set in the piazza of Santa Maria Novella Vecchia in Florence, and the theatre designated for the performance was the city's Teatro Pagliano. Unfortunately, the ball did not make its debut on that occasion, but only later during the 1872 carnival and then in Naples in 1883[176].

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[171] See MARIA NEVILLA MASSARO, *Il Ballo pantomimo al Teatro Nuovo di Padova (1751-1830),* cit. p. 225. The listing of the tragic action can be found on p. 272.

[172] «*Francesca da Rimini* – Ballo eroico in cinque atti (1825), composta da Vincenzo Schira e coreografata da Giovanni Calzerani e Giulio Viganò; *Francesca da Rimini* – Azione tragica in cinque atti (1838), comp. Saverio Mercadante, cor. Giacomo Serafini (questa Francesca da Rimini riprendeva con variazioni una *Francesca d'Arimino* – Azione tragica in 5 Atti coreografata dallo stesso Serafini nel 1825); *Francesca da Rimini* – Opera ballo in quattro atti (1870), comp. Cesare Favetti, cor. ignoto; *Francesca da Rimini* – Azione tragico-mimica in cinque atti (1856), comp. Ferdinando Gualtieri, cor. Antonio Coppini»; «*Francesca da Rimini* – Ballo eroico in five acts (1825), composed by Vincenzo Schira and choreographed by Giovanni Calzerani and Giulio Viganò; *Francesca da Rimini* – Azione tragica in five acts (1838), comp. Saverio Mercadante, cor. Giacomo Serafini (this Francesca da Rimini resumed with variations a Francesca d'Arimino - Azione tragica in five acts choreographed by Serafini himself in 1825); *Francesca da Rimini* – Opera ballo in four acts (1870), comp. Cesare Favetti, chorus unknown; *Francesca da Rimini* – Azione tragico-mimica in five acts (1856), comp. Ferdinando Gualtieri, cor. Antonio Coppini», ROBERTO FRATINI, *Quasi una catabasi. La Divina Commedia nella danza degli ultimi 200 anni. Parte I*, in «Dante e l'arte», n. 4, 2017, pp. 137-184, quotation at p. 141. In addition to the aforementioned work by Tomassini, FRATINI's study is completed in ROBERTO FRATINI, *Quasi una catabasi. La Divina Commedia nella danza degli ultimi 200 anni. Parte II*, in «Dante e l'arte», n. 5, 2018, pp. 273-334.

[173] See PIETRO SARACCO, *Pia de' Tolomei*. Ballo tragico in cinque atti, Pisa, 1840; DOMENICO RONZANI, *Ugolino della Gherardesca.* Ballo tragico in sei atti, Torino, 1856; EGIDIO PRIORA, *Manfredi primo Re di Sicilia*, Modena, 1847; STEFANO TOMASSINI, *Sempre in piedi. Dante e la danza,* cit., 2023, pp. 54-57.

[174] See CESARE LEVI, *Dante "dramatis personae",* cit., pp. 161-165.

[175] See GIOACCHINO COLUZZI, *Dante. Azione coreografica fantastica in 5 atti e 12 quadri*. La musica del presente ballo venne espressamente scritta dal compianto Maestro A. Chiti, Napoli, Stabilimento Tipografico Prete, 1883.

[176] See STEFANO TOMASSINI, *Sempre in piedi. Dante e la danza,* cit., 2023, pp. 56-57. See also an in-depth study on the artist, choreographer and dancer, in ORNELLA DI TONDO, GLORIA GIORDANO, *Madamigella de La Vallière, "Appunti coreografici"manoscritti di Gioacchino Coluzzi (Firenze 1878). Presentazione e lettura del sistema cinegrafico e delle annotazioni coreiche di una fonte inedita del repertorio italiano ottocentesco. Prima parte: Profilo dell'autore, presentazione dell'opera e sue caratteristiche (Ornella Di Tondo), Seconda parte: Lettura del sistema coreografico (Gloria Giordano)*, in *Ricostruzione, ri-creazione e rivitalizzazione della danza*, Atti del 1° Convegno AIRDanza, Roma, 26-27 aprile 2003, Associazione Italiana per la Ricerca sulla Danza 2004, pp. 69-111; MARIA VENUSO, *Dante di Gioacchino Coluzzi al San Carlo di Napoli (1883): testi e paratesti per frammenti di storia nuova*, in ROBERTA ALBANO, GIANLUCA BOCCHINO, MARIA VENUSO (a cura di), *Dante performatico. Letture in diffrazione tra letteratura e Performing Arts*, Bologna, Massimiliano Piretti, 2023, pp. 25-44.

In a profusion of characters of various meanings, probably for the first time, Dante dances on stage and becomes a paladin of the new nation at the end of Act III: subsequently, pictures with a political/nationalist background are offered, staging Dante's political theories of the division of powers and supporting the figure of a king as a guarantor of the new-found peace, in the face of sectarianism and fratricidal rivalries. Finally, the personified united Italy is crowned by Dante and the ball closes with a final general picture[177].

In the course of the century, from group scenes, we move on to a consistent conception of virtuosic duets and encounters between performers that are articulated in pantomime and gestures, but also through the new techniques of classical dance, evidenced, in this case, by the enucleation of female lead roles and the intensification of dramas dedicated to them. A key role is played by the connection and constant dialogue with similar operas in music and theatre, staged concomitantly, as is the case, for example, with the character of *Pia* from Marenco/Saracco or that of *Francesca* from Calzerani/Galzerani-Pellico, which act as direct sources for the librettos that support the conception of the scenes for the choreographies.

The true interpreters and trendsetters in the 19th century were the great actors, who had the ability to bring Dante's life closer to his work by creating in their own person that psychological introspection and excavation that the codified acting of the theatre of the early and middle 19th century had failed to scratch.

2.6. The Great Actor and Dante

In the Italian context, the capocomico-lead structure of the ensembles and the hierarchical subdivision of the performers according to roles envisage a certain subjugation of the parts to a well-defined representational code, into which the character required by the drama to be performed is to be brought when necessary.

This method remained largely in use in Italy well after the end of the 19th century. In Europe, instead, it was gradually undermined, mostly for artistic reasons, as the role system rewarded and supported above all individuals whose presence on stage determined the success of a production, being a sufficient condition to support all the workers involved with the income collected.

[177] See GIOACCHINO COLUZZI, *Dante. Azione coreografica fantastica in 5 atti e 12 quadri*, cit., pp. 6-8.

Observing this phenomenon through the lens of Dante's plays, we understand how dramatic writing is conceived and written with the characteristics of the roles to which the actors refer in mind. As is amply demonstrated by Umberto Artioli in the volume he edited, the 19th century is the century in which this role system reached its maximum application and was subsequently called into question. The need to work more on the unity of the drama as a coherent artistic element, not subjugated to the spotlight on this or that single role, the new and increasingly sought-after theorisation of the actor's training, with a growing interest in his ability to range between roles (starting with the transition between comic and tragic), create the preconditions for a greater openness in the debate on the art of theatre, allowing the complex system of theatre figures to find their own recognised formal articulation, *first and foremost the* figure of the *dramaturg* and that still being formed of the future director[178].

By preserving the memory of Tieck's experience within the multifaceted German landscape that was leading to a new definition of theatre spaces, from the importance of rehearsals to the assignment of the part on the basis of the artist's abilities and not of the role in which he or she was 'hinged', one can see how the revolution of the system gradually took root among European companies on the basis of the proliferation of permanent theatres, the contractual frameworks of the artists and the shift of the dramaturgical axis from a performance elaborated on the basis of the performer's skill, to the need for a theatre that appropriated the complexity of the human condition on stage[179].

This magmatic ferment will take time to be absorbed by the Italian tradition, mainly due to the fragmentary nature of the structures, institutions and companies, which are incapable of giving unambiguous answers to demands that are increasingly present on the international scene.

An exceptional performer, a canonical figure in the reception of Dante, a master whose experience marked the way for future generations, Gustavo Modena (1803-1861) also went down in history for his *Dantate*, evenings dedicated to the declamation of Dante's cantos with an accompanying spectacularisation[180]. The actor encapsulates the revolutionary spirit of the

[178] See UMBERTO ARTIOLI (a cura di), *Il teatro dei ruoli in Europa*, Padova, Esedra, 2000.
[179] On this subject, see HANS DOERRY, *Il sistema dei ruoli nel teatro tedesco dell'Ottocento*, a cura di Cristina Grazioli, Firenze, Le Lettere, 2006 [trad. ita. *Das Rollenfach im deutschen Theaterbetrieb des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin, Selbstverlag der Gesellschaft für Theatergeschichte, 1926]; BERNHARD DIEBOLD, *Il sistema dei ruoli nel teatro tedesco del Settecento*, a cura di Umberto Artioli e Cristina Grazioli, Firenze, Le Lettere, 2001[trad. ita. *Das schauspielerische Rollenfach im deutschen Theaterbetrieb der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Leipzig, L. Voss, 1913].
[180] For a profile of Modena see: CLAUDIO MELDOLESI, *Profilo di Gustavo Modena. Teatro e rivoluzione democratica*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1971; ARMANDO PETRINI, *Gustavo Modena. Teatro, arte, politica*, Pisa, ETS, 2012;

19th century and the sapiential nature of the actor's craft, constituting with his example a new and more compelling way of bringing the *lecturae Dantis* to the stage.

It is no coincidence that in his life, political activism, grand-actor training and, *conditio sine qua non* for the conception of his *format*, the condition of an exile, spent mostly in London, a cultural hotbed and nerve centre for liberal international politics, are coexisting:

Quando incontrò Mazzini, negli anni '30, Gustavo era già celebre come attore alfieriano e di drammi storici, dove aveva trionfato in particolare nei panni di Paolo nella *Francesca da Rimini* di Pellico, un *best-seller* dantesco a fosche tinte che diventò il suo cavallo di battaglia, e che, nel 1829, era riuscito a recitare a Padova senza censure grazie all'intercessione della moglie del generale Nugent, pronunciando, nella scena quinta del primo atto, un'appassionata *Apostrofe all'Italia* acclamata dagli spettatori come una manifesta solidarietà all'autore incarcerato[181].

When he met Mazzini, in the 1830s, Gustavo was already famous as an actor of Alfieri and historical dramas, where he had triumphed in particular as Paolo in Pellico's *Francesca da Rimini*, a darkly coloured Dantean best-seller that became his warhorse, and which, in 1829, he had succeeded in performing it in Padua without censorship thanks to the intercession of General Nugent's wife, pronouncing, in scene five of the first act, an impassioned *Apostrofe all'Italia* acclaimed by the spectators as a manifest solidarity with the imprisoned author.

Inspired and supported by Mazzini, like many of the improvisers previously discussed, Modena invested his mature career in the need for theatre to play a social and educational role in promoting discussion and the mobilisation of people towards the most pressing community cause, in this case, the unification of Italy, which was also expressed in the publication of his *Teatro educatore* (1836)[182]. Exiled after having long embraced the Risorgimento cause, in London he found particularly favourable terrain for grafting his own spectacular offerings onto an incessant demand for 'high' cultural content that recognised the Italian literary and artistic tradition as having a primacy and interest that could not be ignored, thanks to particularly vehement admirers such as the scholar Thomas Carlyle[183].

ARMANDO PETRINI (a cura di), *Ripensare Gustavo Modena. Attore e capocomico, riformatore del teatro fra arte e politica*, Roma, Bonanno, 2012. Si rimanda inoltre ad alcuni interventi biografici a lui dedicati; See le voci: LUIGI RASI, *Modena Gustavo*, in LUIGI RASI, *I comici italiani. Biografia, bibliografia, iconografia*, 2 voll., Firenze, Bocca-Lumachi, vol. 2, 1905, pp. 132-141; *Modena Gustavo*, a cura di Silvio D'Amico, in Enciclopedia italiana di scienze, lettere ed arti, diretta da G. Treccani, I-XXXVI, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, XXIII, 1934, pp. 520-521; *Modena Gustavo*, a cura di G. Pastina e V. Pandolfi, in *Enciclopedia dello Spettacolo*, fondata da Silvio D'Amico, 10 voll., Roma, Le Maschere, vol. 7, 1960, coll. 671-675. Also indispensable for an all-round understanding of the artist and the man are the writings of TERENZIO GRANDI, *Gustavo Modena attore patriota*, Pisa, Nistri-Lischi, 1968; GUSTAVO MODENA, *Scritti e discorsi di Gustavo Modena (1831-1860)*, a cura di Terenzio Grandi, Roma, Istituto per la Storia del Risorgimento Italiano, 1957; GUSTAVO MODENA, *Epistolario di Gustavo Modena 1827-1861*, a cura di Terenzio Grandi, Roma, Vittoriano, 1955; LUIGI BONAZZI, *Gustavo Modena e l'arte sua*, Perugia, Morlacchi, 2011 (I ed., Perugia, Stabilimento tipo-litografico in San Severo, 1865).

[181] MARZIA PIERI, *La Commedia in palcoscenico. Appunti su una ricerca da fare*, in «Dante e l'arte», n. 1, 2014, pp. 67-84, quotation at p. 70.

[182] See GUSTAVO MODENA, *Scritti e discorsi di Gustavo Modena (1831-1860),* cit., pp. 244-254. See also LORENZO MANGO, *I dialoghi politici di Gustavo Modena*, in ARMANDO PETRINI, *Gustavo Modena. Teatro, arte, politica*, Pisa, ETS, 2012, pp. 85-100, reference p. 86.

[183] See *Thomas Carlyle,* edited by Eric R. Vincent, in ED. For an understanding of the author's thought, we recommend: THOMAS CARLYLE, SARAH ATWOOD, OWEN DUDLEY EDWARDS, CHRISTOPHER HARVIE,

This provides an opportunity to propose Dantesque-inspired *recitals*, a certain source of income, writes Marzia Pieri, linked to an ethical-political imperative:

Il suo Dante è una sorta di antidoto rispetto a tanto disincanto, sta dentro un'utopia e lo accompagna lungo una frequentazione scenica che si articola nel tempo in varie tappe: dall'idea di recitarlo, alla tentazione conseguente di identificarvisi in quanto esule fuggiasco, all'approdo conclusivo – paradossale ma non troppo – di "riscriverlo" attualizzato in forma di *Commedione* satirico sul moderno inferno italiano del regime sabaudo[184].

His Dante is a sort of antidote to so much disenchantment, it lies within a utopia and accompanies him along a scenic frequentation that is articulated over time in various stages: from the idea of reciting it, to the consequent temptation of identifying with it as a fugitive exile, to the final landing place - paradoxical but not too much - of 'rewriting' it in the form of a satirical *Commedione* on the modern Italian hell of the Savoy regime.

While many studies in the literary sphere have dealt with the figure of Modena and his particular love for Dante[185], through the lens of theatrical studies it is possible to construct an exemplary picture of the artist. As Claudio Meldolesi first recalls, and Armando Petrini in more recent times[186], experimentation in the field of acting was also enriched by comparison with more innovative and modern theatrical realities, especially the English and French, which provided the artist with a space to adapt new modes of expression, far from the Italian model from which he wanted to distance himself.

Modena thus comes into contact with a spectacular system in ferment, which changes the actor's training methods and his modes of expression on stage, opening up to a praxis that

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TERENCE JAMES REED, BEVERLY TAYLOR, *On Heroes, Hero Worship, and the Heroic in History*, edited by David R. Sorensen and Brent E. Kinser, Yale University Press, 2013 [THOMAS CARLYLE, *On Heroes, Hero-worship and the Heroic in History*, edited with notes and introduction by Mrs. Annie Russell Marble, London, Macmillan, 1897]; THOMAS CARLYLE, *The Hero as Poet. Dante, Shakspeare* (12 May 1840), in THOMAS CARLYLE, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, & the Heroic in History*, London, James Fraser, 1841 [trad. it. *Dante e Shakespeare*, prima versione italiana del Prof. Cino Chiarini, Firenze, Sansoni, 1896]; DAVID MASSON, *Carlyle, Personally and in His Writings: Two Edinburgh Lectures*, London, Macmillan, 1885; ERIK REDLING, *Of Heroes and Mockingbirds: Transatlantic Translations and the Struggle between 'High' and 'Low' Cultures in Nineteenth-Century America*, in ERIK REDLING (edited by), *Traveling Traditions: Nineteenth-Century Cultural Concepts and Transatlantic Intellectual Networks*, cit., pp. 63-78. See also: MICHAEL CAESAR, NICK HAVELY, *Politics and Performance: Gustavo Modena's dantate*, cit., p. 122; IRENE CHIRICO, *Il Dantismo di Gustavo Modena per la nuova Italia*, in JOANNA SZYMANOWSKA, IZABELA NAPIÓRKOWSKA (a cura di), *Il Dante dei moderni. La Commedia dall'Ottocento a oggi*, cit., pp. 71-86, reference at p. 77; PAOLO PUPPA, *Gustavo Modena dramaturg e lettore di Dante*, in ARMANDO PETRINI (a cura di), *Ripensare Gustavo Modena. Attore e capocomico, riformatore del teatro fra arte e politica*, cit., pp. 179-193, reference at p. 190.

[184] MARZIA PIERI, *La Commedia in palcoscenico. Appunti su una ricerca da fare*, cit., p. 72. See also CLAUDIO MELDOLESI, *Profilo di Gustavo Modena. Teatro e rivoluzione democratica*, cit., pp. 101-110.

[185] In addition to the above-mentioned contributions by SIMONE, DEL BALZO, LEVI and FERRIGNI, see: RICHARD COOPER, *Dante on the Nineteenth-century Stage*, in ANTONELLA BRAIDA, LUISA CALÈ (edited by), *Dante on View. The Reception of Dante in the Visual and Performing Arts*, USA-England, Ashgate, 2007, pp. 23-38, reference at pp. 24-25; MICHAEL CAESAR, NICK HAVELY, *Politics and Performance: Gustavo Modena's dantate*, cit.; IRENE CHIRICO, *Il Dantismo di Gustavo Modena per la nuova Italia*, cit.; BEATRICE CORRIGAN, *Dante and Italian Theater: A Study in Dramatic Fashions*, cit., pp. 102-104.

[186] See CLAUDIO MELDOLESI, *Ripensare Modena*, in CLAUDIO MELDOLESI, *Pensare l'attore*, a cura di Laura Mariani, Mirella Schino, Ferdinando Taviani, Roma, Bulzoni, 2013, pp. 105-117; ARMANDO PETRINI, *Gustavo Modena. Teatro, arte, politica*, cit.

is more open to the new, exemplified in a realistic-grotesque acting, accompanied by a naturalness on stage that is the result of meticulous excavation and preparatory study[187]. Distancing himself from the now stereotyped 'pose', but traceable to the declamatory tradition of the theories proposed by Morrocchesi, the Venetian actor demands naturalness, he wants to turn his art towards an understanding of the reference text still in use at the time, but above all towards what can be most similar to everyday experience. In renouncing mannerist pronunciations of the verse, he aims at the search for a stage presence that once again makes the audience reflect and draws them closer to him[188]:

il pubblico non trova di fronte a sé soltanto un attore che recita, e neppure semplicemente il personaggio recitato. Riconosce piuttosto di avere davanti agli occhi Gustavo Modena, artefice del proprio teatro attraverso la costruzione di una unità artistica di attore e tipo[189].

the audience does not just find before them an actor acting, nor even simply the character being acted. Rather, they recognise that they have before their eyes Gustavo Modena, the creator of his own theatre through the construction of an artistic unity of actor and type.

Modena received this new input from the European cultural climate, above all by studying Shakespearian theatre, which he interpreted according to a personal entrepreneurship that found no followers except in his direct pupils, members of his Compagnia dei Giovani or of his later experiences as actor-manager[190]. Embodying the great actor not only as a performer, but also as a lively creator of a way of acting, always sustained by a patriotic ideal to which he would never renounce[191], he approached Dante with wisdom and awareness of the artistic act: he codified a new way of staging the highly successful Alighieri, not only starting from the assumption of approaching him, but succeeding in bringing him into the present.

With the complicity of the omnipresent icon of the Alighieri champion of political coherence (Dante, like Modena, is an exile so as not to deny his beliefs), an overlapping of figures generates the short circuit within which the actor operates in an artistic sense, leveraging a psychological excavation of the character that is still being theorised. Modena on stage

[187] See SANDRA PIETRINI, *La recitazione grottesca e l'eredità mancata di Gustavo Modena*, in ARMANDO PETRINI (a cura di), *Ripensare Gustavo Modena. Attore e capocomico, riformatore del teatro fra arte e politica*, cit., pp. 195-212; ARMANDO PETRINI, *Modena e il personaggio: "ispirazione", "contraffazione", "finzione"*, in ARMANDO PETRINI (a cura di), *Ripensare Gustavo Modena. Attore e capocomico, riformatore del teatro fra arte e politica*, cit., pp. 135-152; ARMANDO PETRINI, *Gustavo Modena. Teatro, arte, politica*, cit., pp. 75-146.
[188] See ARMANDO PETRINI, *Gustavo Modena. Teatro, arte, politica*, cit., pp. 147-164.
[189] ARMANDO PETRINI, *Modena e il personaggio: "ispirazione", "contraffazione", "finzione"*, cit., p. 147.
[190] See ARMANDO PETRINI, *Gustavo Modena. Teatro, arte, politica*, cit., pp. 201-271.
[191] See CLAUDIO MELDOLESI, *L'attore, le sue fonti e i suoi orizzonti*, in «Teatro e Storia», a. IV, n. 2 ottobre, 1989, pp. 199-214; ARMANDO PETRINI, *Gustavo Modena. Teatro, arte, politica*, cit., pp. 165-200.

assumes the pose of Dante proposed by the iconography prevailing up to that time (think of the Pre-Raphaelite Dante Gabriel Rossetti[192]): the gloomy face with the usual red cape.

As Maria Ida Biggi writes, Modena pays great attention to the set design, lighting, stage furnishings and costumes[193]. However, an innovative element is added to the usual imagery: the act of writing, which allows the audience to witness the incandescent creative moment of composition[194]. Within a bare setting, a copyist sometimes appears, or Dante's wife, interpreted by Modena's wife, Giulia Calame (even in the role of Beatrice or as the very allegory of poetry), Modena focuses attention on his own interpretation of the Poet, constantly recalling his own similarity to him in the experience of exile or in fervent political ideology. By inserting details such as a modern pen in place of the more verisimilar quill and maintaining a recognisability in Dante's dress, Modena does not hide behind the character but is present in his physicality as an actor, as Paolo Puppa recalls[195].

As Sonia Bellavia notes[196], Modena's artistic journey is connected to the changes that were already abundantly beginning to unhinge the role system, especially in the German area. The definition of a new stage space, the need to refer to a stronger realism that allows the organic whole of the stage coefficients to dialogue with each other in order to bring the spectacular event to a complete sense, unhinges the monolithic nature of the role and proposes a new way of doing theatre, which unfortunately will be on the losing side of the theatrical debate.

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[192] See *Dante Gabriele Rossetti*, a cura di Pompeo Giannantonio, in ED; DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI, *The Early Italian Poets. From Ciullo d'Alcamo to Dante Alighieri. 1100–1200–1300: In the Original Metres together with Dante's 'Vita Nuova'*, London and New York, George Routledge & Sons and E.P. Dutton & Co, 1861; JEAN-PIERRE BARRICELLI, *Dante in the Arts: A Survey*, in «Dante Studies», n. 114 (with the Annual Report of the Dante Society), 1996, pp. 79-93; FABIO CAMILLETTI, *I sospiri della santa: La donna e la malinconia nell'opera di Dante Gabriel Rossetti dalla Blessed Damozel a Bocca Baciata*, in «Contemporanea», n. 3, 2005, pp. 77-83; FABIO CAMILLETTI, *Beatrice nell'Inferno di Londra: Saggio su Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, Trento, La Finestra, 2005; FABIO CAMILLETTI, *Dante's Vita Nova and the Victorians: the Hidden Image Behind Rossetti's Giotto Painting the Portrait of Dante*, in ALESSANDRO VESCOVI, LUISA VILLA, PAUL VITA (editors), *The Victorians and Italy: Literature, Travel, Politics and Art*, Monza, Polimetrica, 2009, pp. 181-192; VERONICA PESCE, *Manus Animam Pinxit. La Vita Nuova e i quadri di Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, in «Dante e l'arte», n. 2, 2015, pp. 201-226; FABIO CAMILLETTI, *Portrait of Beatrice: Dante, D. G. Rossetti, and the Imaginary Lady (William and Katherine Devers Series in Dante and Medieval Italian*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 2019. An issue dedicated to Dante's fortunes between Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites is scheduled for publication in 2024 in the journal «Dante e l'arte».

[193] See MARIA IDA BIGGI, *«Far lavorare Sarte e Pittore». La scena e i costumi in Gustavo Modena*, in ARMANDO PETRINI (a cura di), *Ripensare Gustavo Modena. Attore e capocomico, riformatore del teatro fra arte e politica*, cit., pp. 55-70.

[194] See FRANCES TROLLOPE, *A visit to Italy,* 2 voll., London, Richard Bentley, 1842, vol. 1., pp. 328-330.

[195] See SIMONA BRUNETTI, *Due esempi di drammatisation di Dante nell'Ottocento italiano, cit.,* p. 187; PAOLO PUPPA, *Gustavo Modena dramaturg e lettore di Dante*, cit.

[196] See SONIA BELLAVIA, *Shakespeare, Teatro e Nazione: il pensiero europeo alle origini della riforma di Modena*, in ARMANDO PETRINI (a cura di), *Ripensare Gustavo Modena. Attore e capocomico, riformatore del teatro fra arte e politica*, cit., pp. 153-164.

From the perspective of Dante's reception in the theatrical environment, bringing Dante to the stage by moving away from a classicist style with a hieratic posture of tragedy means asking the audience to be a living and reflective presence during the *performance.* No longer, therefore, a simple set resounding of verses, but a new and overwhelming attention to the actor's attitude to make them reflect on the moral and ethical framework of which the *Commedia* and its *exempla* are bearers:

> Modena, it appears, knew how to exploit this combination of forces to perfection in his enactment of Dante brought back to life. His performances were so memorable because they not only engaged and pleased the ear and the eye, but because they also left a mark on the flesh, the tingling sensation of the skin which threatens, if only momentarily, the demarcation between the 'outside' and the 'inside' of the person who watches and listens[197].

Modena is perhaps one of the first actors to clash with the organic nature of the *Commedia*, attempting not to dwell only on the passages hitherto considered canonical and succeeding in this to create a renewed version of the *lectura Dantis*, that is, going so far as to offer his audience a commentary on the text that would make its similarities and repercussions on the life of each person evident[198].

In the exile that saw him far from his homeland from 1832 to 1839, Modena specialised in his own idea of the *Dantate*. What is conventionally marked as a cardinal date in his artistic production, namely the recitation of some passages from the *Commedia* following a *Grand Morning Concert* at London's Queen's Mary Theatre on 17 May 1839, is only one of the moments that make up the art of saying Dante according to Modena's style and *verve.*

As Michael Caesar and Nick Havely argue, the chronological complexity on which these *recitals* are structured and formalised, the initial shield-stratagem they use through the presence of a musical component and operatic performers of prominence with the English public to attract a greater number of interested parties in addition to the Italian contingent of residents across the Channel suggests that a vaunted and central experience has only taken its first steps there, failing, however, to satisfy the original motivation of raking in enough money to pay off debts and return home. Moreover, like all truly successful dramas, the physiognomy of the *Dantata* evolved over a broad chronological span, meeting international audiences and thus again the festive Italian one, offering Modena a workhorse to exploit when needed and

[197] MICHAEL CAESAR, NICK HAVELY, *Politics and Performance: Gustavo Modena's dantate*, cit., p. 127.
[198] Ivi, p. 126.

providing him with the programmatic basis to write later works, such as *Il falò e le frittelle* (1860)[199], a clear manifestation of his unflinching anti-monarchical and anti-papal ideas[200]:

Modena fece dell'interpretazione di Dante una sua creazione. Ai canti più celebri (a Londra Modena aveva declamato i canti di Paolo e Francesca, di Ugolino, di Capaneo, di Manfredi, di Farinata degli Uberti, dei simoniaci, e dei ladri, insieme all'Invocazione all'Italia e alla Maledizione dei diavoli) ne affiancò altri come l'Invettiva di S. Pietro contro la chiesa corrotta; e più radicalmente intervenne sulla struttura medievale del poema, separandone le parti, togliendo la poesia dai canti e dandole un senso nuovo. In passato si era nascosto dietro Dante, ora Modena, rappresentando Dante, rappresentava sé stesso, teorizzava la sua ribellione politica. All'immedesimazione, ai caldi toni della declamazione sostituì una recitazione che potremmo definire, in termini moderni, straniata, di meditazione. Caddero definitivamente i residui dell'interpretazione romantica della prima ora. La rappresentazione della Divina Commedia divenne lo spettacolo per eccellenza del culto degli ideali e del «rispetto di sé»[201].

Modena made Dante's interpretation his own creation. To the most famous cantos (in London, Modena had declaimed the cantos of Paolo and Francesca, Ugolino, Capaneo, Manfredi, Farinata degli Uberti, the simoniacs, and the thieves, along with the Invocation to Italy and the Curse of the Devils) he added others such as St. Peter's Invective against the corrupt church; and more radically he intervened in the medieval structure of the poem, separating its parts, removing the poetry from the cantos and giving it a new meaning. In the past he had hidden behind Dante; now Modena, representing Dante, represented himself, theorised his political rebellion. To identification, to the warm tones of declamation he substituted a recitation that we might call, in modern terms, estranged, of meditation. The remnants of the romantic interpretation of the first hour definitely fell away. The performance of the Divine Comedy became the spectacle par excellence of the worship of ideals and 'self-respect'.

These mature works testify up until Modena's death, shortly before the monumental celebrations that were to see his direct pupils as protagonists, to his stubborn firmness of ideas on the art of the theatre, on the actor's craft and on his political views. It is, therefore, evident how Modena represents a starting point for what will later become a stylistic characteristic of *saying* or *reciting Dante*. Having a personal and political thought to articulate in the complex machine of Dante's fortune from the 19th century onwards would only be possible for artists with the support of precise poetics.

During and after Modena's life, a universe of experiences was created by first-rate personalities in the history of actors, and especially Great Actors, who have marked Italian and international stages. Indeed, one could observe how around the Venetian actor, thanks to his connections not only on an artistic level, a field of forces with the most disparate evolutions is stirring with ferment.

Despite the fact that Modena declared on several occasions that he had no pupils[202], he remained an indispensable point of reference for the generation of artists who immediately

[199] See GUSTAVO MODENA, *Scritti e discorsi di Gustavo Modena (1831-1860)*, cit., pp. 217-233.
[200] See MICHAEL CAESAR, NICK HAVELY, *Politics and Performance: Gustavo Modena's dantate*, cit.
[201] CLAUDIO MELDOLESI, *Profilo di Gustavo Modena. Teatro e rivoluzione democratica*, cit., p. 96.
[202] Reference is made to the letter sent by Modena to the newspaper «La Rivista» on 22 April 1845, where the actor replies to the critic Enrico Montazio that he had never had any pupils connoted as figures to «initiate them into his own theories, lead them, step by step, to the most daring trials»/«iniziarle alle proprie teorie, condurla, passo passo, fino alle più ardite prove», GUSTAVO MODENA, *Rettificazione. Lettera di Gustavo Modena al Direttore della Rivista*, in «La Rivista», 22 aprile 1845 (poi pubblicata in *Lettera di Gustavo Modena al Direttore*

shared the stage with him; one thinks at least of Ernesto Rossi (1827-1896) and Tommaso Salvini (1829-1915)[203]. Since their contribution to the art of reciting Dante is not marked by the same aura of novelty that emerged from the Maestro's performances, it is necessary to mention at least the most significant moments that inevitably link them to the teachings of Modena. Leaving aside for a moment the climax of this parable, the celebrations of Dante's centenary in 1865 in which the two are called upon to perform in the capital, Florence, suffice it to say that Rossi is perhaps one of the most slavish supporters of the *Dantata*, as he belongs to that group of 'amateur' actors, such as Francesco Jannetti[204], whom Modena takes under its wing in the Compagnia dei Giovani and to whom it immediately offers parts that will allow them to grow and prove their skill on stage according to his logic of reforming Italian theatre. In addition to being appreciated by national audiences for his acting with a strong emotional impact, Rossi, like Salvini, is responsible for Shakespeare's fortune in Italy, electing *Hamlet* as his own warhorse, and also being appreciated by European and overseas audiences in various guises, always maintaining a strong linguistic and acting identity on stage.

Tommaso Salvini, on the other hand, entered the Modena company together with his father in 1843 at only fourteen years of age, where he soon proved his worth and thus left it to create a first-rate career for himself, always remaining bound to the Dantean dictate of the 'maestro' especially in the *modus operandi* of character construction. In his performance, however, he chose not to pursue the grotesque trait, in favour of a «classical declination of a

della Rivista di Firenze, in «Il Pirata», 6 maggio 1845), reference made in ARMANDO PETRINI, *Gustavo Modena. Teatro, arte, politica*, cit., pp. 272-273.

[203] See LUIGI RASI, *Ernesto Rossi*, in LUIGI RASI, *I comici italiani. Biografia, bibliografia, iconografia*, 2 voll., Firenze, Bocca-Lumachi, vol. 2, 1905, pp. 421-431; LUIGI RASI, *Tommaso Salvini*, in LUIGI RASI, *I comici italiani. Biografia, bibliografia, iconografia*, 2 voll., Firenze, Bocca-Lumachi, vol. 2, 1905, pp. 485-498; *Ernesto Rossi*, a cura di Silvio D'Amico, in *Enciclopedia italiana di scienze, lettere ed arti*, diretta da G. Treccani, I-XXXVI, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, XXIII, 1934, pp. 520-521; *Tommaso Salvini*, a cura di Silvio D'Amico, in *Enciclopedia italiana di scienze, lettere ed arti*, diretta da G. Treccani, I-XXXVI, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, XXIII, 1934, pp. 520-521; *Ernesto Rossi*, a cura di Giuseppe Pastina, in *Enciclopedia dello Spettacolo*, fondata da Silvio D'Amico, 10 voll., Roma, Le Maschere, vol. 8 (1961), coll. 1124-1227; *Tommaso Salvini*, a cura di Giuseppe Pastina, in *Enciclopedia dello Spettacolo*, fondata da Silvio D'Amico, 10 voll., Roma, Le Maschere, vol. 8 (1961), coll. 1440-1444.

[204] «A singular figure on the mid-19th century Italian scene, we have little news of him. Roman by birth, he died in 1855 in Turin of cholera ... A man of letters, translator of dramatic texts, after his experience with Modena he moved to London and Edinburgh, where he was 'Professor of declamation'. He occasionally returns to Italy, where he declaims and recites between Turin and Milan»/«Figura singolare nel panorama della scena italiana di metà Ottocento, di lui abbiamo poche notizie. Romano di origini, muore nel 1855 a Torino di colera … Uomo di lettere, traduttore di testi drammatici, dopo l'esperienza con Modena si sposta a Londra e a Edimburgo, dove è "Professore di declamazione". Ritorna ogni tanto in Italia, dove declama e recita fra Torino e Milano», ARMANDO PETRINI, *Gustavo Modena. Teatro, arte, politica*, cit., p. 229; see also ANDREA SIMONE, *Dante in scena. Percorsi di una ricezione: dalla fine dell'ancien régime al grande attore*, cit., pp. 362-380.

naturalism poised between sobriety and fervour, strongly emotionalist»[205], which earned him the interest of director and theorist Konstantin Sergeevič Stanislavskij[206].

The personality that deviated the most from the Venetian maestro upon his return from enforced exile was that of the actress Adelaide Ristori (1822-1906), a star of the stage on the rise, already on her way to becoming one of the world's leading 19th-century performers[207].

Modena and Ristori can be dichotomously contrasted as, on an artistic and political level, they are the most representative poles of *reciting Dante.* Without neglecting the artistic value of the operation, for both Dante is a question of *business*: Modena in exile understood the economic value that Dante's declamation entailed and decided to make his own political cause of the Risorgimento go hand in hand with an educating theatre, capable of moving consciences and initiating *first and foremost* Italians, but not only them, into the urgent need to take a position on the cultural chessboard. Ristori began her own Dantesque operation by interpreting Pellico's *Francesca,* and soon made it one of his workhorses. It was only later, in 1855, on tour with Ernesto Rossi in Paris and from observing him in Dante's recitations that had much in common with Modena's example, that she understood the media value and the stronghold on international audiences that *saying Dante* had. She too, therefore, decided to immerse herself in Dante's episodes, favouring the recitation of cantos with iconic female figures as protagonists, and was immediately a great success.

The political difference between the two can easily be deduced from the noble title Ristori obtained from her marriage to Marquis Giuliano Capranica del Grillo in 1847. Whilst the actress's participation in the cause of unity cannot be doubted, her aristocratic status, which as a woman and artist we cannot, however, consider negligible for the time, obliged her to support the advent of the Savoy monarchy and not a republic, as Modena and others hoped. To this actress we owe the opening of horizons that projected the artistic relationship between Dante and acting practice throughout the world, not only emphasising the presence of her

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[205] «declinazione "classica" di un naturalismo in bilico tra sobrietà e foga, fortemente emozionalista», ARMANDO PETRINI, *Modena e Salvini: poetiche d'attore a confronto*, in EUGENIO BUONACCORSI (a cura di), *Tommaso Salvini. Un attore patriota nel teatro italiano dell'Ottocento*, Bari, Di Pagina, 2011, pp. 110-129, quotation at p. 123.

[206] See DONATELLA ORECCHIA, *Il sapore della menzogna. Rossi, Salvini e Stanislavskij: un aspetto del dibattito sul naturalismo*, Genoa, Costa&Nolan, 1996; EDO BELLINGERI, *Stanislavskij e Salvini: note su Otello*, in EUGENIO BUONACCORSI (ed.), *Tommaso Salvini. Un attore patriota nel teatro italiano dell'Ottocento*, Bari, Di Pagina, 2011, pp.143-166.

[207] LUIGI RASI, *Adelaide Ristori*, in LUIGI RASI, *I comici italiani. Biografia, bibliografia, iconografia*, 2 voll., Firenze, Bocca-Lumachi, vol. 2, 1905, pp. 363-382; *Adelaide Ristori*, a cura di Silvio D'Amico, in *Enciclopedia italiana di scienze, lettere ed arti*, diretta da G. Treccani, I-XXXVI, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, XXIII, 1934, pp. 520-521; *Adelaide Ristori*, a cura di Bruno Brunelli, in *Enciclopedia dello Spettacolo*, fondata da Silvio D'Amico, 10 voll., Roma, Le Maschere, vol. 8 (1961), coll. 1015-1018.

declamations and her artistic value in European theatres, but also definitively widening the boundaries of her reception, following the tours that saw her as a protagonist in Latin America and that, following her path, provided for the active and constant presence of Italian artists in the various continents.

Riding the wave of fortune that she received in Paris, at the World's Fair and in London, Ristori and her company are a certainty of financial success and critical acclaim wherever they land and are consequently hired overseas.

By defining a repertoire made up of actor rehearsals, excerpts and arias taken from various tragedies and carefully chosen Dante's cantos, all accompanied by musical interludes, a type of performance is outlined that is easily exportable to international impresarios, defining a package that is sure to be successful both for the Italian company, which had to travel abroad, and with the foreign *intelligentsia*, which in this way feels a share in Italian art and its fame. As regards London performances, the *made-in-Italy recitals* by Italian actors are a great success and the reputation of the performers involved means that the theatres are always full[208].

In the panorama of Dante's performances, the value of Ristori's experience, with an amazing career for her time and an unquestionable ascendancy on the stage (her was the only opinion that counted, especially after her return to the stage as a Marchesa, and strong in the devotion of her audience), reinforced a precise type of representation: through the declamation of the cantos, the skill of the 'great actor' is affirmed, and the works of Alighieri thus become a compulsory passage for the affirmation of a tradition closely linked to the poet on the local scene.

Dante's centenary celebrations, instituted in 1865 in the newly established capital city of Florence on Monday 14, Tuesday 15 and Wednesday 16 of the same year, gave a clear perception of this new value of *saying Dante* within the acting practice of the peninsula[209]. Considering the epochal importance of the event, throughout Italy, and mainly in the so-called 'cities of Dante', there were initiatives linked to the poet that related his popular character with dedicated popular magazines to prepare for the celebrations[210].

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[208] See ARMANDO PETRINI, *L'attore italiano dall'Ottocento agli inizi del Novecento,* cit., pp. 278-279; GIGI LIVIO, *La scena italiana. Materiali per una storia dello spettacolo dell'Otto e Novecento,* Milan, Mursia, 1989.

[209] An early article stating the dates and a provisional schedule of initiatives for the May 1865 celebrations can be found in the section *Cronaca Fiorentina*, in «La Nazione», n. 93, lunedì 03 aprile 1865.

[210] "«A *Giornale del Centenario di Dante Alighieri* (Dante Alighieri Centenary Newsletter) was published, the first edition of which appeared on 10 February 1864. The following words featured beneath the headpiece: "Prepare the national celebrations for the anniversary of Dante's birth". This newsletter, in fact, provided timely news of all the events organized in Florence and the rest of Italy, together with articles by the major Dante scholars of that time. In addition to this, a newssheet was also published, in true Tuscan pedagogical style, specifically

As Erminia Irace suggests, Dante once again responded to two needs that were as pressing as ever for United Italy, which still lacked the Vatican possessions and Triveneto: the need to generate consensus towards the new form of government and the people that constituted it and, even more importantly, to generate and focus on a unifying figure the sense of recognition in the patriotic ideals that Alighieri had been called upon to impersonate since the late eighteenth century[211].

«Dante Alighieri. E quali onori gli abbiam noi resi finora? Dove sono le testimonianze della nostra riconoscenza? Dove le statue che dovrebbero ornare le piazze di tutte le città italiane? dove i monumenti? Dove le feste secolari? Oh rossore! L'Italia è sempre quella matrigna che fu Firenze al maggior de' suoi figli! – Italiani! Fra cinque anni sarà il sesto centenario della nascita di Dante; fra cinque anni sarà compiuta l'unità della patria. Italiani! Io propongo che la prima festa nazionale della nostra rigenerazione sia un'ammenda onorevole, sia la Festa secolare di Dante Alighieri»[212].

«Dante Alighieri. And what honours have we rendered him so far? Where are the testimonies of our gratitude? Where the statues that should adorn the squares of all Italian cities? Where the monuments? Where the secular festivals? Oh blush! Italy is still that stepmother that Florence was to the greatest of her children! - Italians! In five years it will be the sixth centenary of Dante's birth; in five years the unity of the fatherland will be accomplished. Italians! I propose that the first national feast of our regeneration be an honourable amends, let it be the secular feast of Dante Alighieri».

In the issues published to prepare for the event, news is also reported of ideas for possible events to be organised and prepared in different Italian cities. For example, along the lines of what happened for the Raineri with *Pompe*, it is described how the poet Napoleone Giotti has:

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aimed at the working classes. The title of this newssheet was *La Festa di Dante. Letture domenicali del popolo italiano* (Dante's Day. Sunday readings for the Italian people), and it was published from 1 May 1864 to 11 June 1865. It

contained instructive articles about the Divine Comedy, the places that Dante visited during his lifetime, and the principal events of the age he lived in», FULVIO CONTI, *The Ultimate Italian. Dante and a Nation's Identity*, translated by Patrick John Barr, London/New York, Routledge, 2023, pp. 43-44 [ita. ed. *Il Sommo italiano. Dante e l'identità della nazione*, Roma, Carocci, 2021]. The newspapers and periodicals mentioned are various issues of «Giornale del centenario di Dante Allighieri», nn. 1-49, 10 febbraio 1864 – 10 settembre 1865, Firenze, Tipi di M. Cellini e C. alla Galileiana, 1865, with a particular focus on *Descrizione delle feste dantesche*, in «Giornale del centenario di Dante Allighieri», n. 47, 20 maggio, 1865; and the newspaper «Le feste di Dante. Letture domenicali del popolo italiano» published by the direction of «Giornale del Centenario», Firenze, M. Cellini, 1865. Moreover, *Guida officiale per le feste del centenario di Dante Alighieri nei giorni 14, 15, 16 maggio 1865 in Firenze, Accademia dei quadri viventi e Declamazione nel regio Teatro Pagliano la sera del 16 maggio 1865 a ore 8, Programma*, Firenze, M. Cellini, 1865 e *Omaggio a Dante Alighieri offerto dai cattolici italiani nel maggio 1865 sesto centenario dalla sua nascita*, Roma, Monaldi, 1865.

[211] See ERMINIA IRACE, *Itale glorie,* Bologna, Il Mulino, 2003, pp. 150-151. For more on how vital the Dante celebrations of 1865 were in relation to the Unification of Italy and the promotion of a new identity, see MAHNAZ YOUSEFZADEH, *City and Nation in the Italian Unification. The National Festivals of Dante Alighieri*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011; ANNE O' CONNOR, *Florence: city and memory in the nineteenth century*, Florence, Città di Vita, 2008; ILARIA PORCIANI, *La festa della nazione. Rappresentazione dello Stato e spazi sociali nell'Italia unita*, Bologna, Il mulino, 1997.

[212] GUSTAVO STRAFFORELLO, *La festa secolare di Schiller*, in «Rivista contemporanea», vol. XVIII, a. VII, luglio-settembre 1859, p. 444. Some passages of this exhortation can be found in the later article PIO RAJNA, *I centenarii danteschi passati e il centenario presente*, in «Nuova Antologia», s. VI, vol. CCXII, fasc. 1179, maggio-giugno 1921, pp. 3-23.

immaginato un grandioso ballo, rappresentante oltre i tratti più salienti della vita di Dante, anche i più belli della sua visione nei tre Regni. Questo ballo dovrà rappresentarsi in Firenze, durante la Festa del venturo anno. Desideriamo che il celebre coreografo sig. Rota accetti di comporre questo spettacolo dantesco, nel quale la sua maestria non può che trovare nuova occasione di farsi onore[213].

imagined a grandiose ball, representing not only the most salient features of Dante's life, but also the most beautiful features of his vision in the three kingdoms. This dance is to be performed in Florence, during the Feast of the coming year. We would like the celebrated choreographer, Mr Rota, to accept to compose this Dantean spectacle, in which his mastery cannot but find new occasions to do honour.

The dance in question is not reported in any of the chronicles of the day, although it is easy to see how the presence of the famous choreographer Giuseppe Rota at the centenary was entirely improbable, as was his involvement in the preparation of the performance, as in those years the artist was returning to Italy after the success of his performances at the Paris Opera and unfortunately he passed away in May 1865[214]. The daily newspaper «La Nazione» reported a *Ballo di Dante* within the programme of Giuseppe Verdi's *Lombardi alla prima crociata*, scheduled for 12 May 1865 at the Teatro Pagliano, but the news was not acknowledged by critics in other newspapers[215]. Instead, it is admissible to believe that this Dante choreographic project was assigned and brought to completion in the aforementioned *Dante. Azione coreografica fantastica in 5 atti e 12 quadri* by Gioacchino Coluzzi, which for its themes, setting and forecasts was to debut at the Pagliano during the celebrations, but, as Tomassini reports: «no longer performed due to the bankruptcy of the company»[216].

In Florence, the capital of the new Kingdom, the three days were organised in the presence of King Vittorio Emanuele, who not only took part in the ceremony to name the statue created by Enrico Pazzi in the square in front of the Basilica of Santa Croce (now Piazza dell'Unità d'Italia)[217], but also in the subsequent festivities and performances on the calendar. The leading protagonists of these celebrations were Rossi, Ristori and Salvini, who converged

[213]«Giornale del centenario di Dante Allighieri», n. 17, 20 luglio 1864, p. 140.
[214] See *Giuseppe Rota*, a cura di Rita Zambon, in DBI.
[215] See «La Nazione», n. 152, venerdì 12 maggio 1865.
[216] «non più rappresentato per il fallimento dell'impresa», STEFANO TOMASSINI, *Sempre in piedi: Dante e la danza*, cit., p. 605. It is also true that within the Manuale Dantesco there is a mention of «*Giotti Napoleone,* Ballo dantesco. – Ha imaginato un ballo, nel quale insieme a molte cose accadute al Poeta durante la sua vita si veggono le più strepitose e belle cose del mondo di là. È la Divina Còmedia spiegata con vive figure», without actually mentioning the possibility of a real staging during the celebrations. Given these facts, future research will give reason for these *lacunae*, see GIUSEPPE JACOPO FERRAZZI, *Musicografia*, in GIUSEPPE JACOPO FERRAZZI, *Manuale dantesco*, 5 voll., Bassano, Tipografia Sante Pozzato, 1865-1877, vol. IV, 1871, p. 212.
[217] Regarding the particular events surrounding the creation of the statue and its subsequent allocation in Florence, after the refusal of the city of Ravenna, see ORESTE RAGGI, *Della statua di Dante Alighieri innalzata in Firenze il XIV maggio MDCCCLXV: storia curiosa e genuina*, Modena, Zanichelli, 1865; LUISA ELSA VICHI CALLEGARI, *Documenti per la storia del monumento nazionale a Dante*, in «Studi danteschi», XLVI, 1969, pp. 273-288; ANNE O'CONNOR, *Dante Alighieri – from Absence to Stony Presence: Building Memories in Nineteenth-Century Florence*, in «Italian Studies», vol. 67, n. 3, 2012, pp. 307-335; FULVIO CONTI, *The Ultimate Italian. Dante and a Nation's Identity*, cit., pp. 45-48 and 80-85.

on the capital to perform various shows and declamations together with other illustrious performers, such as Gaetano Gattinelli.

On the evenings of 13 and 15 May, the three artists showed off their talents in a revival of Pellico's *Francesca da Rimini* at the Teatro Niccolini[218]. Francesca was interpreted masterfully by Ristori. Salvini's decision to give way to Rossi in the role of Paolo was a happy one: the actor decided to use all his dramatic mastery to give greater depth to the character of the betrayed husband, thus succeeding with his characteristic expressiveness in winning the favour of the audience, standing out in this scenic triangle in the role of Lanciotto, a feat never before achieved by anyone[219]: «Lanciotto converted all the public's affections to himself: pity towards the lovers died: for that performance they no longer excused their guilt towards a husband so honest, so confidant, so good, so noble, so valiant of person»[220].

In addition to a reading by Ristori of the homage sent by the French writer Victor Hugo to the Committee for the Dantean Celebrations[221], another event on the calendar catalyses the political attention that *saying Dante* generates between the stage and its audience.

As reported in the *Guida officiale per le feste del centenario di Dante Alighieri*, on the evening of Tuesday 16, an «academy of living pictures with selected declamations of the Divine Comedy takes place in the Regio Teatro Pagliano»[222], in which thirteen pictures relating to Dante's Life and his masterpiece are performed:

> **Programma dell'Accademia**
> **Sinfonia**
> VITA DI DANTE
> 1° Quadro - *Il Saluto di Beatrice a Dante – Coro a Beatrice Portinari* – Parole di G. Corsini, musica del Maestro Pieraccini.

[218] «The musical recital of the second evening will be done at the Pagliano, as will that of the third: but these are offered to the Representatives, and the public will wait for them to be repeated after the festivities, as we believe will be done, especially for the first. In the meantime, Mrs Ristori and Messrs E. Rossi, T. Salvini and Gattinelli, who all graciously accepted the Commission's invitation, will take part in that declamation. Indeed, we believe that a requotation of Francesca da Rimini at the Teatro Niccolini for the evening of the 15th has been concerted between some of these renowned artists»/«L'accademia musicale della seconda sera sarà fatta al Pagliano, così quella della terza: ma queste sono offerte ai Rappresentanti, ed il pubblico aspetterà che si ripetano dopo le feste, come crediamo che si farà, specialmente per la prima. Intanto a quella declamazione prenderanno parte la signora Ristori, e i signori E. Rossi, T. Salvini e Gattinelli, i quali tutti graziosamente aderirono all'invito della Commissione. Crediamo anzi che fra alcuni di questi rinomati artisti sia stata concertata una recita della Francesca da Rimini al Teatro Niccolini per la sera del 15», in «Giornale del centenario di Dante Allighieri», n. 7, 10 aprile 1864, p. 368.

[219] PIER MORONE, *Appendice. Francesca da Rimini*, in «La Nazione», n. 157, mercoledì 17 maggio 1865.

[220] «Lanciotto convertì a sé tutti gli affetti del pubblico: morta la pietà verso gli amanti: per quella interpretazione non si scusava più la loro colpa verso un marito sì onesto, sì confidente, sì buono, sì nobile, sì prode della persona», JARRO (GIULIO PICCINI), *Vita aneddotica di Tommaso Salvini*, Firenze, Bemporad, 1908, p. 236.

[221] See *Cronaca Fiorentina*, in «La Nazione», n. 156, martedì 16 maggio 1865.

[222] «accademia di quadri viventi con declamazioni scelte della Divina Commedia nel Regio Teatro Pagliano», in «Guida officiale per le feste del centenario di Dante Alighieri», Firenze, Tipi di M. Cellini e C. alla Galileiana, 1865, p. 42.

INFERNO
2° Quadro – *La Lupa* - Declamazione del signor T. Salvini.
3° Quadro – *Francesca da Rimini*, cs. della signora A. Ristori.
4° Quadro – *Farinata*, cs. del signor E. Bossi (sic.) [R]ossi.
5° Quadro – *I ladri*, cs. del suddetto.
6° Quadro – *Il Conte Ugolino*, cs. del signor T. Salvini.
PURGATORIO
7° Quadro – *La Pia*, cs. della signora A. Ristori.
8° Quadro – *Sordello*, cs. del signor E. Rossi.
9° Quadro – *La Porta del Purgatorio*, cs. del signor T. Salvini.
PARADISO
10° Quadro – *Piccarda*, cs. della signora A. Ristori.
11° Quadro – *Cacciaguida*, cs. del signor L. Gattinelli.
12° Quadro – *S. Pietro*, cs. del suddetto.
13° Quadro – *Apoteosi di Dante* – LA divina Commedia – Coro, parole di *, musica del Maestro L. Bettazzi[223].

Academy Programme
Symphony
LIFE OF DANTE: 1st Picture - Beatrice *greeting to Dante* - *Chorus to Beatrice Portinari* - Words by G. Corsini, music by Maestro Pieraccini.
INFERNO: 2nd Picture - *The She-wolf* - *Declamation* by Signor T. Salvini; 3rd Picture - *Francesca da Rimini*, by Signora A. Ristori; 4th Picture - *Farinata*, by Mr. E. Bossi; 5th picture - *The Thieves*, by the aforementioned; 6th picture - *Count Ugolino*, by Signor T. Salvini.
PURGATORY: 7th Painting - *La Pia*, by Mrs. A. Ristori; 8th Painting - *Sordello*, by Mr. E. Rossi; 9th Painting - *The Purgatory Gate*, by Mr. T. Salvini.
PARADISE: 10th Painting - *Piccarda*, of Mrs. A. Ristori; 11th Painting - *Cacciaguida*, by Mr. L. Gattinelli; 12th picture - *S. Pietro*, by the aforesaid; 13th Picture - *Apotheosis of Dante* - *The Divine Comedy* - *Chorus*, words by *, music by Maestro L. Bettazzi.

The three main protagonists subdivided cantos and key characters of the *Commedia*, each one having the opportunity to stand out with his or her own best talents thanks also to constant frequentation with Dante's poem. As can be deduced from the titles provided, despite the importance of the event, once again we were not talking about entire cantos, but about episodes, characters, and even architectural elements created by Dante's ultramundane imagery, now an indisputable shared heritage. The most striking case is surely offered by condensing Salvini's declamation of the first canto of *Inferno* into the allegory of the *She-wolf.*

The chronicles report a flood of crowds for this particular evening, also because it is precisely within the first canto that what has long been proposed within the popular scene takes place, namely the superimposition of the Veltro's saving prophecy with the physical person of King Vittorio Emanuele, the sovereign who first began to reunite Italy: «The first canto of Inferno was recited with great effectiveness by Sig. Salvini; who, having reached the verses

[223] «Guida officiale per le feste del centenario di Dante Alighieri», cit., pp. 42-43. See also the article of A. F., *Appendice. Teatro Pagliano-Accademia dei quadri viventi e declamazione dantesca*, in «La Nazione», n. 161, domenica 21 maggio 1865.

that foretold the mysterious Veltro, was able with a single glance to honestly manifest an allusion that was in all minds, and to which all responded with thunderous cheers»[224].

From Jarro, pseudonym of Giulio Piccini, journalist and writer, who writes Salvini's biography, we learn in a long and emotional passage that:

Nel dire la famosa terzina dantesca allusiva al Veltro, che «farà morir di doglia» la bestia «che mai non empie la bramosa voglia» il Salvini guardò imperterrito il Sovrano, ch'era nel palco sul proscenio. Ogni scintilla faceva, a que' giorni, divampar un incendio di patriottismo: proruppero grida ed applausi: e non cessavano. Il Re imbarazzato: chè tutti sanno come fosse allora irta di spine la così detta questione romana: non si moveva; ma agli applausi reiterati, alle grida, si consultò con le persone ch'eran nel palco: e di un subito si alzò, sporgendosi verso il pubblico. Il momento di entusiasmo fu indescrivibile, si sarebbe detto l'anima della patria si protendesse verso di lui[225].

In saying the famous Dantean tercet alluding to the Veltro, which 'will make die of grief' the beast 'that never fulfils the yearning', Salvini looked undaunted at the Sovereign, who was on the proscenium stage. Every spark ignited a fire of patriotism in those days: shouts and applause erupted and did not cease. The king was embarrassed, for everyone knows how fraught with thorns the so-called Roman question was then: he did not move; but at the repeated applause, at the shouts, he consulted with the people in the box: and immediately he stood up, leaning towards the audience. The moment of enthusiasm was indescribable, one would have said the soul of the country stretched out towards him.

It seems opportune to quote here the thought formulated by historian Fulvio Conti, who reiterates the centrality played by Dante's celebrations (and in synthesis, of the figure of Alighieri) in creating that idea of Italian identity around which to converge the aspirations and ways of constituting the new collective imaginary of reference of the post-unification era:

Nel momento in cui la letteratura fu chiamata a svolgere una missione nazionale e civile cominciò quasi contestualmente ad affermarsi l'idea di una sua celebrazione pubblica. Si sviluppò la moda degli elogi, dei ritratti, delle commemorazioni, finché nel triennio giacobino, in quelle piazze dove s'innalzavano gli alberi della libertà e dove andavano in scena le feste rivoluzionarie, si svolsero con grande concorso di popolo le celebrazioni degli antichi poeti: Virgilio a Mantova, Ariosto a Ferrara e a Reggio, Dante a Ravenna, il 3 gennaio 1798, omaggiato da Vincenzo Monti, all'epoca commissario in Romagna della Repubblica Cisalpina. Fu senza dubbio da lì, osservava Carlo Dionisotti, che ebbe «origine la tradizione celebrativa che ancora oggi dura»[226].

At the moment when literature was called upon to fulfil a national and civic mission, the idea of its public celebration began to take hold almost simultaneously. The fashion for eulogies, portraits and commemorations developed, until during the three Jacobin years, in those squares where the trees of liberty were erected and where the revolutionary festivities were staged, celebrations of the ancient poets took place with a great concourse of

[224] «Il primo canto dell'Inferno fu recitato con grande efficacia dal sig. Salvini; il quale, giunto ai versi che preconizzavano il misterioso Veltro, seppe con un solo sguardo manifestare onestamente un'allusione che era in tutti gli animi, e cui tutti risposero con fragorosi evviva», Ibidem.

[225] JARRO (GIULIO PICCINI), *Vita aneddotica di Tommaso Salvini,* cit., p. 237.

[226] FULVIO CONTI, *L'inaugurazione simbolica di Firenze capitale: il monumento a Dante in piazza Santa Croce*, in SANDRO ROGARI (a cura di), *1865: questioni nazionali e questioni locali nell'anno di Firenze capitale*, Atti del Convegno di studi, Firenze, 29-30 ottobre 2015, Firenze, Polistampa, 2016, pp. 69-81, quotation at p. 72. The quotation refers directly to CARLO DIONISOTTI, *Varia fortuna di Dante*, cit., p. 268 and to the volumes to which the same author refers for the creation of the celebrations: ERMINIA IRACE, *Itale glorie*, cit., pp. 77-128. See also DUCCIO TONGIORGI, *«Dell'obbligo di onorare» gli italiani illustri: polemiche sette-ottocentesche sul primato disconosciuto*, in ANGELO COLOMBO, SYLVIE PITTIA, MARIA TERESA SCHETTINO (sous la direction de), *Mémoires d'Italie. Identités, représentations, enjeux (Antiquité et Classicisme). À l'occasion du 150e anniversaire de l'Unité italienne (1861-2011)*, Como, New Press Edizioni, 2010, pp. 213-225.

people: Virgil in Mantua, Ariosto in Ferrara and Reggio, Dante in Ravenna, on 3 January 1798, paid homage by Vincenzo Monti, at that time commissioner in Romagna of the Cisalpine Republic. It was undoubtedly from there, Carlo Dionisotti observed, that the 'celebratory tradition that still endures today' originated.

The example constituted by Dante's tableaux performed on the exceptional evening in Florence sums up and consolidates the idea of the festival as a high and participatory moment of creating a shared mentality. The theatre, thanks to its aggregative nature, provides even more of an opportunity for the Risorgimento society of the 19th century to cultivate around itself an aura of sharing that starts from culture and emotion and flows into identification with a common cause.

Although, as already mentioned, at this time, these yearnings were expressed in the formula of the monarchy, Dante would not be long coming to be declined as an icon in future forms of government, not only in Italy, which would seek in his figure an example of coherence and freedom. The remaining part of the century saw these great actors remain undisputed protagonists of the Dante scene, flanked by new rising talents. Yet another triad of voices, with the addition of the star Eleonora Duse, rises at the epochal transition between the 19th and 20th centuries, to form the group that Petrini defines as "mattatori"[227]: a new form of *recitals* with Giacinta Pezzana, an unconventional adaptation in a parodic key with Ermete Zacconi and the particularly apt and well-posed voice of Ruggero Ruggeri.

Giacinta Pezzana (1841-1919) is undoubtedly the female interpreter who, after Ristori, performed Dante's declamations assiduously, particularly abroad and especially weaving a special bond with Latin America. A woman with a strong temperament and great wit, it is no coincidence that she is defined as a "Garibaldian" and arrives at Dante's *mise-en-scene* following Modena's dictation on the one hand, and defining her own personal approach, on the other to what, in her opinion, had the most right, and perhaps a duty, to be brought to the stage.

As suggested by Laura Mariani's work on her conspicuous correspondence with various intellectuals of the time, and Petrini's work on the theatrical pedagogical theories she formulated at the end of the 19th century, Pezzana prepared her own way for future interpretations of Dante, the *veladas*, through a diligent study of the *Commedia* and starting from the assumption that she wanted to bring back to the theatre a higher language, more worthy of the ethical and political ideals proposed by Alighieri's example. In order to reach her ultimate goal, namely to re-educate the audience, Pezzana codifies her own way of saying Dante: with the curtain down, alone on stage, Pezzana declaims and comments personally on the *Commedia*,

[227] See ARMANDO PETRINI, *L'attore italiano dall'Ottocento agli inizi del Novecento,* cit., pp. 287-289.

creating with the audience a personal and visceral shaking of consciences through Dante's verses, receiving consents as well as reproaches, and also inserting elements taken from the new lighting techniques. Finally, we owe her the apprenticeship of Eleonora Duse (with whom she had a relationship of love and hate) for which the diva will be indebted for life[228].

Unlike the strong component of political-feminist commitment that radiates from the previous artist, Ermete Zacconi's (1857-1948) relationship with Dante is characterised by the light-hearted and highly parodic nature of the performer[229]. A famous performer on stage, he had been confronted with the declamation of poetic verse since his early maturity, at first arousing much resistance from established critics, as had happened to his master Giovanni Emanuel before him[230]. For him, the turning point came with the celebration of Gustavo Modena's centenary (1903), for which, alongside the great Salvini, he found himself demonstrating to the public his skill as a performer: on this occasion, he did not fail to receive high and unanimous acclaim for his declamation of the twenty-first canto of the *Inferno*, consequently including Dante in his repertoire in the future, mainly on European and trans-oceanic *tours*, and specialising in the cantos of the barters (*If.* XXI) and snakes (*If.* XXV) already dear to the master[231]. In his highly personal verse production, the passionate and light-hearted nature of the artist is outlined. Unlike many of his colleagues, Zacconi stands out as an intense connoisseur of Dante, he rewrites a very personal canto in tercets and, like the poet

[228] See LUIGI RASI, *Giacinta Gualtieri-Pezzana*, in LUIGI RASI, *I comici italiani. Biografia, bibliografia, iconografia*, 2 voll., Firenze, Bocca-Lumachi, vol. 2, 1905, pp. 269-274; *Giacinta Gualtieri-Pezzana*, a cura di Silvio D'Amico, in *Enciclopedia italiana di scienze, lettere ed arti*, diretta da G. Treccani, I-XXXVI, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, XXIII, 1934, pp. 520-521; *Giacinta Pezzana*, a cura di Giuseppe Pastina, in *Enciclopedia dello Spettacolo*, fondata da Silvio D'Amico, 10 voll., Roma, Le Maschere, vol. 8 (1961), coll. 76-77. See ARMANDO PETRINI, *Attori e scena nel teatro italiano di fine Ottocento. Studio critico su Giovanni Emanuel e Giacinta Pezzana*, Torino, Accademia University Press, 2020 [2012[1]]; LAURA MARIANI, *L'Ottocento delle attrici*, in «Acting Archives Reviews. Rivista di studi sull'attore e la recitazione», a. VII, n. 14, novembre 2017, pp. 1-26. Important and indispensable for understanding the artist is the study conducted by Mariani on her collection of letters, see LAURA MARIANI, *L'attrice del cuore. Storia di Giacinta Pezzana attraverso le lettere*, Firenze, Le Lettere, 2005.

[229] See LUIGI RASI, *Ermete Zacconi*, in LUIGI RASI, *I comici italiani. Biografia, bibliografia, iconografia*, 2 voll., Firenze, Bocca-Lumachi, vol. 2, 1905, pp. 704-715; *Ermete Zacconi*, a cura di Silvio D'Amico, in *Enciclopedia italiana di scienze, lettere ed arti*, diretta da G. Treccani, I-XXXVI, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, XXIII, 1934, pp. 520-521; *Ermete Zacconi*, a cura di Francesco Savio, in *Enciclopedia dello Spettacolo*, fondata da Silvio D'Amico, 10 voll., Roma, Le Maschere, vol. 9 (1962), coll. 2067-2070. See also DONATELLA ORECCHIA, *Il tramonto del teatro all'antica italiana: primi ritratti di mattatori*, in DONATELLA ORECCHIA, *Il Critico e L'attore. Silvio D'Amico e la scena italiana di inizio Novecento*, Torino, Accademia University Press, 2012, par. 37-83 (in *open access*).

[230] See ARMANDO PETRINI, *Attori e scena nel teatro italiano di fine Ottocento. Studio critico su Giovanni Emanuel e Giacinta Pezzana*, cit.

[231] GIUSEPPE GAUDA, *I divulgatori di Dante sulla scena*, in «La Lettura. Rivista mensile del Corriere della Sera», fasc. 8, 01 agosto 1920, pp. 607-608, references at p. 608.

before him, he inserts contemporary real characters, such as entertainers and performers, as the protagonists of a new otherworldly scene.

In his *Parodie dantesche*, private writings kindly made accessible by Simone's archival research, he leaves room for the theme of the journey that underpins the *Commedia*, *alter Odysseus* in a prelude to a *Purgatory* where he hopes to arrive despite his worldly misdeeds. In the subsequent papers, however, he creates a desecrating bedlam of the 'actors', who maliciously bark out verses in defiance of decency and measure: «those whom you call comedians up there and we call snarling dogs down here»[232].

Following in the footsteps of Dante's poetry and the example of so much other parodistic and encomiastic production, Zacconi took up the metre of the tercet, resumed the settings and, making the poet's word his own, inserted his fellow actors (Rossi and Modena are not missing) into the described picture, as in a theatre scene, not forgetting even contemporary theatre critics «masters in making and unmaking reputations with insidious and brief lies»[233], proving that he ascribes himself to the underlying scheme of the *Comedy*, thus becoming himself an *alter Dante* in the figure of the *agens* and *auctor* of the parodistic "staging" on paper. The scholar Giulio Ferroni had already commented on this passage of the century as: «the years leading up to the First World War saw the comedian come to the fore both from a theoretical point of view and in his 'militant' choices [...]. The century that was to be defined as 'short' immediately appeared on the long wave of the comic»[234].

Standing as a *trait d'union* between the 19th century and the first part of the 20th century is the figure of Ruggero Ruggeri (1871-1953)[235]. Following the scansion proposed by Petrini, Ruggeri is ascribed to the group of actors defined as 'performers', in that his personal production, despite a stage presence that was still markedly grandiloquent, left room for a new praxis that envisaged a greater openness of the subject to the contribution made by authors and

[232] «quei che lassù chiamate commedianti | e noi chiamiamo quaggiù cani ringhiosi», see Ermete Zacconi's *Parodie dantesche,* in ANDREA SIMONE, *Dante in scena. Percorsi di una ricezione: dalla fine dell'ancien régime al grande attore*, cit., pp. 608-613.
[233] «mastri in far e disfar riputazioni con menzognette insidiose e brevi», Ibidem.
[234] «gli anni che precedono la Prima guerra mondiale vedono il comico salire alla ribalta sia dal punto di vista teorico sia nelle scelte "militanti" […]. Il secolo che sarà definito "breve" si affaccia subito sull'onda lunga del comico», GIULIO FERRONI, *Secolo tragico, secolo del comico*, in SILVANA CIRILLO (a cura di), *Il comico nella letteratura italiana. Teorie e poetiche*, Roma, Donzelli, 2005, pp. 287-300, quotation at p. 288.
[235] See *Ruggero Ruggeri*, a cura di Albarosa Camaldo, in AMAtI (archivio multimediale degli attori italiani) online. See also: LUIGI RASI, *Ruggero Ruggeri*, in LUIGI RASI, *I comici italiani. Biografia, bibliografia, iconografia*, 2 voll., Firenze, Bocca-Lumachi, vol. 2, 1905, pp. 446-448; *Ruggero Ruggeri*, a cura di Silvio D'Amico, in *Enciclopedia italiana di scienze, lettere ed arti*, diretta da G. Treccani, I-XXXVI, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, XXIII, 1934, pp. 520-521; *Ruggero Ruggeri*, a cura di Corrado Pavolini, in *Enciclopedia dello Spettacolo*, fondata da Silvio D'Amico, 10 voll., Roma, Le Maschere, vol. 8 (1961), coll. 1309-1310.

directors to the theatre. Indeed, his career is marked by his personal friendship and constant frequentation with Luigi Pirandello, for whom he will be a refined interpreter[236], but also of D'Annunzio's dramas.

In his interpretations of Dante, which took place between the stage and radio, he chose to start with a painstaking work on musicality and his own voice, which earned him praise and support from all the critics of his time[237]. Already from the earliest records, it can be seen how Ruggeri used to stage a canto, often the fifth from *Inferno*, within a *collage* of pieces from dramas and poems, to give even greater emphasis to the theme of the evening. Particularly in his post-World War II *tournée*, it is clear that Ruggeri was one of the leading exponents of Italian declamation and that he understood how a well-constructed poetic repertoire in terms of content together with a musical and lyrical component (notably reminiscent of the first Dante *recitals*), in the case of 1946 composed of a classical female vocal trio, was the key to securing a decisive adhesion on the part of the public, not simplistically pandering to their taste, but offering a population by then destroyed by conflict and the rise of the ghosts of racism and ideological extremism, a form of comfort based on the plurality of Italian culture and its artistic beauty[238].

As the scholar Silvio D'amico hoped, «the diction of Dante's cantos could not only constitute an interesting and original number to be introduced in the performances of the Dramatic Companies, but could be considered as one of the most dignified and effective forms of commemoration of the Divine Poem»[239].

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[236] See ARMANDO PETRINI, *L'attore italiano dall'Ottocento agli inizi del Novecento*, cit., pp. 289-290. See also DONATELLA ORECCHIA, *Attori moderni: interpreti ma non solo*, in DONATELLA ORECCHIA, *Il Critico e L'attore. Silvio D'Amico e la scena italiana di inizio Novecento*, cit., par. 1-66 (in *open access*); MARZIA PIERI, SIRO FERRONE, *La drammaturgia di Ruggeri*, in «Ariel: quadrimestrale di drammaturgia dell'istituto di studi pirandelliani e sul teatro italiano contemporaneo», n. 56/57, mag/dic. 2004, pp. 1-97.

[237] See LEONARDO BRAGAGLIA, *Ruggero Ruggeri in sessantacinque anni di storia del teatro rappresentativo*, Roma, Trevi, 1968.

[238] In this case reference is made to archive material in fund *Ruggeri* of the Museo Biblioteca dell'Attore in Genoa by Andrea Simone as part of his own archival investigation. He points out how the dates for the year 1946 actually show the presence of the Trio for the dates of Circolo delle Gallerie, Piacenza, 24 June 1946 (cataloguing n. 000301); Arena di Verona, 4 July 1946 (cataloguing n. 000302); Teatro Nuovo, Milan, 17 June 1946 (cataloguing n. 000304), See *documentary appendix*, in ANDREA SIMONE, *Dante in scena. Percorsi di una ricezione: dalla fine dell'ancien régime al grande attore*, cit.

[239] «la dizione dei canti di Dante non solo potrebbe costituire un interessante ed originale numero da introdursi negli spettacoli delle Compagnie Drammatiche, ma potrebbe considerarsi come una delle forme di commemorazione del Divino Poema più dignitosa ed efficace», See SILVIO D'AMICO, *Dante e gli attori*, in SILVIO D'AMICO, *La vita del teatro: cronache, polemiche e note varie*, a cura di Alessandro D'Amico, vol. I (1914-1921. Gli anni di guerra e della crisi), Roma, Bulzoni, 1994, pp. 394-398, reference at p. 394.

In his being a witness to a time and a way within the now established custom of chanting the verse[240], Ruggero Ruggeri manages to maintain throughout his career a naturalness veiled in constant study, tending towards a constant search for perfect diction, bringing to his productions and performances that expressive density that characterises the true actor.

Finally, Ruggeri, at the dawn of his eighties, decides to switch to a new *medium*, transferring all his wisdom into a repertoire of records that reprise his greatest hits. With Pirandello's *Enrico IV,* and verses taken from Giosuè Carducci, Gabriele D'Annunzio and Lorenzo de' Medici, the fifth canto of *Inferno* once again stands out: this reading of it will be the second «oldest existing recording of a Dante reading»[241].

2.7. Twentieth-century premises for a new kind of theatrical reception of Dante

[…] Dante non aveva significato poi tanto per l'umanità, e [...] veniva di norma sopravvalutato. [...]. Ci tenne, prima di tutto, a dire che la composizione della *Commedia* non era originale, ma era una forma molto comune, che era stata usata, poco prima di Dante, nella *Visione di Alberico*. Tenne poi a sostenere che Dante non poteva dare nel poema un quadro completo del suo tempo e del pensiero dell'epoca, dal momento che era tanto incolto da non conoscere il greco. Non era un filosofo, poiché subordinava il pensiero alla rivelazione, e quindi non era un precursore del Rinascimento né della Riforma. Non era un patriota, poiché acclamava un impero tedesco, con la grazia di Dio. Al massimo era un campanilista fiorentino. E non era nemmeno democratico, poiché aveva sempre auspicato l'unione al potere di papato e impero. Non aveva mai attaccato il papato, ma alcuni papi che avevano condotto una vita immorale, come del resto aveva fatto lui stesso in gioventù. Era un monaco, un vero idiota figlio del suo tempo; per niente progressista, dal momento che manda all'inferno dei bambini non battezzati. Era un gretto monarchico, dato che mette Bruto e Satana nel cuore stesso dell'inferno. Mancava di autocritica, quando metteva tra i peggiori crimini l'ingratitudine verso gli amici e il tradimento verso la patria, dato che aveva sistemato nell'inferno il suo amico e maestro Brunetto Latini, e aveva appoggiato l'imperatore tedesco Enrico VII contro Firenze, la sua città. Aveva cattivo gusto, classificando tra i sei più grandi poeti del mondo Omero, Orazio, Lucano, Ovidio, Virgilio e… sé stesso [242].

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[240] See SILVIO D'AMICO, *Appendice. I dicitori di versi. Conferenza tenuta nella Sala della Società degli Autori di Roma il 1° giugno 1914*, in SILVIO D'AMICO, *Maschere. Note su l'interpretazione scenica*, Roma, Mondadori, 1921, pp. 191-219, reference at p. 216.

[241] «più antica registrazione esistente di una lettura dantesca», RODOLFO SACCHETTINI, *I vestititi di Dante: un'archeologia della lettura dantesca*, in ALBERTO CASADEI, PAOLO GERVASI, *La voce di Dante. Performance dantesche tra teatro, tv e nuovi media*, cit., pp. 13-32, citazione a p. 17. New and more complete references are also to be found in RODOLFO SACCHETTINI, *Dante in scena tra radio e tv*, in ACCADEMIA DEI LINCEI (a cura di), *La ricezione della Commedia dai manoscritti ai media*, Atti del convegno internazionale dell'Accademia dei Lincei (23-25 marzo 2022, Roma), Roma, Bardi, 2023, pp. 395-413, reference at Ruggeri at pp. 397-398.

[242] «Dante tämligen betydelselös för mänskligheten och [...] överskattad. Han ville först säga att kompositionen i Commedia ej var originell, utan en mycket vanlig form, vilken blivit strax förut använd i Albericus' vision. Han ville påstå att Dante ej kunde giva hela sin tids bildning och tankar i detta poem då han var så obildad att han ej kunde grekiska. Han var ej filosof då han slog tanken i band under uppenbarelsen och därför var han icke heller någon föregångare till renässans eller reformation. Han var icke patriot, ty han hyllade ett tyskt kejsardöme med guds nåde. [...] Och demokrat var han ej heller, ty han drömde alltid om ett förenat påve- och kejsardöme. Han angrep ej påvedömet utan några påvar, vilka levat osedligt som han själv i sin ungdom. Han var en munk, ett sannskyldigt idiotiskt barn av sin tid, icke ett fjät framom, då han sänder odöpta barn till helvetet. Han var en inskränkt rojalist som sätter Brutus jämte Satan i helvetets brännpunkt. Han saknade all självkritik då han bland de värsta brott upptager otacksamhet mot vänner och förräderi mot fädernesland, själv förpassande sin vän och lärare Brunetto Latini i avgrunden och understödjande tyske kejsaren Henrik VII mot sin fädernestad Florens. Han

[...] Dante did not mean that much to humanity, and [...] he was usually overrated. [...]. He took care, first of all, to say that the composition of the Commedia was not original, but was a very common form, which had been used, shortly before Dante, in Alberico's Vision. He then claimed that Dante could not give in the poem a complete picture of his time and the thought of the time, since he was so uncultured that he did not know Greek. He was not a philosopher, since he subordinated thought to revelation, and was therefore not a forerunner of the Renaissance or the Reformation. He was not a patriot, since he acclaimed a German empire, with the grace of God. At best he was a Florentine parochialist. Nor was he a democrat, for he had always wished for the union of papacy and empire in power. He had never attacked the papacy, but some popes who had led immoral lives, as he himself had done in his youth. He was a monk, a true idiot child of his time; not progressive at all, since he sent unbaptised children to hell. He was a narrow-minded monarchist, since he put Brutus and Satan in the very heart of hell. He lacked self-criticism, when he placed among the worst crimes ingratitude towards friends and betrayal of his country, since he had placed his friend and master Brunetto Latini in hell, and had supported the German emperor Henry VII against Florence, his city. He had bad taste, ranking among the six greatest poets in the world Homer, Horace, Lucan, Ovid, Virgil and... himself.

This biting description by August Strindberg is to be found in one of the latest works of comparative analysis by Camilla Storskog, dedicated to the production of the Swedish playwright and writer and the works of Dante. In the 20th century, in fact, there is a constant rewriting of Dante's is to be found through a new and enterprising gaze, sometimes very crude, that wants to free itself from the aegis of the classical, of the untouchable.

Strindberg became acquainted with Dante's work during his university days, when his thinking was still imbued with *vis polemica* and a certain aggressiveness. As scholars of the Swedish writer report, in the period following his university days, referred to as 'hellish', the author moved temporarily to France to devote himself to occultism and science. Consequently, his production reflects this gloomy atmosphere, following in the footsteps of Dante's otherworldly journey, which he re-proposes in a sort of mystical experience also favoured by his profession of Christian faith, to generate texts that openly declare his debt to the Florentine. The novel *Inferno* (1896-7) and the dramatic trilogy *Till Damaskus* [To Damascus] (1904) are undoubtedly proof of the strength exerted by the Dante reception of the time, which followed the more dreamlike and esoteric path already explored in the 19th century by Gabriele Rossetti

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hade dålig smak då han bland världens sex största skalder sätter Homer, Horatius, Lucanus, Ovidius, Virgilius, och – sig själv», AUGUST STRINDBERG, *Jäsningstiden. En själs utvecklingshistoria (1867-1872)*, in HANS LINDSTRÖM (ed.), *Samlade Verk 20: Tjänstekvinnans son I-II*, Stockholm, Norstedts, 1989, pp. 169-341, reference at pp. 336-337 [ed. ita. AUGUST STRINDBERG, *Età di fermenti. Autobiografia*, in AUGUST STRINDBERG, *Romanzi e racconti, a cura di Ludovica Koch,* 2 voll., Milano, Mondadori, 1991, vol. 1 (*Il 'ciclo autobiografico'*), pp. 199-412, citazione a pp. 407-408]. For an overview of Dante's Stindbergian reception, see NILS NORMAN, *Strindberg och Dante*, in «Svensk litteraturtidskrift», vol. 27, n. 3, pp. 103-115. This passage, where the influence of Dante in Strindberg's literary and dramaturgical production is explained, is taken up by the contribution CAMILLA STORSKOG, *Incontro all'Inferno. Strindberg e Dante*, in EMILIA PERASSI, SIMONE FERRARI, ALICE NAGINI (eds.), *Dante nelle letterature straniere. Dialoghi e percorsi*, Milan, Ledizioni, 2021, pp. 143-154. For a further overview of Dante's fortunes in Sweden, see: ALF LOMBARD, *Dante in Sweden*, in VITTORE BRANCA, ETTORE CACCIA (eds.), *Dante nel mondo. Raccolta di studi promossa dall'Associazione internazionale per gli studi di lingua e di letteratura italiana*, cit., pp. 560-564; CONNY SVENSSON, FRANCESCA TURRI, *Svedesi che hanno letto Dante*, in EMILIA PERASSI, SIMONE FERRARI, ALICE NAGINI (eds.), *Dante nelle letterature straniere. Dialogues and Pathways*, cit., pp. 81-91.

(father of the famous painter Dante Gabriel), Eugéne Aroux, William Blake, and Giovanni Pascoli, who in his turn derived it from Ugo Foscolo[243]. Inspired by Dante's works, the Swedish artist imbues his writing with his personal experience as a man and artist focused on self-seeking, in order to stage the drama of characters pursuing the «true way»[244], constantly beset by sin and error, as if they were always relegated to the flames of Hell, and in fact still strongly linked to the atmospheres and dissensions of the poem's first cantica. In this new part of our discussion, referring back to more authoritative essays, which clearly outline the matrices and nexuses operating in Strindberg's works[245], it is essential to take our starting point from this

[243] A more in-depth explanation of the phenomenon will be given later, with the examination referring to Rudolf Steiner's esotericism. For a clear idea of what is meant here, see: LUIGI VALLI, *L'allegoria di Dante secondo Giovanni Pascoli*, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1922; LUIGI VALLI, *Per la croce e l'aquila di Dante*, Napoli, F. Perrella, 1924; LUIGI VALLI, *Il linguaggio segreto di Dante e dei Fedeli d'Amore*, 2 voll., Roma, Optima, 1928-1930; LUIGI VALLI, *Il linguaggio segreto di Dante e dei Fedeli d'Amore*, Milano, Luni, 2004; STEFANO SALZANI, *Luigi Valli e l'esoterismo di Dante*, Città di Castello (PG), Il Cerchio, 2014; LUIGI VALLI, *La chiave della Commedia*, Milano, Luni, 2016; RENÉ GUÉNON, *L'ésotérisme de Dante*, Paris, Charles Bosse, 1925; RENÉ GUÉNON, *L'esoterismo di Dante*, traduzione di Pia Cillario, Milano, Adelphi, 2001; PAUL RENUCCI, *Dante francese e dantismo esoterico nel secolo presente*, in VITTORE BRANCA, ETTORE CACCIA (a cura di), *Dante nel mondo. Raccolta di studi promossa dall'Associazione internazionale per gli studi di lingua e di letteratura italiana*, cit., pp. 155-182; MARIA PIA POZZATO (a cura di), *L'idea deforme. Interpretazioni esoteriche di Dante*, introduzione di Umberto Eco, postfazione di Alberto Asor Rosa, Milano, Bompiani, 1989; ROBERT L. JOHN, *Dante templare. Una nuova interpretazione della Commedia*, Milano, Hoepli, 1987 [*Dante*, Wien, Springer, 1946[1]]; ADRIANO LANZA, *Dante e la gnosi: esoterismo del Convivio*, Roma, Edizioni mediterranee, 1990; GABRIELLA BARTOLOZZI, *Exoterismo ed esoterismo nell'opera dantesca*, Firenze, Atheneum, 2001; PIERO VITELLARO ZUCCARELLO, LUIGI DELLA SANTA, ANGELO IACOVELLA, ALESSANDRO GROSSATO, MARCO VANNINI (a cura di), *Sotto il velame. Dante fra universalità esoterica e universalismo politico*, Milano, Mimesis, 2007; JÓZSEF NAGY, *L'etica dantesca secondo l'esegesi di Pascoli*, in «Letteratura Italiana Antica. Rivista annuale di testi e studi», vol. XII, 2011, pp. 333-347; MARIO CIMINI, *Il dantismo esoterico dell'Ottocento: da Rossetti a Pascoli*, in JOANNA SZYMANOWSKA E IZABELA NAPIÓRKOWSKA (a cura di), *Il Dante dei moderni: la Commedia dall'Ottocento a oggi. Saggi critici*, cit., pp. 183-192; GIAN LUIGI FERRARIS, *Dante esoterico? (e l'"idea deforme"): Gabriele Rossetti - Eugène Aroux - Giovanni Pascoli - Luigi Valli - Rodolfo Benini - René Guénon*, Alessandria, Dell'Orso, 2021; PAOLO DE STEFANO, *Giovanni Pascoli l'inquieto studioso di Dante*, prefazione di Ruggiero Stefanelli, Bari, cacucci, 2021; *Gabriele Rossetti*, a cura di Pompeo Giannantonio, in ED; *Eugéne Aroux*, a cura di Remo Ceserani, in ED; *Giovanni Pascoli*, a cura di Franco Lanza, in ED. Inoltre, possono essere utili: ANTOINE FAIVRE, *L'esoterismo. Storia e significati*, con una prefazione di Massimo Introvigne, Varese, SugarCo, 1992; KOCKU VON STUCKRAD, *Was ist esoterik? Kleine Geschichte des geheimen Wissens*, München, C.H. Beck, 2004 [trad. ita. *Cos'è l'esoterismo? Breve storia della conoscenza segreta*, prefazione di Aldo Natale Terrin, Padova, Messaggero di Sant'Antonio, 2016]; ANTOINE FAIVRE, *L'esoterismo occidentale. Metodi, temi, immagini*, tradotto e a cura di Francesco Baroni, Brescia, Morcelliana, 2012; PAOLO PIZZIMENTO, *René Guénon lettore di Dante: devianza o apporto?*, in «Sinestesie», n. 24, a. VII ottobre, 2018, pp. 66-75; PAOLO PIZZIMENTO, *Michel Vâlsan e Réne Guénon: una dottrina degli stati molteplici dell'essere in Dante?*, in «Sinestesie», n. 29, a. IX maggio, 2020, pp. 1-15; the whole fasc. 1 is dedicated to Dante and philosophers of the Ninetheenth century in «Humanitas: rivista bimestrale di cultura» (*Dante nei filosofi del Novecento*, a cura di Tolone Oreste), n. LXXVI, fasc. 1, 2021, pp. 3-188; SILVIA ARGURIO, *Dante esoterico e Dante essoterico nella Parigi di fine Ottocento: i Saloni della Rose Croix e la statua di Dante di Jean-Paul Aubé*, in «Dante e l'arte», n. 10, 2023, pp. 91-106. Finally, the doctoral dissertation of SERGIO SCARTOZZI, *Letteratura italiana e «scienze occulte» tra fin de siècle e primo Novecento*, Relatore prof. Francesco Zambon, Dottorato di Ricerca in Le Forme del Testo, Curriculum: Linguistica, Filologia e Critica, Ciclo XXX, Università degli Studi di Trento, 2017, available at: http://eprints-phd.biblio.unitn.it/3096/1/SCARTOZZI_Letteratura_italiana_e_scienze_occulte_tra_fin_de_si%C3%A8cle_e_primo_Novecento.pdf (last accessed 14/05/2025).

[244] «diritta via», *If*. I, v. 3.

[245] «Egregio dottore, io ho compreso l'amico scomparso e la ringrazio! Qualche anno fa, nella medesima situazione di Weininger, consideravo di andarmene e avevo scritto nel mio *Diario*: perché mai? Catone s'è suicidato quando

illustrious example within the history of theatre to trace a line, which will act as a guideline, to better understand the theatrical reception of Dante in the twentieth century.

In this era, unlike this specific case, perhaps almost unique for its declared operation among the great interpreters of European theatre, Dante is almost never directly mentioned on stage, but echoes of his thought and poetics are often presented, elaborated through the personal gaze of artists and directors, often in narrative scripts that serve as premises for the dramaturgical staging. If the European scene is also closely connected with Dante's work, one observes how foreign artists seek above all to come into contact with his poetics, finding a communion of intentions, or openly taking sides against his cumbersome figure as a classic.

Naturally, even in this process of re-elaboration, Italy assumes a privileged position, although still detaching itself with difficulty from the nationalist drive that binds it to the figure of its immortal artist. Below, therefore, are some examples of great interpreters of 20th-century cultural and artistic activity that best identify the collective interest in the works of Dante, particularly in his *Comedy*.

Suffice it to think of Eastern Europe, in which Dante became the example, the author par excellence to whom to refer in order to breathe life into the revolution underway, which received the impulses of the Romantic era later than the rest of Europe. As it had been previously for Italy at the time of the wars of the Risorgimento, so too the artists and intellectuals of the Russian Empire saw in Dante the example to follow and the figure with

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ha capito di non potersi tenere aldi sopra della melma del peccato. Ecco perché poi è stato assolto da Dante (*Inferno*). Io (August Strindberg) cado, pur non volendo cadere, ragion per cui … crac! Stavo per risalire la china e una donna m'ha fatto precipitare… In ogni caso, ho continuato a vivere perché ho creduto di capire che la nostra unione con la donna Spirito della Terra è un sacrificio, un dovere, una prova. Non si ha il diritto di vivere quaggiù come dèi: si deve procedere nel fango e tuttavia tenersi puri ecc. Pensi un po' a Maeterlinck! Proprio la stesa cosa! Si librava altissimo al di sopra della materia (*Le Trèsor des humbles*), ma è sopraggiunto lo Spirito della Terra nudo per esibirlo ed esibirsi assieme! Non è forse tragico! Sposatosi, Lutero scrisse a un amico: "Sposarmi? È incredibile! Me ne vergogno! Ma pare che nostro Signore voglia deridermi". Mi mandi pure la biografia [di Weininger] e tutto il resto. – Schering, comunicandomi il suicidio, mi ha scritto: "Weininger ha suggellato la sua fede con la morte". È vero. Stavo per fare la stessa cosa anch'io negli anni Ottanta; solo con la mia "scoperta". Non un punto di vista, ma una vera e propria scoperta, e anche Weininger era uno "scopritore". Il nuovo secolo sembra portare verità nuove; la visione zoologica del mondo è finita nella psicologia veterinaria. Noi che abbiamo aspirazioni, ricominciamo a cercare un'anima immortale, ecco perché siam qualificati religiosi. Ed io in effetti lo sono, anche se non posso aderire a una religione confessionale. Sicché, in mancanza di meglio, mi posso definire un "libero pensatore cristiano"! Il suo lontano sconosciuto amico August Strindberg», AUGUST STRINDBERG, *Lettera 131. A Artur Gerber (Stoccolma, 22 ottobre 1903)*, in AUGUST STRINDBERG, *Vita attraverso le lettere*, a cura di Franco Perrelli, Genova, Costa&Nolan, 1999, pp. 333-334. See also the description part concerning the 'hellish' period, in AUGUST STRINDBERG, *Vita attraverso le lettere*, cit., pp. 255-263. See also AUGUST STRINDBERG, *Inferno*, traduzione di Luciano Codignola, riveduta sul testo francese originale, in AUGUST STRINDBERG, *Romanzi e racconti*, vol. 1 (*Il ciclo autobiografico*, a cura di Ludovica Koch) Milano, Mondadori, 1991, pp. 687-866; AUGUST STRINDBERG, *Verso Damasco*, tradotto dallo svedese da Luciano Codignola e Mady Obolensky, Milano, Adelphi, 1974; AUGUST STRINDBERG, *Inferno. Inferno, Leggende, Giacobbe lotta*, a cura e con un saggio di Luciano Codignola, Milano, Adelphi, 1972; FRANCO PERRELLI, *Strindberg: scritti sul teatro*, Imola, Cue Press, 2016.

whom they could identify, precisely because of his exile and his irreducible attachment to his own ideals; not least, also because of the love component present in his lyrics.

From Osip Mandel'štam, with his *Conversation on Dante*[246], to the poems of Anna Achmatova and the artist Vladimir Vladimirovič Majakovsky (1893-1930): the influence of Dante's works and the use of the figure of the Poet are no longer circumscribable to the world of literature alone. The texts that these authors wrote in delicate years for the fate of their country and of the people who had awakened to the common cause of independence (and later to the one on resisting Stalinism) belonged to that same rebellious strand that had guided Italian artists and patriots during the *Risorgimento*: Dante as a symbol did not go unnoticed.

Renewing and extending that 19th-century reception that had previously taken place in English culture with poets such as Shelley, Byron, Keats, Coleridge, Wordsworth and Blake[247], came T.S Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) and his theory of the objective correlative[248], and Ezra Pound's studies and hypotheses. In the latter, Dante is described as the *Everyman*, identifying in the poet and his journey the experience enclosed in the journey of knowledge and inner awareness in which every human being can come to recognise her/himself, an identification with the whole of humanity in the journey of life:

> Thus the Commedia is, in the literal sense, a description of Dante's vision of a journey through the realms inhabited by the spirit of men after death; in a further sense it is the journey of Dante's intelligence through the states of mind wherein dwell all sorts and conditions of men before death; beyond this, Dante or Dante's intelligence may come to mean "Everyman" or "Mankind", whereat his journey becomes a symbol of mankind's struggle upward out of ignorance into the clear light of philosophy. In the second sense I give here, the journey is Dante's own

[246] Reference is made to the Italian version of the Russian text, OSIP MANDEL'ŠTAM, *Conversazione su Dante*, a cura di Remo Faccani, Genova, il nuovo melangolo s.r.l., 2021[3][il melangolo s.r.l., 1994[1]; ed. russa OSIP MANDEL'ŠTAM, *Razgovor o Dante*, Moskva, Iskusstvo, 1967]. The Russian author's text was published in the same year in Italy, See OSIP MANDEL'ŠTAM, *La quarta prosa: sulla poesia, discorso su Dante, viaggio in Armenia*, presentazione di A. M. Ripellino, Bari, De Donato, 1967. For further study see also the essays: KRISTINA LANDA, *"Congiungendo L'incongiungibile". Le citazioni della "Commedia" nella "Conversazione su Dante"*, in «Parole Rubate/Purloined Letters», n. 26 dicembre, 2022, pp. 81-102; EMMANUELE RIU, *Ascoltando Dante: il caso di Osip Mandel'štam*, in JOANNA SZYMANOWSKA E IZABELA NAPIÓRKOWSKA (a cura di), *Il Dante dei moderni: la Commedia dall'Ottocento a oggi. Saggi critici*, cit., pp. 289-304. Necessary for a minimal understanding of Dante's reception in Russia, or in Russian-speaking countries, are the texts: MICHAIL ILLARIONOVIČ GOLENIŠČEV-KUTUZOV, *Dante nella cultura sovietica*, in VITTORE BRANCA, ETTORE CACCIA (a cura di), *Dante nel mondo. Raccolta di studi promossa dall'Associazione internazionale per gli studi di lingua e di letteratura italiana*, cit., pp. 583-605; MICHELE COLUCCI, *Tra Dante e Majakovskij. Saggi di letterature comparate slavo-romanze*, introduzione e cura di Rita Giuliani, Roma, Carocci, 2007.

[247] See JULIA STRAUB, *The Transatlantic Dante in the Nineteenth Century: Literary Authority and Reception Histories*, cit.

[248] See ANDREW THOMPSON, *George Eliot and Italy*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 1997; PAUL DOUGLASS (edited by), *T. S. Eliot, Dante and the idea of Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011; DANIELA CASELLI, *Modernist Dante*, in MANUELE GRAGNOLATI, ELENA LOMBARDI, FRANCESCA SOUTHERDEN (edited by), *The Oxford Handbook of Dante*, cit., pp. 634-650; MARCO CANANI, *Cammei danteschi: George Eliot e la lingua della Commedia*, in EMILIA PERASSI, SIMONE FERRARI, ALICE NAGINI (a cura di), *Dante Nelle Letterature Straniere*, cit., pp. 111-123; RINO CAPUTO, *4. "Easier to read": poeti nordamenricani critici di Dante*, in RINO CAPUTO, *Il Pane Orzato. Saggi di lettura intorno all'opera di Dante Alighieri*, cit., pp. 103-117.

mental and spiritual development. In a fourth sense, the Commedia is an expression of the laws of eternal justice; "il contrappasso", the counterpass, as Bertran calls it or the law of Karma, if we are to use an Oriental term[249].

As we have already pointed out in the previous chapters, English literature and culture at large benefited from intense and careful research and dissemination of Dante and his works. The literary outcomes of this cultural climate irretrievably influenced playwrights and artists, as would happen later with the Irish James Joyce and Samuel Beckett. In the prose of the former, but above all in the theatre of the latter, we also pass through Dante's poetry, of which Beckett is a fine reader from a young age. Far from this study, however, is to establish all the occurrences of Dante in their conspicuous productions, in which echoes or strong contaminations with episodes and specific characters can be found[250].

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[249] EZRA POUND, *The Spirit of Romance,* Connecticut/Ireland, New Directions Books, 1952 [New York, Laughlin, 1929], pp. 118-165 (*Dante*), more specifically p. 127. For an edition of the same in Italian, see EZRA POUND, *Dante dalle carte Scheiwiller*, a cura di Corrado Bologna e Lorenzo Fabiani, Venezia, Marsilio, 2015, p. 36.

[250] See HOWARD HELSINGER, *Joyce and Dante*, in «ELH», vol. 35, n. 4 December, 1968, pp. 591-605; CAROLE SLADE, *The Dantean Journey through Dublin*, in «Modern Language Studies», vol. 6, n. 1 Spring, 1976, pp. 12-21; MARY T. REYNOLDS, *Joyce and Dante: the shaping imagination*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1981; FRITZ SENN, *James Joyce's "Ulysses": Hell, Purgatory, Heaven in "Wandering Rocks"*, in «Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies (HJEAS)», vol. 19, n. 2 Fall, 2013, pp. 323-328; JAMES ROBINSON, *Joyce's Dante Exile, Memory, and Community*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2016; MICHAEL ROBINSON, *From purgatory to inferno: Beckett and Dante revisited*, in «Journal of Beckett Studies», n. 5 Autumn, 1979, pp. 69-82; MARIA GEMMA PARNISARI, *Ombre dantesche nell'opera di Samuel Beckett*, in «Études de Lettres: revue de la Faculté des lettres de l'Université de Lausanne», vol. 1, fasc. 1, 1978, pp. 137-144; DANIELA CASELLI, *"L'andar su che porta?": Dante nel primo Beckett*, in «The Italianist», vol. 18, n. 1, 1998, pp. 130-154; JEAN-PIERRE FERRINI, *Dante et Beckett*, preface de Jacqueline Risset, Paris, Hermann, 2003; TIZIANA INGRAVALLO, *Primo Beckett: da DANTE…BRUNO.VICO..JOYCE a MORE PRICKS THAN KICKS*, Bari, Edizioni Dal Sud, 2004; ANTHONY CORDINGLEY, *KEEPING THEIR DISTANCE: Beckett and Borges Writing after Joyce*, in «Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui», vol. 14, fasc.1 December, 2004, pp. 131-146; EMILIA DI ROCCO, *Beckett e Dante*, in «Strumenti critici», a. XX, fasc. 3 settembre, 2005, pp. 403-422; DANIELA CASELLI, *Beckett's Dantes: Intertextuality in the Fiction and Criticism*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2006; DIRK VAN HULLE, *Undoing Dante: Samuel Beckett's Poetics from a Textual Perspective*, in «Text», vol. 16, 2006, pp. 87-95; DANIELA CASELLI, *Dante, Beckett and the Archive*, in «COSMO: Comparative Studies in Modernism», n. 5, 2014, pp. 29–45; FABIOLA NOTARI, *Ritorni danteschi e rielaborazione delle tre cantiche in T. S. Eliot, Samuel Beckett, Ezra Pound. Semplice nostalgia o straordinaria modernità del Sommo Poeta?*, in «KEPOS», vol. 1, 2021, pp. 1-35; RONALD DE ROOY, *'Il poeta che parla ai poeti': Elementi danteschi nella poesia italiana e anglosassone del secondo Novecento*, Firenze, Franco Cesati, 2003. See also the doctoral theses of RENATA SPERANDIO, *Dantean Reverberations: four readers of Dante in the Twentieth Century. A study on the Dantes of Primo Levi, Edoardo Sanguineti, Samuel Beckett and Seamus Heaney*, Department of Italian Studies, School of Humanities, University of Birmingham, 2009, available at: https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/761/1/Sperandio10PhD.pdf (last accessed 14/05/2025); TOMMASO GENNARO, *«La traccia dell'addio delle cose». L'Europa postbellica e il caso Beckett*, Relatrice Prof.ssa Camilla Miglio, Dottorato in Scienze del testo, curriculum Studi interculturali, Ciclo XXIX, Università Sapienza di Roma, 2017, disponibile al sito: https://iris.uniroma1.it/retrieve/e3835316-8e66-15e8-e053-a505fe0a3de9/Tesi%20dottorato%20Gennaro (last accessed 14/05/2025), then merged into the volume TOMMASO GENNARO, *La traccia dell'addio delle cose. Macerie urbane, umane e culturali nel secondo dopoguerra*, Roma, Sapienza University Press, 2017; JOHN PILLING, *Beckett and Italian Literature (after Dante)*, in DANIELA GUARDAMAGNA, ROSSANA M. SEBELLIN (editors), *The Tragic Comedy of Samuel Beckett*, Proceeding of the conference *Beckett in Rome* (17-19 April 2008, Università Roma Tor Vergata), Bari, Laterza, 2009, pp. 5-10; DANIELA CASELLI, *The Politics of Reading Dante in Beckett's Mercier and/et Camier and "The Calmative" / "Le calmant"*, in DANIELA GUARDAMAGNA, ROSSANA M. SEBELLIN (editors), *The Tragic Comedy of Samuel Beckett*, Proceeding of the conference *Beckett in Rome* (17-19 April 2008, Università Roma Tor Vergata), cit., pp. 20-35. A further food for thought, to which we will return later, is the organic influence between Beckett and

Returning to observe how Dante's poetics is received in theatre, we must once again turn our attention to the first decade of the 20th century, i.e. to the time when all the avant-gardes and new currents of thought confront tradition. An important piece of evidence comes from the German-speaking countries, where new theories on staging and directing were in full swing. In the same period that marked the blossoming of the artistic reception of Dante for Strindberg, it is essential to mention Rudolph Steiner (1861-1925), the theosophist and reformer, who nurtured a particular interest both in theatre and Dante[251]. Following his Berlin period, in which he approached theatre as a critic, the creator of eurythmy founded the *Goetheanum* in Dornach, Switzerland, as the headquarters of the Anthroposophical Society and a centre for research and dissemination of Anthroposophy. In his theatrical practice, Steiner brings the focus back to the actor's attentive body but also to a complete training practice based on *Sprachgestaltung*, meditation, the development of a creative imagination and a more conscious scenic realisation on the part of the artist. In Steiner's conception, this exercise develops an artist who is a conduit between the spiritual, astral world and the purely physical world and who, through eurythmic speech and movement, becomes a fundamental medium for accompanying the audience in a dialogue between the micro and macrocosm[252].

Kantor, which will develop repercussions in the poetics of the companies of the second half of the century, which will be analysed in the next chapter, hence: GABRIELE FRASCA, *Lo spopolatoio. Beckett con Dante e Cantor*, Napoli, Edizioni D'If, 2014; TOMMASO GENNARO, LUIGI MARINELLI, *«Una sorta di predecessore»: Kantor e Beckett*, in LUIGI MARINELLI, VALENTINA VALENTINI E ANDREA VECCHIA (a cura di), *Politica dell'arte, politica della vita. Tadeusz Kantor fra teatro, arti visive e letteratura*, Roma, Lithos, 2018, pp. 111-124.

[251] The main reference texts on *Sprachgestaltung*, or Art of the Word, are the following: RUDOLF STEINER, MARIE STEINER VON SIVERS, *Sprachgestaltung und dramatische Kunst*, Dornach, Philosophisch-Antroposophischer Verlag, 1926 [trad. ita. RUDOLF STEINER, MARIE STEINER VON SIVERS, *Arte della Parola e Arte Drammatica*, Milano, Editrice Antroposofica, 1967; *Sprachgestaltung e arte drammatica*, Milano, Editrice Antroposofica, 1990; *Regia e arte drammatica*, Milano, Editrice Antroposofica, 1994]; RUDOLF STEINER, MARIE STEINER VON SIVERS, *Die Kunst der Rezitation und Deklamation*, Dornach, Philosophisch-Antroposophischer Verlag, 1928; RUDOLF STEINER, MARIE STEINER VON SIVERS, *Methodik und Wesen der Sprachgestaltung*, Dornach, Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1975 [trad. ingl. *Creative Speech. The formative Process of the Spoken Word*, translated by Winifred Budgett, Nancy Hummel, Maisie Jones, London, Rudolf Steiner Press, 1978]; RUDOLF STEINER, MARIE STEINER VON SIVERS, *Poetry and the Art of Speech*, London, London School of Speech Formation, Rudolf Steiner House, 1981. Also see: HELLA WIESBERGER, *Marie Steiner von Sivers. Ein Leben für die Antroposophie*, Dornach, Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1988; MARIE STEINER, *Ihr Weg zur Erneuerung der Buhnenkunst durch die Antroposophie. Eine Dokumentation*, Dornach, Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1973. Regarding Steiner's texts dedicated to Dante, read: RUDOLF STEINER, WILLY SCHWARZ, *La visione divina di Dante. Studi su Dante*, Milano, Editrice Antroposofica, 2021; WILLY SCHWARZ, *Studi su Dante e spunti di storia del cristianesimo*, Milano, Editrice antroposofica, 1982; WILLY SCHWARZ, *Si trovano in Dante echi delle opinioni teologiche di Pietro Olivi? Dante e i templari*, Firenze, Sansoni, 1966; WILLY SCHWARZ, *Dante e l'interpretazione della sua opera*, Milano, L'Editrice scientifica, 1961.

[252] See RUDOLF STEINER, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Dramaturgie 1889-1900*, Dornach, Verlag der Rudolf Steiner–Nachlassverwaltung, 1960. For a more in-depth look at Steiner's method on the preparation of the actor and the type of spiritual work to be undertaken in order to be able to deal with a staging that took anthroposophical principles into account, see: MONICA CRISTINI, *Rudolf Steiner e il teatro. Euritmia: una via antroposofica alla scena contemporanea*, Roma, Bulzoni, 2008; MONICA CRISTINI, *Euritmia. Quando la spiritualità apre uno spiraglio all'emozione*, in «Danza e Ricerca. Laboratorio di studi, scritture, visioni», a. III, n. 1, 2011, pp. 11-40; MONICA CRISTINI, *Rudolf Steiner al lavoro con l'attore: l'immaginazione creativa come chiave dello studio del*

From an initial examination of Steiner's writings translated mainly by one of his disciples, the physician Willy Schwarz, it emerges how the conduit to Florentine's poetry had been provided in the first place by his long and intense study of Goethe's works, both in his artistic and more scientific works; subsequently, constituting a further artistic and spiritual crossing, was his relationship and dialogue with the actress and later wife Marie von Sivers. Thanks to her, who knew Italian perfectly and loved Italian culture, Steiner travelled frequently in Italy, came into contact with first-rate studies in the field of Dante of the time, such as those of Giovanni Pascoli and Giosuè Carducci, and took possession of the *Commedia*. The object of interest for the scholar is the very nature of Dante's thought, for which he takes up all the Rosicrucian influence and the esoteric interpretations that see in his poetry the desire to leave a key, especially in the metaphors of the eagle and the cross, in the figure of the woman/nature as a medium to universal wisdom, for those initiates who could grasp the cryptic sapiential message in the folds of the overlapping meanings.

In addition to the doctrinal/initiative value, Steiner and his wife included Dante and his works in a list of authors whose texts were particularly suitable for *Sprachgestaltung* and eurythmy exercises[253]. Monica Cristini emphasises how the method of preparation taught at the Gotheanum was a true spiritual experience that formed interpreters who were aware not only of the modalities but also of the repercussions that their message had to bring into society.

It is worth noting that in the first Italian tour of the eurythmists, Dante's texts were chosen as part of a larger anthology of pieces to be performed on stage, in order to make the Italian public appreciate this new form of spiritual art along with texts from its literary canon. After the first experiments in Switzerland and Germany, eurythmy was first presented on stage in Milan in front of a small audience of invited guests, where, among Mozart, Beethoven,

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personaggio, in «Acting Archives Review», a. II, n. 4 novembre, 2012, pp. 36-67; RUDOLF STEINER, *L'esoterismo dell'attore*, traduzione di Monica Cristini e Sabine Zubeck, in «Acting Archives Review», a. II, n. 4 novembre, 2012, pp. 68-80; MONICA CRISTINI, *Psychological Gesture, Concentration and Meditation on character development with Rudolf Steiner and Michael Chekhov*, in «Medicina nei secoli: Journal of History of Medicine and Medical Humanities», vol. 31, n. 2, 2019, pp. 335-354; MONICA CRISTINI, *Spiritualità e teatro: elementi antroposofici per la Tecnica dell'attore*, in «Culture Teatrali», n. 23, 2014, pp. 77 - 86.

[253] In the list of names given, dating back to dramatic actions by the eurythmists between 1924 and 1948, we find not only Dante Alighieri, but also authors who in the previous chapters have been associated, and not a little, with Dante's reception and reworking in the various works of literature, such as Carlyle, Novalis, Rossetti, Strindberg and Tieck, as well as the ever-present Goethe. One clarification, for which we again thank Monica Cristini, concerns Steiner's and his wife's understanding of poets: the poet is also a conduit between the higher and lower worlds, and through his choice of words he translates and makes clear a spiritual message. Steiner, with his own additional sensitivity, understands and translates the spirituality contained in these poems by condensing it into syllables, tones and rhythms and, through sound in eurythmic movement, makes the spirituality inherent in the poets' words accessible to the public. See MARIE STEINER. *Ihr Weg zur Erneuerung der Buhnenkunst durch die Anthroposophie. Eine Dokumentation*, cit., pp. 142-143.

Lafontaine, Shakespeare and Carducci, a movement exercise was proposed on the sonnet from the *Vita Nova*, whose *incipit* is «Such sweet decorum and such gentle grace»[254]. Following the first performance in front of a large audience in Turin in January 1930, critics found it difficult to connect this new art form to the innate sensuality of the dancers' bodies, resembling only partially the free dance of Isadora Duncan, Mary Wigman or Rudolf von Laban:

Abbiamo visto tradurre in movimento le lettere dell'alfabeto, le vocali e le consonanti: abbiamo assistito alla trasformazione plastica delle note musicali ed alla realizzazione visiva di frasi poetiche e di accordi sinfonici; abbiamo assistito alla rappresentazione mimica di versi di Dante, di Leopardi, di Carducci e alla materializzazione estetica di un brano di Bach. Tutto ciò è stato molto interessante, molto bello, molto curioso, ma il soffio della fantasia e della poesia non ha mai dato calore umano alla fatica delle iniziate all'arte del movimento[255].

We have seen the letters of the alphabet, vowels and consonants translated into movement: we have witnessed the plastic transformation of musical notes and the visual realisation of poetic phrases and symphonic chords; we have witnessed the mimic representation of verses by Dante, Leopardi, Carducci and the aesthetic materialisation of a piece by Bach. All of this was very interesting, very beautiful, very curious, but the breath of imagination and poetry never gave human warmth to the efforts of the initiates into the art of movement.

Another journalist, in San Remo in 1930, expresses a different opinion: he believes that the times are propitious for a revival of dance and encourages with meritorious words the detached presence of the eurythmists, wrapped in simple tunics with coloured drapes, associating their deportment with the hieraticism of cult priestesses:

Un'arte sensuale come quella della danza, qui esprime solo se stessa, come il suono esprime solo se stesso, di là e di qua di ogni limite. Non è più l'economicità, l'empiricità del fatto sessuale, più o meno simbolizzato e imperante nelle contorsioni dei danzatori: ma è la tendenza del corpo, e quindi dell'uomo che è tutto nel suo corpo, a ritrovare le sue grandi parentele obliate, a rinnovare i connubi cosmici con la fiamma, con l'acqua, con l'aria, con la terra, come fu già nell'arte antica, che più della nostra viveva in comunicazione con gli elementi[256].

A sensual art such as dance here expresses only itself, just as sound expresses only itself, beyond and beyond all limits. It is no longer the cheapness, the empirical nature of the sexual fact, more or less symbolised and prevailing in the contortions of the dancers: but it is the tendency of the body, and therefore of man who is all in his body, to rediscover his great forgotten kinship, to renew the cosmic union with flame, with water, with air, with the earth, as was already the case in ancient art, which more than ours lived in communication with the elements.

The codification of how to set up the work on word and sound, the art of conscious gesture in the connection between micro and macrocosm, internal and external, the sensitivity to be acquired in approaching the text of the author of reference, pushed Steiner and his disciples to build a new artistic methodology that was not limited to the world of art, but

[254] See the article *Danze euritmiche al Filodrammatici*, in «Corriere della Sera», 13 gennaio 1926, in MONICA CRISTINI, *Rudolf Steiner e il teatro. Euritmia: una via antroposofica alla scena contemporanea*, cit., p. 293. Dante's sonnet «Tanto gentile e tanto onesta pare» is found in *Vita Nova*, Musa/DOL ch. XXVI.
[255] See article reviewing the performance held in Turin on 27/01/1930, signed Marin, *Arte e scienza dei movimenti nella scuola di "Euritmia" del "Goetheanum"*, in «Gazzetta del popolo», 28 gennaio 1930, in MONICA CRISTINI, *Rudolf Steiner e il teatro. Euritmia: una via antroposofica alla scena contemporanea*, cit., pp. 294-295.
[256] See GIOVANNI CAVICCHIOLI, *EURITMIA*, in «Comoedia», a. XII- 15 febbraio/15 marzo, 1930, in MONICA CRISTINI, *Rudolf Steiner e il teatro. Euritmia: una via antroposofica alla scena contemporanea*, cit., pp. 296-297.

founded a true pedagogical educational line that is still operative today[257]. In the few but decisive theatrical adaptations of Goethe's works and personal writings by the naturalised Swiss master, a singular decision emerges in working on the actor, as the interpreter of a movement of inner awareness, and as a conduit for higher knowledge, without neglecting a marked attention to the *mise en scene*, especially with regard to lighting and set design.

As had already been possible to observe in the figure of Stanislavsky and his codified training method for the actor in the transition between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, thanks also to his frequentation of great Italian actors who were engaged in *saying Dante*, in Steiner's example too we witness a new way of being on stage, in which Dante's poetry is associated in a theoretical way with its use. Therefore, it is perhaps more correct to observe how Dante, with the exception of Strindberg, in the European theatrical reception, passes through a sustained and hidden game of cross-references, becoming present within the more theoretical compartment of theatrical theories, awaiting the new, more accomplished results of application in the second half of the century.

The relevance of German theorists and artists in Italy had a great influence on the artistic production of the new Kingdom of Italy: it suffices to observe these constant contacts, exchanges and travels, which were effective and productive in both directions, as attested to by the important frequentation of Dante by the German playwright and writer Bertold Brecht, so influential in Italian theatre directing, whose Dantean reception is still to be explored in depth[258].

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[257] What comes about with Steiner is a constant reworking by artists and theorists of the art of gesture and speech, which is not limited to artistic creation but is intended to be a philosophy of life. Therefore, to this day his teachings are still carried on, eurythmy practices are active, and school systems based on Steiner's pedagogical theories have sprung up that support the training of young people all over the world. A comparison, albeit distant in time, can be made by comparing what Elena Randi writes about Pina Bausch's Tanztheater with these early experiments and then practices of Steiner's eurythmy: «C'è, in compenso, la presenza di gesto, parola e musica, secondo una triade un po' diversa ma presumibilmente derivata dal *Tanz-Ton-Wort* (danza-suono-parola) su cui negli anni Dieci riflette Laban ereditandola con modifiche importanti dal pensiero di Wagner»/«There is, on the other hand, the presence of gesture, word and music, according to a triad that is somewhat different but presumably derived from the *Tanz-Ton-Wort* (dance-sound-word) on which Laban reflected in the 1910s, inheriting it with important modifications from Wagner's thought», See ELENA , *Il Tanztheater di Pina Bausch*, in «Scritture della performance», n. 2, fasc. 2, 2013, pp. 78-104. The references to which the essay refers can be found in footnote 6 of the essay: «il *Prospectus: Laban courses for dance, sound, speech*, un breve scritto contenente gli intenti della scuola di Laban databile alla metà degli anni Dieci, forse steso da Suzanne Perrottet, in Dick McCaw (edited by), *The Laban Sourcebook*, Routledge, London 2011, p. 27; See inoltre la lettera di Laban del 9 maggio 1914 all'amico e collaboratore Hans Brandenburg, in parte riportata in Dick McCaw (edited by), op. cit., pp. 23-24».

[258] See MARCO CASTELLARI, *«Dante schwenkt / Den dürren hintern»: classico, poesia ed esilio in Bertolt Brecht*, in EMILIA PERASSI, SIMONE FERRARI, ALICE NAGINI (Sous la direction de), *Dante nelle letterature straniere. Dialoghi e percorsi*, cit., pp. 189-215. See also: FRANCESCA TUCCI, *"Il reciproco ereditarsi dei poeti". Dante e Brecht*, in «Studi Germanici», vol. XLVIII, n. 1-3, 2010, pp. 135-154; FRANCESCO GIUSTI, *Dante dopo Brecht: gesti lirici e modalità comunicative*, in «Rivista di letteratura italiana», vol. XXXIX, n. 3, 2021, pp. 151-161; EVA HÖLTER, *«Der Dichter der Hölle und des Exils». Historische und systematische Profile der deutschsprachigen*

As we have seen, the new Kingdom of Italy has its own way of adapting and re-elaborating Dante's works, linking him to the building of a national identity. In this perspective, one could not fail to mention the constant presence/absence of Dante within the production of a giant of twentieth-century European theatre, namely the Sicilian Luigi Pirandello. Recalling his German training in Bonn, Pirandello, like many intellectuals of his time, experienced more this opening of frontiers, of hybridisation of the gaze, while always maintaining his own identity confirmed by his endless artistic production. As Michela Mastrodonato's studies suggest[259], Dante is a constant and evocative presence in Pirandello's production. Besides, the former is intentionally dealt with by the latter in his role of critic and member of the Italian academic debate, with essays on humour, on the comic operating in the cantos of the so-called Malebolge[260], where Dante finds himself having to rely on a group of devils, the Malebranche[261], and as Ferrigni recalls:

Dante-Rezeption, Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 2002, pp. 216-219 and 280-287; FRANCESCO GIUSTI, *Dante dopo Brecht: gesti lirici e modalità comunicative*, in «Rivista di Letteratura italiana», a. XXXIX, n. 3 (*Dante nella poesia del Novecento e dei primi anni del nuovo millennio I*, a cura di Donato Pirovano, Clara Allasia), 2021, pp. 151-161; WOLFANG PÖCKL, *Bert Brecht und Dante*, in «Deutsches Dante-Jahrbuch», vol. LXIII, n. 1, 1988, pp. 75-86.

[259] See MICHELA MASTRODONATO, *Pirandello e l'ossessione dantesca. Uno, nessuno e centomila, riscrittura allegorica della Commedia*, Roma, Carocci, 2021; MICHELA MASTRODONATO, *Pirandello e il naso storto di Dante. Uno, nessuno e centomila: riscrittura allegorica della Commedia*, in «Rivista di Letteratura italiana», vol. XXXVIII, fasc. 3, 2020, pp. 91-107.

[260] Malebolge is the name given to the eighth circle of *Hell*, in which the fraudulent are punished. As with Cocito, the frozen infernal lake that gives its name to the entire ninth circle, Malebolge subtends the entire eighth circle, subdivided into ten bolge by concentric moats, surrounded by walls and spanned by rock bridges. Inside the ditches the damned are punished, divided according to their guilt (I pimps and seducers; II flatterers; III simoniacs; IV soothsayers; V barters; VI hypocrites; VII thieves; VIII fraudulent councillors; IX sowers of discord; X forgers). The cantos referring to the damned of Malebolge range from *If*. XVII to *If*. XXX.

[261] See LUIGI PIRANDELLO, *Scritti danteschi*, Milano, Luni, 2021; LUIGI PIRANDELLO, *Per uno studio sul verso di Dante*, in «Nuova Antologia», 1° novembre 1907; LUIGI PIRANDELLO, *Poscritta*, in «La Vita letteraria», vol. IV, n. 42, 1907, poi confluito in LUIGI PIRANDELLO, *Arte e scienza*, Roma, Modes, 1908; LUIGI PIRANDELLO, *La commedia dei diavoli e la tragedia di Dante*, in «Rivista d'Italia», settembre 1918, a seguito di una *lectura Dantis* tenuta a Orsanmichele il 3 febbraio 1916; LUIGI PIRANDELLO, *La poesia di Dante*, in «L'Idea nazionale», 14 settembre 1921. Previously published in the *Scritti danteschi* section of the volume LUIGI PIRANDELLO, *Saggi*, a cura di Manlio Lo Vecchio Musti, Milano, Mondadori, 1939 and now also available in LUIGI PIRANDELLO, *Scritti danteschi*, Milano, Luni, 2021. In fact, Dante is quoted in the essay *Sull'Umorismo*, but only to say that his work «dà mirabili esempi di ironia nel senso retorico della parola: ma né qui, né in altro punto, del resto, della *Comedia*, non è traccia d'umorismo»/«gives admirable examples of irony in the rhetorical sense of the word: but neither here nor elsewhere in the *Comedia* is there any trace of humour», See LUIGI PIRANDELLO, *Sull'Umorismo*, Firenze, Luigi Battistelli, 1920, p. 17 [Lanciano, Carabba, 1908[1]]. See also the essays: ERNESTO G. CASERTA, *Croce, Pirandello e il problema estetico*, in «Italica», vol. 51, n. 1 Spring, 1974, pp. 20-42; OLGA RAGUSA, *Nota su "L'umorismo" di Luigi Pirandello*, in «Italianistica: Rivista di letteratura italiana», vol. 17, n. 1 gennaio/aprile, 1988, pp. 139-144; MASSIMO LUCARELLI, *Exercices de lecture sur trois pièces de Luigi Pirandello à la lumière du binôme réalité/fiction*, in CÉLINE FRIGAU MANNING (sous la direction), *Pirandello ou la chambre d'échos. Un théâtre et ses intertextes*, Paris, Garnier, pp. 111-132. On the comedy of Malebolge, and the more literary studies that take Pirandello's essays into consideration, see: FEDERICO SAVIOTTI, *Dante, i diavoli e l'ira di Virgilio*, in «Carte Romanze», vol. 2, n. 1, 2014, pp. 211-253; PAOLO PIZZIMENTO, *I diavoli e Dante: paura, identità e "sconfinamenti"*, in «Comparatismi», n.8, 2023, pp. 332-349; MARIO PETRUCCIANI, *L'uomo, la bestia e la « buffa » in Malebolge*, in «Lettere Italiane», vol. 20, n. 1 gennaio-marzo, 1968, pp. 3-16; GIAMBATTISTA SALINARI, *Il*

è il primo Pirandello a dare una descrizione comica della burla dei diavoli in Malebolge e da lì dà il là a tutti gli studi interdisciplinari tra teatro prettamente detto e letteratura, che possano ben comprendere come in realtà già dal medioevo la figura del diavolo nelle rappresentazioni dei misteri era utilizzata per essere burlata beffata vinta dall'angelo che invece riporta la pace, l'ordine e la salvezza dell'umana gente[262].

Pirandello is the first to give a comic description of the devils' mockery in Malebolge and from there he opened the path for all interdisciplinary studies between theatre and literature, which can well understand how in reality already in the Middle Ages the figure of the devil in the in the staging of mystery plays was used to be mocked defeated by the angel who instead brought peace, order and salvation to human beings.

On the other hand, as Umberto Artioli's work reveals[263], Pirandello's creativity operates by exploiting that co-presence of levels of meaning so dear to the Florentine poet, and the same esoteric matrices, the undercurrent of medieval *visiones*, are detected in his writings, which cannot fail to recall the Poet or a certain investigation of the Florentine at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.

From the way in which the commentary on Dante is set up, not forgetting a jab at the scholarly world of the time, one glimpses a sort of reflection on his own artistic production, the suggestion that Pirandello himself, *alter-Dante auctor*, experiences and places in his gaze on his own literary and dramaturgical works, at various stages, at various levels, being able to interpret that dramaturgical duality that Dante was not allowed, of author and adaptor:

Insomma non pensiamo sempre che ciò che per noi è un punto di partenza per ogni indagine – punto stabile, immutabile, eterno – già fuori del poeta, perché espresso e dunque ormai staccato e liberato da lui, per il poeta viceversa è, a volta a volta, un punto di arrivo, il punto cioè ov'egli a mano a mano è arrivato, *nuovo*, nella trattazione della materia che gli si muove ancora calda e gli si agita dentro nella sua *momentaneità attiva*. E anche a questo non pensiamo sempre: che un poeta può si predisporre la sua materia, ma non sa e non può sapere egli stesso quando la predispone, con quale animo arriverà a essa allorché si farà a trattarla; se il sentimento sarà ancora in lui così vivace da animar questa materia come forse nella prima disposizione aveva creduto di poterla animare e quanto del sentimento ch'egli credeva di poterle dedicare per investirla, inopinatamente possa essere stato preso e accolto da elementi nuovi sorti all'improvviso dalla materia precedente, cosicché ben poco o nulla ormai ne avanzerà per essa, che gli rimarrà perciò vuota davanti, inerte, superflua, se un sentimento nuovo e diverso non sorgerà a investirla e invalorarla[264].

In short, we do not always think that what for us is a point of departure for every investigation - a stable, unchanging, eternal point - already outside the poet, because it is expressed and therefore now detached and freed

comico nella «Divina Commedia», in «Belfagor», vol. 10, n. 6, 1955, pp. 623-641; LAVINIA SPALANCA, *Imago Diaboli. Diavoli e Demòni da Dante a Stradano*, in «Dante. Rivista internazionale di Studi Danteschi», vol. XIV, 2017, pp. 31-43, especially at pp. 33-40.

[262] MARIO FERRIGNI, *Dante e il teatro*, cit., pp. 14-15.

[263] See UMBERTO ARTIOLI, *L'officina segreta di Pirandello*, Bari, Laterza, 1989; UMBERTO ARTIOLI, *Pirandello allegorico. I fantasmi dell'immaginario cristiano*, Bari, Laterza, 2001. Also important are the essays on Artioli's thoughts on Pirandello in ELENA RANDI, *«Da che parte sta il corpo rispetto allo spirito?»*, in «Mimesis Journal. Scritture della performance», n. 4, fasc. 2 (Per ricordare Umberto Artioli), 2015, pp. 5-14; PAOLA DEGLI ESPOSTI, *Una quête inesausta. Itinerario attraverso gli studi di Umberto Artioli*, in «Mimesis Journal. Scritture della performance», n. 4, fasc. 2 (Per ricordare Umberto Artioli), 2015, pp. 15-22; SIMONA BRUNETTI, *Enrico IV ovvero il potere salvifico dell'immaginazione*, in «Mimesis Journal. Scritture della performance», n. 4, fasc. 2 (Per ricordare Umberto Artioli), 2015, pp. 23-32.

[264] LUIGI PIRANDELLO, *La commedia dei diavoli e la tragedia di Dante*, in LUIGI PIRANDELLO, *Scritti danteschi*, cit., pp. 50-51.

from him, for the poet, on the other hand, is a point of arrival, that is, the point where he has gradually arrived, new, in his treatment of the matter that still moves warmly and stirs within him in its active momentariness. And we do not always think about this either: that a poet may predispose his matter, but he does not know and cannot know himself when he predisposes it, with what mind he will arrive at it when he will be treating it; whether the sentiment will still be so lively in him as to animate this matter as perhaps in the first disposition he believed he could animate it, and how much of the sentiment he believed he could dedicate to it in order to invest it, may unexpectedly have been taken up and accepted by new elements that have suddenly arisen from the previous matter, so that little or nothing will now be left over for it, which will therefore remain empty before him, inert, superfluous, if a new and different sentiment does not arise to invest and validate it.

Leaving the Sicilian author, we conclude this brief examination of theorists, reformers and theatre artists who look to Dante as another great of Italian and European theatre. The most famous play that in itself opens and condenses certain 20th-century instances, on which a large number of studies have already focused, is undoubtedly the opera *Francesca da Rimini* written by the poet and playwright Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863-1938) and staged at the Teatro Costanzi in Rome on 9 December 1901. In an ostentatious struggle to claim a theatre of poetry in which to give space to a new mode of expression and in which to uphold the evocative value of poetry, appropriating new spaces and attempting to evoke the primordial festive, all-encompassing value of ancient/classical theatre[265], D'Annunzio decided to write this *play* for the divine Eleonora Duse, his muse and incomparable actress in the international scene of the early 20th century, who for this character followed in the footsteps of the most famous performers Marchionni and Ristori and drew on the great wealth of indications received from the teacher Pezzana. It is not so much the choice of confronting Dante's subject matter, of which the poetic production of the poet from Pescara is strongly innervated, even in the theatre[266], that is singular, as the fact of preferring the theatre as the place in which to virtuously compete with

[265] See UMBERTO ARTIOLI, *Il combattimento invisibile. D'Annunzio tra romanzo e teatro*, Bari, Laterza, 1995; GIOVANNI ISGRÒ, *Sviluppi delle risorse sceniche in Italia. Da D'Annunzio agli anni Trenta*, Roma, Bulzoni, 2009; GIOVANNI ISGRÒ, *D'Annunzio inscenatore e i padri fondatori della rivoluzione del teatro europeo del '900*, in «Rassegna D'Annunziana», a. XXXII, n. 65/66 (Il mondo di d'Annunzio: temi, forme, valori. 40° Convegno Nazionale Di Studi), 2016, pp. LXXIX-LXXXVIII; GIOVANNI ISGRÒ, *D'Annunzio e il teatro fuori dal teatro. La messinscena della Figlia di Iorio al Vittoriale (1927) e della Nave a Venezia (1938)*, in «Archivio d'Annunzio», vol. 4 Ottobre, 2017.

[266] Among those already mentioned are: LAURA MELOSI, *D'Annunzio e il Dante monumentale. Dai carteggi con Olshcki e Passerini con documenti inediti. Parte prima: il progetto e la fuga (1909-1910)*, in La Bibliofilía», vol. 120, n. 1 gennaio-aprile, 2018, pp. 111-142; LAURA MELOSI, *D'Annunzio e il Dante monumentale. Dai carteggi con Olschki e Passerini con documenti inediti. Parte seconda: la stampa e l'epilogo (1911-1922)*, in «La Bibliofilía», vol. 120, n. 2 maggio-agosto, 2018, pp. 279-308; LAURA MELOSI, *D'Annunzio e l'edizione 1911 della Commedia*, Firenze, Olschki, 2019; PIETRO GIBELLINI, *Il Dante di D'Annunzio, erotico ed eroico*, in «*la* Biblioteca di via Senato», n. 1 gennaio, fasc. 1, 2022, pp. 21-28; PIETRO GHIBELLINI, ELENA VALENTINA MAIOLINI (a cura di), *D'Annunzio e Dante. Atti del convegno di studi*, Milano, Silvana, 2023. See also THOMAS PERSICO, *La «ghirlandetta» dannunziana*, in «Sinestesie», vol. XXIV (Numero Speciale: *D'Annunzio e l'innovazione drammaturgica*, premessa di Elena Ledda, saggi introduttivi di Giovanni Isgrò e Carlo Santoli), 2022, pp. 109-118.

Dante's grandiose poem, declaring how in the 20th century the place to give voice to poetry is undoubtedly the theatre.

As with the rest of the poet's dramatic production, this opera was not particularly praised by the public, who found themselves «after a six-hour performance of which they had admired the scenery and costumes, [...] in two vociferous throngs of supporters and protesters»[267], and saw its greatest fortune in the drafting of the libretto for music in Zandonai's operatic version in 1914, performed on the world's major stages up to the present day[268].

Dante for D'Annunzio reflects that form of healthy competition, of poetic agonism between greats that shows its implications not only in the revival of stylistic features and precious words of the poetic tradition but, above all, through a way of contending on an equal footing, from Vate to Vate[269]. If Pirandello could be an *alter Dante auctor*, D'Annunzio, on the other hand, claims that panic ecstasy, that Dionysian and all-encompassing experience of the author who participates in his own new artistic vision, determining himself in this dynamic also *agens.* As Mirella Schino recalls, these were the years in which Italy and its performers were wrongly considered marginal, out of time, and late. Instead, Italian audiences and artists participated in the new, they took it in first person thanks to the tours of the great actors, dancers and directors in Italy (think of Sergej Djagilev's Ballets Russes, Max Reinhardt[270], and Steiner

[267] «dopo sei ore di spettacolo di cui pure aveva ammirato scene e costumi, […] in due schiere vociferanti di sostenitori e contestatori», ISABELLA INNAMORATI, *Punti di svolta: La figlia di Iorio fra trionfi e rovine del teatro italiano di primo Novecento*, in «Sinestesie», vol. XXIV, cit., pp. 133-148, quotation at p. 134.

[268] See ANTONELLA BRAIDA, *Dante's Inferno in the 1900s: From Drama to Film*, in ANTONELLA BRAIDA, LUISA CALÈ (editors), *Dante on View. The reception of Dante in the visual and performing arts*, cit, pp. 39-51; FEDERICA FORTUNATO, IRENE COMISSO (a cura di), *«Meravigliosamente un amor mi distringe». Intorno a Francesca da Rimini di Riccardo Zandonai*, cit.; MARIA PIA PAGANI, *Francesca da Rimini: dal "teatro di poesia" dannunziano al dantismo sulla scena russa*, in «Dante e l'arte», n. 1, 2014, pp. 97-116; PAOLO CASCIO*, Francesca da Rimini: un libretto di Felice Romani, tra Dante e Mazzini*, cit.; VÍCTOR SÁNCHEZ SÁNCHEZ, *Dante en la música española: la Divina Comedia de Conrado del Campo, del poema sinfónico a la ópera*, in «Dante e l'arte», n. 2, 2015, pp. 161-186; DEIRDRE O'GRADY, *Da Dante a Mercadante: Francesca da Rimini voce del belcanto ottocentesco*, in «Dante e l'arte», n. 8, 2021, pp. 183-202; CARLO SANTOLI, *Dante e d'Annunzio. Alcuni esempi di innovazione tra musica, poesia e scena nella Francesca da Rimini*, in «Rivista di Letteratura italiana», a. XXXIX, n. 3 (*Dante nella poesia del Novecento e dei primi anni del nuovo millennio I*, a cura di Donato Pirovano, Clara Allasia), 2021, pp. 89-97.

[269] In this regard, reference is made to Dante's manner of thinly veiled self-definition of himself as the one who will hold the poetic palm, easily discernible in the eleventh canto of Purgatorio, when he converses with the proud, and in the subsequent cantos of the lustful in Purgatorio, where he declares himself to be the only true heir of Stylnovistic poetry.

[270] See ELEONORA EGIZI, *La compagnia dei Balletti Russi di Djagilev in Italia*, in «Teatro e Storia», a. 29, vol. XXII (Dossier: L'anticipo italiano. Fatti, documenti, interpretazioni e testimonianze sul passaggio e sulla ricezione della grande regia in Italia tra il 1911 e il 1934, a cura di Mirella Schino, Carla Arduini, Rosalba De Amicis, Eleonora Egizi, Fabrizio Pompei, Francesca Ponzetti, Noemi Tiberio), 2008, pp. 123-148; CARLA ARDUINI, *La tournée italiana di Max Reinhardt del 1932*, in «Teatro e Storia», a. 29, vol. XXII, cit., pp. 193-212; FEDERICA ROCCHI, *"Ich blieb in Florenz… und ich habe viel erlebt". Intellettuali ebrei-tedeschi nella Firenze degli anni Trenta*, in «LEA - Lingue e letterature d'Oriente e d'Occidente», n. 10, 2021, pp. 279-297; SONIA BELLAVIA, *Max Reinhardt*, Roma, Carocci, 2021.

himself mentioned earlier), but the passage and adherence to these novelties took place through a particular selection:

Questa è l'Italia degli anni Venti: un paese di cultura secolare e di grande modernità. Questa cultura non è solo appannaggio del popolo degli attori, o di qualche artista anomalo. Gli scrittori di teatro sono saggi ed esperti. La critica è competente, e disposta alla discussione. Non è naturalmente disposta, vista la grande tradizione teatrale di cui l'Italia può vantarsi, ad accettare passivamente tutto quel che le arriva dall'estero, ma è curiosa e interessata. Questa è l'Italia[271].

This is Italy in the 1920s: a country of secular culture and great modernity. This culture is not only the prerogative of the actors, or of some anomalous artist. Theatre writers are wise and experienced. Critics are competent, and willing to discuss. It is naturally not willing, given the great theatre tradition that Italy can boast of, to passively accept everything that comes to it from abroad, but it is curious and interested. This is Italy.

If the early twentieth century, in Italy, as in Europe, does not, therefore, let go of the massive creative drive and re-elaboration of Dante and his works, begun in the nineteenth century, continuing and enriching his work with new ideas for theatrical disciplines, one can still speak of filiation and a close relationship of artistic genesis between master and disciple (as we shall see between the theorists and the subsequent adaptations of the second half of the twentieth century), and of direct intergenerational transmission within art families, as regards the still productive exercise of the great actors and their descendants in using and *saying Dante*.

An example on which the critics have not particularly dwelt and which instead constitutes a striking example of this last indication is offered by the case study. *Dante. Tre visioni sceniche* by Maso Salvini. He was the grandson of the already described great actor and patriot Tommaso Salvini, as well as son of his eldest son Gustavo, who was also an actor, company director and first *Paolo* in the above-mentioned D'Annunzio production of *Francesca da Rimini*. The writer and scriptwriter Maso Salvini elaborated these three visions on the basis of the numerous shows inspired by and dedicated to Dante's life, thinking of offering a unique opportunity to his father and his company, devising his own personification of the Poet Vate. As had been the case with his father Tommaso Salvini, the chronicles do not record a particular predilection for declaiming Dante's verses on the part of his son Gustavo Salvini, but it seems clear that the decision to write for him and have him impersonate the character of Dante as the protagonist was a sort of homage to his career, and thus ascribable to that practice now consolidated for great actors of seeing in the recitation of the Poet and his verses a medal to the artist's skill and merit.

The three visions are linked to key moments in Dante's life, elaborating on the character Dante in such a way as to make him utter certain famous verses, as if to arouse in the audience

[271] MIRELLA SCHINO, *Sette punti fermi*, in «Teatro e Storia», a. 29, vol. XXII, cit., pp. 29-39, quotation at p. 31.

that musical memory of the poet's words. And on the musical issue, we could add an even more interesting fact, as Maso Salvini asked the then already famous composer Pietro Mascagni to write a romance for the moment of meeting between Dante and the composer Casella, an episode full of musicality in the *Commedia*[272]. As reported by the «Corriere della Sera», a dress rehearsal was given in Florence at the Teatro Niccolini in January 1917, and the premiere took place in the same theatre on the following 11 March. The information available to date reports that in April of the same year, it was then staged at the Lirico in Milan, but no further details are given as to the circulation of the play or the performers except to report that on that occasion, it was performed by Gustavo Salvini as Dante and his company[273].

Mascagni's romance, first published in 1917 and then reprinted in 1952 with the title *Canzone di maggio*, sought out medieval-type sonorities with a delicate revival of the referenced poem and strongly recalling Dante's triplet[274]. In the same year, the composer signed *Rapsodia Satanica*, inaugurating the season of continuous collaboration with the cinema, with a view to cooperation between the arts. In Italy approaching the centenary of Dante's birth in 1921, a particular effervescence of new productions linked to Dante could be noted, in the theatrical context polarised between the constant revival of Dante by male and female actors in the form of *recitals* (think again of Zacconi, Pezzana and Ruggeri), and the new forms of theatre, which, starting from the theatre of more traditional origin[275], linked to the presence of

[272] See *Pg.* II, vv. 76-133.

[273] Articles accessed: *Una finzione scenica di T. Salvini, Firenze 7 gennaio notte*, in «Corriere della Sera», 8 gennaio 1917; "*Dante" di Tommaso Salvini, Firenze 10 marzo notte*, in «Corriere della Sera», 11 marzo 1917; *La "Lodoletta" di Mascagni*, in «Corriere della Sera», 25 aprile 1917; *Dante di T. Salvini al Lirico*, in «Corriere della Sera», 25 aprile 1917; «Corriere della Sera», 29-30 aprile 1917.

[274] See CESARE ORSELLI, *Pietro Mascagni*, Palermo, L'Epos, 2011, pp. 359-360.

[275] Other dramas linked to Dante's life are once again worthy of note, but they do not constitute a new line of critical contribution to the history of theatre but inevitably bring to mind that tradition that has never ceased of writing dramas with a didactic-moral value in Church-regulated school environments. An example of this is the production of Catholic dramas by Monsignor Giuseppe Ellero (1866-1925), who wrote a *Vita Nova* and a *Pier della Vigna* in the first decade of the 20th century, to be intended for the seminarians of Udine. On the other hand, dramas with Dante themes are also present in the panorama, such as «*Gli Alighieri* (Milano 1910), poema drammatico di Francesco Cazzamini-Mussi e Marino Moretti, […] *Dante alla corte degli Scaligeri* di Agostino Bartolini (Roma 1911); […] *La potenza di Dante* di Sesto Liburno (Milano 1911)», even if one document to date attributes the authorship of the latter to Alfredo Sisti, or others that go on to praise and support the patriot in the new guise of the Italic superman to coincide with Dante's centenary, influenced by the futurist climate and the expansionist policies Italy was undertaking, as in the case of Virginio Prinzivalli's play *Dante e la patria*, in *Teatro*, a cura di Giovanni Antonucci, in ED; see also GIUSEPPE ELLERO, *Drammi*, Torino, Società editrice internazionale, 1944; ELPIDIO ELLERO, *Il tricesimano Giuseppe Ellero: profilo di un poeta, letterato, drammaturgo e sacerdote scomodo*, in ENOS COSTANTINI (dât dongje di), *Tresesin: ad Tricensimum*, 88. Congrès (Tresesin, ai 2 di Otubar dal 2011), Udine, Societât Filologjiche Furlane, 2011, pp. 631-656; VIRGINIO PRINZIVALLI, *Dante e la patria*. Scene storiche fiorentine in tre atti, Roma, Scuola tipografica Salesiana, 1921; ALFREDO SISTI, *La potenza di Dante*, Milano, Marelli & C., 1911; FRANCESCO CAZZAMINI MUSSI, MARINO MORETTI, *Gli Allighieri. Poema drammatico*, Milano, Baldini-Castoldi, 1910; FRANCESCO CAZZAMINI MUSSI, MARINO MORETTI, *Gli Allighieri. Poema drammatico in quattro atti*, a cura di Alessandro Merci, Ravenna, Giorgio Pozzi, 2024.

the great actor, or more easily assimilated to the context of the actor-manager's theatre, began to hybridise in different forms; in Salvini's case with music and in D'Annunzio's case with new models of *mise en scene* that would have to wait until the second half of the century and the Nuovo Teatro to find artistic application.

Between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, new theatrical research gained attention, together with the conception of new modes of expression, role definition, and actor preparation. At the same time, the focus shifted to the possibilities offered by lighting technology and a new conception of space. All this resulted in a complete definition of theatre direction. A long road, which sees some of its most important interpreters already included in the list of participants in Dante's theatrical reception, but which is outside the scope of our discussion. It is sufficient for us to highlight how, on the occasion of Dante's centenary in 1921, the new theories on the materiality and definition of the stage space are in the foreground and are intended to attest to a renewed dominance of space, of the visual, over the omnipresent word.

The only case to effectively apply these new proposals of *light design* and conception of stage space to Dante's *Comedy* is found in an American author. Norman Bel Geddes (1893-1958) began his career as a set designer and then became famous by applying his talent for *design* to the industrial branch, especially in the automotive sector[276]. In his youth, he experimented in the field of set and lighting design, adhering to those European expressionist instances that sought to reform the stage by describing the spectacle as an immersive, abstract, all-encompassing and collaborative experience between the arts. At a particularly difficult time in his life, as he himself describes, he found himself alone and grabbed a random book to empower himself: it was Edward Norton's translation of *The Divine Comedy*[277]. Thunderstruck

[276] For more on the author, see SALVATORE FARINA, *Norman Bel Geddes e la costruzione del futuro. La nascita dell'industrial design negli USA*, con un contributo di Anna Giannetti, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2017; BARBARA ALEXANDRA SZERLIP, *The Man Who Designed the Future: Norman Bel Geddes and the Invention of Twentieth-Century America*, New York, Melville House, 2017. There is also his autobiography NORMAN BEL GEDDES, *Miracle in the evening: an autobiography*, edited by William Kelley, New York, Doubleday & company, 1960. See also the page in the Harry Ransom Center in Austin (Texas, USA) that collects the fund dedicated to him and partially digitised, where most of his writings and materials are stored: https://norman.hrc.utexas.edu/fasearch/findingAid.cfm?eadid=00798 (last accessed 14/05/2025). The drawings made for the adaptation of the *Divine Comedy* are instead kept in the Tobin Collection of Theatre Arts at the Marion Koogler McNay Art Museum in San Antonio, Texas. An early cataloguing of Geddes's theatre materials was published in FREDERICK J. HUNTER, *Catalog of the Norman Bel Geddes Theatre Collection*, Boston, G. K. Hall, 1973. See also KATHERINE FEO KELLY, HELEN BAER, *A Visionary's Archive: The Norman Bel Geddes Papers at the Harry Ransom Center*, in Journal of Design History, vol. 25, no. 3 (Special Issue: Design Histories of the Olympic Games), 2012, pp. 319-328.

[277] See NORMAN-BEL GEDDES, *A project for a theatrical presentation of the Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, with a foreword by Max Reinhardt, photography by Francis Bruguière, New York, Theatre Arts Inc., 1924, pp. 7-8. See also FREDERICK HUNTER, *Norman Bel Geddes' Conception of Dante's Divine Comedy*, in «Educational

by this reading and by the world described by Dante, so close to his avant-garde ideas of spatial conception, he decided to design a theatre that could stage an adaptation that would reflect its artistic complexity, suggestive of the orchestration of the lights that had to constantly scan the time on the stage and the music, not human, produced by unrecognisable instruments, installed under the *cavea* where the audience sat and transported by a sophisticated system of steel tubes, intended to suggest vibrations reverberating throughout the theatre. All this was in conjunction with the centenary celebrations of Dante in 1921. This project was only exhibited and realised in sketches, photos and models, but unfortunately never saw the light of day. In his own experience with Max Reinhardt, for whom he was chosen as set designer in his 1924 US tour and who wrote a commentary on his text on the Dante adaptation, Geddes re-proposed that grandiosity and uniqueness of stage space that had characterised his early idea for the *Comedy*, turning the Century Theatre into an immense medieval Gothic cathedral[278].

As has been briefly outlined, the twentieth century, at the height of its aesthetic and theoretical revolution, once again sees Dante as an object of study, capable of articulating itself in accordance with every need and above all being an interesting subject of investigation for various purposes, from theory to *mise en scene* and actorly praxis. Waiting for the second half of the twentieth century to observe completed refined theatrical adaptations, the more conscious fruit of directorial theatre and its direct followers, we will now leave the field to the new ways of *saying Dante*, from *Lecturae Dantis* to performances, between the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Theatre Journal», vol. 18, n. 3 Oct. (Special American Theatre Issue), 1966, pp. 238-246; RICHARD H. PALMER, *Style in Lighting Design*, in «Educational Theatre Journal», vol. 19, n. 2 May, 1967, pp. 142-148; GEORGE E. BOGUSCH, *Norman Bel Geddes and the Art of Modern Theatre Lighting*, in «Educational Theatre Journal», vol. 24, n. 4 Dec., 1972, pp. 415-429; OLIVER M. SAYLER, *The New Movement in the Theatre*, in «The North American Review», vol. 213, n. 787 Jun., 1921, pp. 761-771; MONTROSE J. MOSES, *The Theatre in America*, in «The North American Review», vol. 219, n. 818 Jan., 1924, pp. 82-91. A more recent study shows how new technologies, especially digital three-dimensional modelling, can be applied to Geddesian sketches in order to reconstruct them and thus have an additional tool to study their innovations within theatre history: IRYNA KUKSA, *The Set-SPECTRUM Project-scenographic reconstruction and theatre education*, in «Theatre Design & Technology», vol. Fall, 2008, pp. 49-57.

[278] See OSCAR G. BROCKETT, MARGARETH MITCHELL, LINDA HARDBERGER (edited by), *Making the scene: a history of stage design and technology in Europe and the United States*, San Antonio (Texas), Tobin Theatre Arts Fund, 2010, pp. 236-238; 262-268; 285-286.

SECOND PART

ANALYSIS OF TWO CENTURIES OF CONTEMPORARY PERFORMATIVE FORTUNE

THIRD CHAPTER
THE *LECTURAE DANTIS* FROM THE SECOND HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY TO THE NEW MILLENNIUM

3.1. Exemplary interpreters of the *Lecturae Dantis*

The history of theatre in Dante's name was determined mainly by authors, with writings dating back centuries, and only later by performers. With the development of a more articulated definition of the spectacular event, thanks to the increasing relevance of the director and the greater visibility given to all the stage elements involved, greater emphasis was also placed on the role of male and female actors.

"Saying Dante" is a spectacular practice that moves from a substantial expressive ambivalence: on the one hand, the cultivated quotation of Dante's tercets aloud within an academic and traditionally more aristocratic panorama of reference, by distinguished authors or scholars; on the other hand, the popular revival, the memory, the collective memory of passages from the *Comedy* that is passed down orally in the community, precisely by virtue of the primigenial choices made by Alighieri, that is, by the decision to write his own work in the vernacular, using the chained tercet that facilitates its musical memorisation. In the 20th century, as happened in the previous century with both great actors and improvisers, the art of saying Dante is passed down the family or from masters to disciples, in most cases highly trained and designated for this type of performance. The turn of the century and the advent of new technologies invariably affect the new possibilities of codifying Dante's performance.

Indeed, if the only difference introduced in previous centuries was due to the performer and his training, it is now necessary to interface with new media and instruments. The first to be mentioned is the amplification medium par excellence, namely the microphone. The second is definitely the object of propagation, the amplifier. It will soon become clear how these two elements, and mainly the first one, will become the subject of new studies to probe the human voice and its multiple potential in the artistic field. Finally, it is necessary to mention the new channel through which this modernisation was made possible, the radio, with its diverse

programming and so-called radio dramas, giving a new perspective to the training of the actor and the identification of his specificities.

Finally, a clarification must be given with respect to the form and mode of *Lectura Dantis* that will be considered here. From the 20th century onwards, the form of *lectura* becomes more solid and concrete as the diversification of the models of the origin and the differentiation of the spectacular context, we move on to a definition of what pertains to *lectura* as a "theatrical genre". *Lectura Dantis* is therefore to be defined as a form of lecture-performance of scholarly derivation and particularly referring to the academic way of listening to poetry and discussing it among peers, which indispensably envisages the reading of a canto from Dante's *Comedy*, with the possibility of adding comments. In defining the *lecturae*, it is envisaged that the canto may simply be read, read with an artistic interpretation or declaimed by an actor as by any other individual, leaving the subsequent or preceding commentary to be carried out with the means and hermeneutic depth of the person taking charge. In this now-defined tradition, it is envisaged that the two moments of the *lectura* may be divided between two persons, leaving the commentary, the contextualisation of the canto in Dante's thought, to a scholar or academic, while the actual presentation of Alighieri's verses pertains mainly to an artist, as can be observed in the first radio columns directed by Giulio Bertoni (1937), or by Umberto Bosco (in *Classe unica*, 1954-1976), or in the later and successful cycle directed by the scholar Natalino Sapegno, which included collaboration with actors Carlo D'Angelo, Arnoldo Foà and Achille Millo[1].

Sometimes, however, it is the scholar himself who takes on the burden and honour of supporting both moments, as in the case of the successful series by Vittorio Sermonti (1929-2016), who for his entire life combined his vocation as a teacher with that of playwright and theatre operator in various guises, strongly investigating the relationship between poetry and vocality (*Figure 2*). His *lecturae* began on the radio[2], then moved to the stage and were

[1] See See ANTONIO IURILLI, *Letteratura in onda. Un canone letterario per la radio del dopoguerra*, in PAOLA PONTI (a cura di), *Letteratura e oltre. Studi in onore di Giorgio Baroni*, Pisa/Roma, Fabrizio Serra, 2012, pp. 517-521; CATERINA CONTI, *Dante alla radio: attualizzazione divulgazione della Divina commedia nella modernità*, in MARIO CIMINI (a cura di), *L'altro Dante. Processi di attualizzazione della Commedia*, Atti del Seminario Internazionale di Studi online - Università "G. d'Annunzio" di Chieti-Pescara (24-25 novembre 2021), Lanciano, Carabba, 2022, pp. 101-114; RODOLFO SACCHETTINI, *Dante in scena tra radio e tv*, in Accademia dei Lincei (a cura di), *La ricezione della Commedia dai manoscritti ai media*, Atti del convegno internazionale dell'Accademia dei Lincei (23-25 marzo 2022, Roma), cit., pp. 400-403; RODOLFO SACCHETTINI, *I vestititi di Dante: un'archeologia della lettura dantesca*, in ALBERTO CASADEI, PAOLO GERVASI, *La voce di Dante. Performance dantesche tra teatro, tv e nuovi media*, cit., pp. 18-25.

[2] Vittorio Sermonti is a great advocate of the preferability of listening to Dante without necessarily tracing him back to a face, a great admirer of vocal-actor mastery applied to the medium of radio. Therefore, his *lecturae Dantis* aired from 1987 to 1992, making the whole of Italy passionate about the words of the Supreme Poet on

subsequently published as audio recordings, with the revision and commentary of authoritative Dante philologists such as Gianfranco Contini and Natalino Sapegno[3], finally landing in the *home video* format. In an interview, after briefly mentioning his own venture with Dante, Sermonti thus refers to the difference he sees between radio and television as media for the dramatic art:

Da questo punto di vista il mezzo radiofonico si presta perfettamente! Possiamo chiederle quanto è stato stimolato da questo medium?
Io sono della generazione della guerra: sentivo tutto alla radio e trasformavo tutto in immagini. La televisione è un piccolo cinema che non mi è familiare e non mi sembra misteriosa quanto la radio. Se la televisione si rivolge a un villaggio globale, la radio si rivolge a una metropoli clandestina. Gli ascoltatori radio ascoltano uno per uno. I telespettatori fanno parte di una comunità, sanno quanti sono. La radio si integra nelle abitudini della casa: le donne che fanno i loro mestieri, i pittori che dipingono, gli artigiani che lavorano, le farmaciste... questo è il mio pubblico. I messaggi televisivi sono messaggi in cui il fruitore è radicalmente coinvolto, in cui il messaggio fondamentale è quello delle sue reazioni: noi sappiamo che gli abitanti di Torino sono terrorizzati perché è stata strangolata un'anziana signora. Siamo in una continua ricerca di mercato[4].

From this point of view, the radio medium lends itself perfectly! May we ask you how stimulated you were by this medium?
I am of the war generation: I heard everything on the radio and turned everything into images. Television is a small cinema that is unfamiliar to me and does not seem as mysterious as radio. If television addresses a global village, radio addresses an underground metropolis. Radio listeners listen one by one. Television viewers are part of a community, they know how many there are. Radio is integrated into the routines of the home: women doing their crafts, painters painting, artisans working, pharmacists... this is my audience. Television messages are messages in which the viewer is radically involved, in which the fundamental message is that of his reactions: we know that the inhabitants of Turin are terrified because an old lady has been strangled. We are in continuous market research.

Radio Raitre. In an interview with Cinzia Tani for the programme "Rewind-Visioni private" in 2012 (from min 14:12), Sermonti recounts how his first approach to Dante came about thanks to his family and the study he did with his older brothers. He also states that «c'è sempre un di più nella poesia, restano dei suoni liberi, suoni che evocano a ogni singolo ascoltatore qualcosa di assolutamente irriproducibile. Ognuno sente qualcosa di diverso, incrementa il testo ascoltandolo, facendo una respirazione bocca a bocca, sennò questi testi sono morti»/«there is always something more in poetry, there are free sounds, sounds that evoke in each individual listener something absolutely irreproducible. Everyone hears something different, he increases the text by listening to it, by mouth-to-mouth breathing, otherwise these texts are dead». It was at the invitation of his wife (Ludovica Ripa di Meana), for whom he was reading the *Commedia*, that invited him to record it all for radio, and so it was: «Non bisogna recitare, bisogna leggere! […] Chi non si mette in gioco completamente leggendo Dante è un cattivo attore»/«You must not recite, you must read! [...] Anyone who does not put himself completely at stake by reading Dante is a bad actor». This first venture was followed by countless public *lecturae* around Italy and abroad, leading to their publication accompanied by his comments and the video recording of all the cantos between 2009 and 2010. The interview is available on the RAI Teche website: https://www.teche.rai.it/2019/09/addio-a-vittorio-sermonti-regista-e-grande-esperto-di-dante/ (last accessed 15/05/2025).

[3] See DANTE ALIGHIERI, *L'Inferno commentato e letto da Vittorio Sermonti*, con la supervisione di Gianfranco Contini, regia di Ludovica Ripa di Meana, Roma, Emons, 2018; DANTE ALIGHIERI, *Il Purgatorio commentato e letto da Vittorio Sermonti*, con la supervisione di Gianfranco Contini, regia di Ludovica Ripa di Meana, Roma, Emons, 2018; DANTE ALIGHIERI, *Il Paradiso commentato e letto da Vittorio Sermonti*, con la revisione di Cesare Segre, regia di Ludovica Ripa di Meana, Roma, Emons, 2018. On Sermonti's *lecturae* read also LORENZO PAVOLINI, *Come tutti sanno. La Lectura Dantis di Sermonti alla radio*, in «Dante e l'arte», n. 9, 2022, pp. 165-170.

[4] ANGELA IDA DE BENEDICTIS, VENIERO RIZZARDI, *«Intanto voce fu per me udita»: colloquio con Vittorio Sermonti*, in ANGELA IDA DE BENEDICTIS, MARIA MADDALENA NOVATI (a cura di), *Il prix Italia e la sperimentazione radiofonica: l'immaginazione in ascolto*, Roma, Die Schachtel-Rai Trade, 2012, pp. 89-96, quotation at p. 95.

Sermonti's media and literary endeavour forms the basis for the most famous *Lecturae Dantis* that will be investigated below, and also provides the general framework for understanding why, precisely since the 1970s and 1980s, the doors to Dante's fortunes in performance in its broader sense have opened again. Starting with a few, unavoidable examples, the aim is to highlight in particular how the future of artistic research on the centuries-old tradition of the *Lectura Dantis* has shifted from male to female performers.

3.1.1. Vittorio Gassman

The first example of this investigation of the relationship between actors and Dante finds its most famous interpreter in Vittorio Gassman (1922-2000). Actor, entertainer, and director, the labels applicable to this multifaceted personality of 20th-century Italian theatre and cinema would, in any case, be reductive compared to the contribution he made to the art of representation and its constant renewal until his death (*Figures 3-4-5*).

The relationship with Dante, as he himself says, is a long-standing one, one that runs throughout his life, growing and maturing with him. After being noticed as a basketball star and as a student at the Academy of Dramatic Art, it is certainly with Dante he measures his skills as a fine speaker. With Dante he returns to confront himself as a mature actor, displaying an increasingly pronounced virtuosity. Here we will not go into an examination of his life and career[5], studded with great satisfaction, first on the theatrical stages, and then on the Italian and international film scene, but instead intend to assess how his "actor's suitcase" is put to good use in staging and recording the cantos of *the Comedy*. In addition to a number of recordings made by Natalino Sapegno for Fonit Cetra in 1964[6], Gassman's latest endeavour consists in the video recording of those *Lecturae Dantis* with which he had previously only dealt viva voce. From radio to video, there is no medium that Gassman has not experimented with as an actor, and one can see how the transition from one media channel to another has always been accompanied by the declamation of Dante's verses.

[5] On this subject, see the minimal studies: PIER MARCO DE SANTIS, *Gassman dal teatro al cinema*, in EVA MARINAI, SARA POETA, IGOR VAZZAZ (a cura di), *Comicità negli anni Settanta. Percorsi eccentrici di una metamorfosi fra teatro e media*, con un'introduzione di Anna Barsotti, Pisa, ETS, 2005, pp. 171-188.
[6] See DANTE ALIGHIERI, *La Divina Commedia*, a cura di Natalino Sapegno, consulenza artistica di G. D. Giagni, Torino, Fonit Cetra, 1964. For this particular series "Letteraria Documento", Sapegno entrusted Vittorio Gassman with the reading of Dante's cantos, collected in 18 sound discs, see ALBERTO CASADEI, PAOLO GERVASI, *La voce di Dante. Performance dantesche tra teatro, tv e nuovi media*, cit., pp. 52-54.

In 1993, directed by Rubino Rubini, for the RAI public network, Gassman chose the Angelo Mariani theatre in Sant'Agata Feltria in Romagna as the main venue for the filming, where he skilfully showed off his art in front of a small circle of attendees. The subject of his declamation are the cantos of *Inferno*, and a selection of cantos from the subsequent *cantiche*, respectively four from *Purgatorio* (II-III-V-XXX) and two for *Paradiso* (III-XXXIII)[7]: «Starting my journey in Dante's mystery in the little enchantment of the Teatro Marini, with esteem and sympathy, in good memory. Vittorio Gassman, 24 May '93»[8].

Interviewed by Serena Perrone Capano on the way he prepared and perceived his own interpretation of Dante's verses, he says:

rispettare la forma e seguire il viaggio interno che è di ciascuno di noi. C'è il diritto legittimo di impossessarsi, di far finta di averlo scritto [in modo che] ci si possa mettere tutta la propria esperienza. Nel dire questi quaranta canti, non disperando un giorno di completare l'opera. […] Impossessarsi, far finta di averlo scritto, renderlo accessibile attraverso la prima rete RAI, quaranta canti in tutto, collocarmi a metà fra una piatta lettura e una immedesimazione decisamente teatrale. […] fatica di dentro, mi è rimasta una piccola cicatrice ad accostarmi a tanti misteri uno dietro l'altro, [all'] incredibile sfericità di tutto, [Dante che] anticipa i nostri problemi e continua a spingerci verso l'alto[9].

respect the form and follow the internal journey that belongs to each one of us. There is a legitimate right to take possession, to pretend one has written it [so that] one can put all one's experience into it. In saying these forty cantos, we never despaired, not even for a day, of not being able to finish the work. [...] To take possession of it, to pretend to have written it, to make it accessible through the first RAI channel, forty cantos in all, to place myself somewhere between a flat reading and a decidedly theatrical immersion. [...] struggling inside, I was left with a small scar from approaching so many mysteries one after the other, [the] incredible sphericity of everything, [Dante who] anticipates our problems and continues to push us upwards.

[7] See the data sheet and materials in MAURIZIO GIAMMUSSO (a cura di), *Il Dante di Gassman. Cronaca e storia di un'interpretazione della Divina Commedia*, Milano, Mondadori, 1994, p. 167.

[8] «Iniziando nel piccolo incanto del Teatro Mariani il mio viaggio nel mistero dantesco; con stima e simpatia cordiale, a buon ricordo. Vittorio Gassman, 24 maggio '93». This brief dedication is recorded in the website of the Teatro Angelo Marini, which was chosen by Gassman for the filming of the Dante Readings. The theatre has reopened in 1994 and has become since an object of redevelopment by Regione Emilia Romagna. The decision to set up the filming in this Dante site is not insignificant. It has been hypothesised that Dante had dedicated the first *Inferno* cantica to the illustrious Santagatese, Uguccione della Faggiola, a native of the nearby locality of Faggiola di Casteldelci, in gratitude for his hospitality, but unfortunately there are no historical certainties to corroborate this thesis: https://www.teatromariani.it/gassman-legge-dante/ (last accessed 15/05/2025). The filming was carried out between May and July 1993, and the locations of the filming include: the aforementioned Angelo Mariani theatre in Sant'Agata Feltria, Piazza Nuova in Bagnacavallo (the site of the agonies with the first canto of *Inferno*), Teatro Olimpico in Sabbioneta, Teatro Petrella in Longiano, Teatro Comunale in Narni, Spazio ACEA in Rome, a place in the open countryside near San Gregorio da Sassola, and Teatro Vascello in Rome.

[9] These are just a few passages of the brief but dense interview given by Gassman and carried out by the presenter of the RAI programme "Parole Nuove" Serena Perrone Capano, which can be listened to in full at the following link: https://www.teche.rai.it/2015/09/vittorio-gassman-sulla-divina-commedia/ (last accessed 15/05/2025). A further interesting passage, where Gassman declares his own bulimia towards the work of the actor and the desire perhaps to complete the work of recording the entire *Comedy*, is shown in the video "Gassman incontra Dante" (Gassman meets Dante), available at the RAI Archives and usable at the link: https://www.raiplay.it/dl/RaiTV/programmi/media/ContentItem-efccfab7-99fc-4a66-8065-f1d940d3199b.html#p= (last accessed 15/05/2025).

For artistic and academic critics, Gassman is perhaps the 20th-century Italian actor par excellence, the one who embodies purity of verse and sobriety of articulation, unlike the style that connotes the performers who will follow in our analysis. In his description of Gassman's operation, scholar Maurizio Giammusso recalls how Gassman was always intent on reviewing passages from the Giorgio Petrocchi edition he owned[10], or clutching «Borges's essay, like an amulet. This is how Dante's philology is closely intertwined with the grammar of images and the physical work of the actor»[11].

The artistic project demanded all the actor's energy and concentration, for a *tour de force* that requires recording two songs a day, in addition to previous engagements and location shifts. The test of strength is revealed in the logbook written by Giammusso, making clear to the reader/viewer the dynamics between Gassman and the director Rubino Rubini, their dialogues at times calm, at times prompted by fatigue and the inclement summer weather (from May to July), allowing us to understand how the scenic rendering of Dante's verses was subtly calibrated take by take by the two, filmed by at least four different cameras, so as not to make the television shot cramped or boring to the viewer's eye.

Dante and his memorisation are remembered as a game by Gassman, who, even as a child, engaged in memory contests with his mother, and perhaps it is precisely in this naturalness of the verse, this musicality that has always accompanied him that we find the key to understanding his action on Dante's verse[12]. It should not be forgotten that Gassman also became an actor trainer and teacher at the Bottega Teatrale in Florence, founded in 1979. In this further passage of the baton to his students, he teaches diction and declamation precisely through the reading of the *Commedia*, starting from the verse, from the hendecasyllable, to enucleate a declamation that is its direct interpretation[13]. It is no coincidence that some of these actors, and especially female ones, will in the future also be part of the tradition of the *Lecturae Dantis*[14].

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[10] See DANTE ALIGHIERI, *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata*, a cura di Giorgio Petrocchi, 4 voll., Firenze, Le Lettere, 1994 [DANTE ALIGHIERI, *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata*, a cura di Giorgio Petrocchi, 3 voll., Milano, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1966-1967].

[11] «il saggio di Borges, come un amuleto. Ecco come la filologia dantesca si intreccia strettamente alla grammatica delle immagini e al lavoro fisico dell'attore», MAURIZIO GIAMMUSSO (a cura di), *Il Dante di Gassman. Cronaca e storia di un'interpretazione della Divina Commedia*, cit., p. 25.

[12] The passages of childhood and education always accompanied by Dante's verses are taken up in MAURIZIO GIAMMUSSO (a cura di), *Il Dante di Gassman. Cronaca e storia di un'interpretazione della Divina Commedia*, cit., pp. 55-56.

[13] Ivi, pp. 59-62.

[14] Reference is made to Lucilla Giagnoni, interpreter of *lecturae* and adaptor of the Dante text, and Giusy Frallonardo, creator of the performance *Hell in the cave* conceived for the Castellana Caves (BA, Apulia), which since 2011 has been an example of a Dante adaptation focused on enhancing the unique geospeleological context

Being able to benefit from the medium of video, his *lectura* is the result of skilful editing and choice of the best shot to emphasise Dante's words. Gassman briefly introduces the canto he is going to read and does not fail to emphasise how his knowledge of Dante's material is the result of careful study of the most established critics and scholars on the international scene. In his *lectura*, one grasps the long frequentation of the verse, an exercise aimed at respecting the rhythm and metrics of the hendecasyllable, which wants its accent most marked on the tenth syllable, according to the scheme reported here of the first tercet *of Inferno*, and the possibility of identifying other secondary accents, creating more or less strong accents depending on the interpreter's intention[15]:

Nel | mez|zo |del |cam|min |di |no|stra| **vi**|ta	**A**
mi | ri|tro|vai| per |u|na |sel|va o|**scu**|ra	**B**
ché| la |di|rit|ta| via |e|ra |smar|**ri**|ta[16].	**A**

Together with the metric pillar, the key to Gassman's interpretation is placed in the small gestures of the arms, in the facial expressions and in the gaze, captured by the camera and highlighted by the various shots, an acting body trained to let only that which pertains to the performance transpire. The tension that Gassman builds on Dante's verses is the result of a long study of the many characters presented in the *Comedy*.

Dante constructs his cantos according to a logic of solids and voids, descriptions of the landscape he sees that are sometimes metaphors of his own inner feelings, interspersed with encounters and dialogues with characters with whom he reflects on abstract, universal and also historical, contingent themes. Gassman studies all these elements and elaborates them in his *lectura*, preparing his audience's attention with crescendo modulations or becoming more distant, arranging prolonged emphatic pauses in which, thanks to the medium of video, the camera focuses on his face in close-up, focusing on the actor's expressions and gaze, which

of the caves, see SARA FONTANA, *Hell in the Cave: Falling down to find the light*, in Performance Research, vol. 26, n. 1-2 (*On Hell*, edited by Geraint D'Arcy and Richard Gough), 2021, pp. 58-68.

[15] The hendecasyllable is called *a minore* (with secondary accent on the fourth syllable) or *a maiore* (with secondary accent on the sixth), providing for different ways of constructing the verse. See ALDO MENICHETTI, *Remo Fasani e la metrica della Divina Commedia*, in ALDO MENICHETTI, *Saggi Metrici*, a cura di Paolo Gresti, Massimo Zenari, Firenze, Sismel-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2006, pp. 367-376; REMO FASANI, *La metrica della „Divina Commedia" e altri saggi di metrica italiana*, presentazione di Cesare Segre, Ravenna, Longo Editore, 1992; PIETRO G. BELTRAMI, *La metrica italiana*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2011[5]; LAURA FACINI, JACOPO GALAVOTTI, ARNALDO SOLDANI, GIOVANNA ZOCCARATO (a cura di), *Nuove prospettive sulla terza rima. Da Dante al Duemila*, Padova, libreriauniversitaria.it, 2020.

[16] *If.* I, vv. 1-3.

offer an interpretative key for what will be read a little later. Fear, anguish, and dismay are legible in the actor's eyes as he declaims the triplet:

> Allor fu la paura un poco queta,
> che nel lago del cor m'era durata
> la notte ch'i' passai con tanta pieta[17].

Framed in close-up, at the lectern, after a long shot on the sunny Piazza Nuova in Bagnacavallo, as he looks straight into the camera, his appearance reveals the condition of Dante, here a character speaking in the first person about himself, in the midst of his own inner crisis, metaphorically described as a «dark forest»[18].

In contrast to the thirty-third *canto* of *Paradiso*, Gassman begins the song from the colonnade of the Teatro Olimpico in Sabbioneta, surrounded by classical statues, and recites the prayer to the Virgin Mary by Saint Bernard who intercedes for Dante. In the video, it is evident how Gassman's gaze rises with devotion to the heavens when the triplets point to the Madonna, while his gaze moves downwards (where he is filmed by another camera) to point to the requesting Dante, who waits in hope that the saint's request will be granted. In the passage to St. Bernard's first-person prayer, Gassman effectively clasps his previously open hands in a gesture of supplication so that the idea of prayer is even more emphasised and then uses them to ask again that Dante's senses be preserved in this final part of the journey, finally closing this supplication with a very slow joining of hands in prayer at the triplets:

> Vinca tua guardia i movimenti umani:
> vedi Beatrice con quanti beati
> per li miei prieghi ti chiudon le mani![19].

The declamation proceeds with a significant break: with a close-up on Gassman's face as he pronounces the next tercet, which begins «Li occhi da Dio diletti e venerati,»[20] we can see how the actor has moved. He is now on the stage, surrounded by a small audience of listeners, and his declamation becomes more emotional and pathetic, resorting to frequent grave notes, in tension, resonant, and immediately to quick leaps of octaves[21], to keep the audience's attention awake and amaze them with the frequent changes of rhythm and tone.

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[17] *If*. I, vv. 19-21.
[18] «selva oscura», ivi, v. 2.
[19] *Pd*. XXXIII, vv. 37-39.
[20] Ivi, v. 40.
[21] As, for example, in verse 53: «e più e più intrava per lo raggio».

Gassman's role in the *lectura* is the one of the skilful actor, who has ably trodden countless stages live and on screen, and it shines through in all its mastery, as he entrusts the video direction with the care of every detail, but also guiding it through gestures that are never left to chance, but useful to underline and support his vocal performance.

In his *Lecturae Dantis*, Gassman creates an imperishable artefact of his acting skills, fixing the fruit of a time-tested practice of "saying Dante". In his performance, one grasps the long study and great love that binds him to this particular author.

3.1.2. Carmelo Bene

If the example of Gassman and his future pupils supports the more conservative axis of the *lectura Dantis* coming from the example of the nineteenth-century grand actor, leaning on and enjoying the new communicative discoveries, an opposite and different choice is made by one actor in particular, who becomes the most recognised example of avant-garde theatre in the same years, Carmelo Bene (1937-2002)[22].

For him, too, labels are wasted, if not the more fitting one of *actor-artifex*, as his artistic life largely revolves around the term poetry and radiates out in a vortex of works and operations that have been extensively outlined in previous monographic studies, but which still leave shrouds of mystery by virtue of the archives that have only recently begun to be accessible to scholars. Buiding on steady relationships with the most important theorists and intellectuals of the century (see the dialogues with Gilles Deleuze, with Salvador Dalì, the frequent discussions with Italian professors, intellectuals and artists such as Franco Quadri, Luigi Squarzina, Giuseppe Quartucci, etc.), he tried to be a student at the Accademia d'Arte Drammatica, previously attended by Gassman, deserting it after the first year. Subsequently, he founded the Teatro Laboratorio in Rome, a place where the theatre in its traditional form falls apart, unravelling and confronting itself with the latest forms of American-derived avant-garde, with *happenings* and *cabaret*, thus becoming a paradoxical place where everything impossible becomes possible on a new, disenchanted and unconventional stage.

[22] See CARMELO BENE, *Opere*, con l'autobiografia d'un ritratto, Milano, Bompiani, 2002 [1995[1]].

Bene took part in and signed the Manifesto of the Ivrea Convention, 11-12 June 1967, which laid the foundations of the New Italian Theatre[23], and from there he constituted his own artistic research production, above all working relentlessly on the *phonè*[24], with the need to go

[23] On the New Theatre and a brief examination of its implications (there is a preference for collective work, not based on the genius of the individual, a rejection of naturalism and psychological realism in favour of a new praxis in acting practice, revaluing improvisation and its formulation; a fervent stance in the political field, a rejection of stereotypes and the hegemony of the written text, in favour of a freer elaboration of dramaturgical material; furthermore, there is a predominant investigation into the spaces of the theatre, towards a dismantling of stage conventions), read MARCO DE MARINIS, *Il nuovo teatro: 1947-1970*, Milano, Bompiani, 1987[1] [2005[5]]; PAOLO PUPPA, *Il teatro dei testi. La drammaturgia italiana nel Novecento*, Torino, UTET, 2003; DANIELA VISIONE, *La nascita del Nuovo teatro. 1959-1967*, Corazzano, Titivillus, 2010; SALVATORE MARGIOTTA, *Il Nuovo Teatro in Italia. 1968-1975*, Corazzano, Titivillus, 2013; VALENTINA VALENTINI, *Nuovo Teatro Made in Italy. 1963-2013*, con saggi di Anna Barsotti, Cristina Grazioli, Donatella Orecchia, Roma, Bulzoni, 2015 [trad. engl. VALENTINA VALENTINI, *New Theatre in Italy. 1963–2013*, translated by Thomas Haskell Simpson, London/New York, Routledge, 2018]; ANTONIO ATTISANI, *Atto secondo. Nel mare del teatro (1966-1993)*, Torino, Celid, 2018; ARMANDO PETRINI, *Dentro il Novecento. Un secolo che non abbiamo alle spalle: frammenti di storia della cultura e dello spettacolo*, Perugia, Zona, 2006; LAURA PEJA, *Theatre: inside and out (1945-1978)*, in FAUSTO COLOMBO (edited by), *Media and communication in Italy: historical and theorical perspectives*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 2019, pp. 125-140; DONATELLA ORECCHIA, *Arti visive e teatro attraverso la lente di Sipario (1961-1969)*, in «Arabeschi», n. 19 gennaio-giugno, 2022, pp. 46-70; SALVATORE MARGIOTTA, *La fucina teorica del nuovo teatro in Italia. Verso il teatro immagine*, Caserta, TerreBlu, 2023; SIMONA BRUNETTI, MONICA CRISTINI, PETER ECKERSALL (a cura di), *Il Nuovo Teatro e l'avanguardia teatrale. Incontri e influenze oltre i confini (1948-1981)*, Bari, Edizioni di Pagina, 2024.

[24] «Se è vero che la ricerca di una poesia scenica nel XX secolo è consistita nello sperimentare varie modalità di utilizzazione poetica dei linguaggi teatrali, un capitolo molto vasto di queste sperimentazioni ha riguardato proprio – come dicevo – il linguaggio verbale, la parola, i testi (poetici e non). E qui entra in gioco la voce. […] In realtà, la voce, non in quanto parola o linguaggio, cioè entità semantica, ma in quanto suono ed espressione corporea, cioè entità vocalica al di qua e al di là del significato, è stata una delle risorse più avanzate delle rivoluzioni teatrali contemporanee, ai fini del superamento della rappresentazione verso un teatro dell'azione efficace»/«If it is true that the search for scenic poetry in the 20th century consisted in experimenting with various modes of poetic use of theatrical languages, a very large chapter of these experiments concerned precisely - as I said - verbal language, speech, texts (poetic and otherwise). And this is where the voice comes into play. [...] In fact, the voice, not as a word or language, i.e. a semantic entity, but as sound and bodily expression, i.e. as a vocal entity on both sides of the meaning, has been one of the most advanced resources of the contemporary theatrical revolutions, for the purpose of overcoming representation towards a theatre of effective action», MARCO DE MARINIS, *Il teatro dopo l'età dell'oro. Novecento e oltre*, Roma, Bulzoni, 2013, pp. 176-177. See therefore on this particular issue: ANTONIO ZORETTI (a cura di), *Carmelo Bene. Il fenomeno e la voce*, Lupo, Lecce 2012; PAOLO COLOMBO, *La phoné quotidiana*, in «Mimesis Journal», vol. 8, n. 1, 2019, pp. 133-152; UMBERTO ARTIOLI, CARMELO BENE, *Un dio assente. Monologo a due voci sul teatro*, a cura di A. Attisani e M. Dotti, con scritti di E. Fadini e G. Zuccarino, postfazione di C. Sini, Medusa, Milano 2006; UMBERTO ARTIOLI, *Morire di teatro per l'increato. Carmelo Bene tra silenzio e vocalità*, in CARMELO BENE (a cura di), *La ricerca impossibile. Biennale Teatro '89*, Marsilio, Venezia 1990, pp. 27-38; GIULIA RACITI, *Il ruminare orifiziale della 'phoné' beniana*, in GIADA COCCIA, MARIANTONIETTA CONFUORTO, FRANCESCO CUTILLO, FABIANA DI MATTIA, IRENE MARTANO (a cura di), *Uno straniero nella propria lingua. Scritti per Carmelo Bene*, Oèdipus, Salerno, 2019 pp. 71-86; ALESSANDRO BERTINETTO, *Il pensiero dei suoni. Temi di filosofia della musica*, Milano, Mondadori, 2012; CARLO ROMANO, *L'orchestra in gola di Carmelo Bene. Breve indagine su una voce metaforica e di rappresentazione*, in «Antropologia e teatro», n. 14, 2022, pp. 1-18; PIERSANDRA DI MATTEO, *Voce e clinica. Afasia, delirio linguistico come dimensione fantasmatica della phoné*, in «Culture teatrali», n. 20 (*Teatri di voce*, a cura di Lucia Amara, Piersandra Di Matteo), 2010, pp. 71-96; ROBERTO TESSARI, *Carmelo Bene: una macchina di phonè per il silenzio di Narciso*, in LUIGI ALLEGRI, GIGI LIVIO, PAOLO BOSISIO *et al.* (a cura di), *Il grande attore nell'Otto e Novecento*, Atti del convegno (Torino, 19-21 aprile 1999), Torino, Università degli Studi di Torino-DAMS, 2001, pp. 31-47; GIORGIO AGAMBEN, *Stanze: La parola e il fantasma nella cultura occidentale*, Torino, Einaudi, 1977; DANIELE VERGNI, *Spazio, voce, gesto tra nuova musica e nuovo teatro musicale*, in «Sciami», n. 3 aprile, 2018, online open access; FRANCESCA GASPARINI, *Poesia come corpo-voce. Ipotesi teoriche e esempi novecenteschi (Yeats, Lorca, Artaud, Bene)*, Bulzoni, Roma 2009; VALENTINA VALENTINI (a cura di), *Drammaturgie sonore. Teatri del Secondo Novecento*, Roma, Bulzoni, 2012; VALENTINA VALENTINI (a cura di), *Drammaturgie sonore 2. Saggi e*

beyond the written text, to give new space to the body-voice, to vocality more widely understood, to broaden the range of dynamics that the body, as an internal cavity, can produce:

L'ingresso della *phonè* – il suono 'puro', estraneo sia alla sostanza semantica del *logos*, che alla forma vocale del *melos* – coincide senza dubbio, nella cultura musicale del secondo Novecento, con l'affermazione delle pratiche artistiche che pongono sulla scena, a volte in modo sconvolgente, la dimensione materiale del corpo. […] La voce, in quanto abitatrice unica e privilegiata del corpo, ha avuto bisogno, per affrancarsi totalmente da ogni radice magico-incantatoria, di un passaggio ulteriore. Quello cioè di infrangere un tabù storico, fortemente radicato nella prassi della musica occidentale: il legame, ritenuto fino a quel momento indissolubile, tra il significato della parola e la sua dimensione sonora. […] La Nuova Musica degli anni Cinquanta ha invece cambiato le regole del gioco: ha dissociato il suono della parola, lo ha affrancato dal dominio del 'verbo', e ha liberato in questo modo le infinite ricchezze che la voce non aveva mai compiutamente espresso. Ne ha riscoperto il suono puro, primigenio, inarticolato, finalmente sottratto all'obbligo di possedere una sia pur lata risonanza semantica. E ha così promosso la dimensione della *phonè* a garante esclusiva della sintassi e della grammatica della scrittura vocale[25].

The entry of the *phonè* - the 'pure' sound, extraneous both to the semantic substance of the *logos*, and to the vocal form of the *melos* - undoubtedly coincides, in the musical culture of the second half of the 20th century, with the affirmation of artistic practices that place the material dimension of the body on the stage, sometimes in a shocking manner. [...] The voice, as the unique and privileged inhabitant of the body, needed, in order to free itself totally from all magical-enchanting roots, a further step. That is, to break a historical taboo, strongly rooted in the practice of western music: the link, considered until then indissoluble, between the meaning of the word and its sound dimension. [...] The New Music of the 1950s, however, changed the rules of the game: it dissociated the sound of the word, freed it from the domination of the 'word', and in this way liberated the infinite riches that the voice had never fully expressed. It has rediscovered its pure, primordial, inarticulate sound, finally freed from the obligation of possessing even a faint semantic resonance. And thus promoted the dimension of the *phonè* to the exclusive guarantor of the syntax and grammar of vocal writing.

Valentina Valentini is even more specific:

C'è una teatralità del testo scritto che suggerisce una corporeità sonora, una scrittura vocale che rimanda a una immagine di corpo vocale. La scrittura ad alta voce è un dispositivo costruttivo intermediario tra testo e voce, fra verbalità e vocalità, in un andarivieni dall'uno all'altro, entrambi attraversati dal corpo. In questa accezione, il dispositivo della vocalità è inscritto nel testo letterario in funzione di disintegrazione dell'ordine sintattico-grammaticale-drammatico. La vocalità valorizza i valori fonici, materici cromatici della voce, come l'astrazione nelle arti figurative aveva privilegiato il colore, lo spazio, la materia[26].

There is a theatricality of the written text that suggests a sound corporeity, a vocal writing that refers to a vocal body image. Writing aloud is a constructive intermediary device between text and voice, between verbality and vocality, in a back-and-forth from one to the other, both traversed by the body. In this sense, the device of vocality is inscribed in the literary text as a function of disintegrating the syntactic-grammatical-dramatic order. Vocality enhances the phonic, chromatic material values of the voice, just as abstraction in the figurative arts had privileged colour, space, matter.

conversazioni, Roma, Bulzoni, 2021; LEONARDO MANCINI, *Carmelo Bene: fonti della poetica*, Udine/Milano, Mimesis, 2020. We also recommend reading the two issues of the journal «Culture Teatrali»: «Culture Teatrali», n. 27 (*Teatri del suono*, a cura di Enrico Pitozzi), 2018, e «Culture Teatrali», n. 20, (*Teatri di voce*, a cura di Lucia Amara, Piersandra Di Matteo), 2010.

[25] GUIDO BARBIERI, *Logos, melos, phonè*, in ANNA CESTELLI GUIDI, FRANCESCA RACHELE OPPEDISANO (a cura di*), Il corpo della voce. Carmelo Bene, Cathy Berberian, Demetrio Stratos*, Roma, Arti Grafiche La Moderna, 2019, pp. 32-51, quotation at p. 39.

[26] VALENTINA VALENTINI, *I suoni del teatro*, in VALENTINA VALENTINI (a cura di), *Drammaturgie sonore. Teatri del Secondo Novecento*, Roma, Bulzoni, 2012, pp. 9-50, quotation p. 28.

For Bene, too, the encounter with Dante is the result of a lifelong personal acquaintance[27], which emerges forcefully when the request arrives from the Municipality of Bologna to propose one of his *Lectura Dantis* in commemoration of the tragic massacre that took place in the city's station in 1980[28] (*Figures 6-7*). In the unusual setting of the Torre degli Asinelli, a city monument towering in the centre of Bologna (*Figure 8*), equally artificial and implacable, Bene's voice is condensed through a dense network of cables and amplifiers connected to them, ready to propagate a new and disturbing *Lectura Dantis*[29]. Despite the fact that the heated debate prior to the event had raged on the legitimacy of choosing an artist such as Bene for the occasion, on the impropriety of his choice of songs that made explicit reference to the past licentiousness of the citizens of Bologna, that evening Bene entered the unusual

[27] «il *Chisciotte* del Cervantes e la *Commedia* di Dante, illustrati dal Doré. E poi Walter Scott, Dumas. […] In seguito, a Lecce da mia zia Raffaella, feci incetta dello Shakespeare, del Rusconi. Quindicenne, m'intabarravo nei lenzuoli bianchi, davanti allo specchio. Ero Marc'Antonio, altre volte Bruto, a seconda dell'estro. Il *Timone d'Atene* fu la mia prima lettura shakespeariana. Mi colpì molto»/«Cervantes' *Quixote* and Dante's *Commedia*, illustrated by Doré. And then Walter Scott, Dumas. [...] Later, at my aunt Raffaella's in Lecce, I hoarded Shakespeare translated by Rusconi. Fifteen years old, I wrapped myself in white sheets, in front of the mirror. I was Marc Antony, sometimes Brutus, depending on my mood. The *Timon of Athens* was my first Shakespearean reading. It struck me very much», CARMELO BENE, GIANCARLO DOTTO, *Vita di Carmelo Bene*, Milano, Bompiani, 1998[1], p. 38. See also the memories of his classmates and of the first Bene, the boyish one, already fervent in his declamatory praxis of texts, in the pages of BRUNO PUTIGNANO, *Carmelo Bene. Magia di un sogno. L'infanzia – l'adolescenza*, Lecce, Libreria Pensa Editrice, 2013.

[28] The Bologna massacre was an attack committed on Saturday 2 August 1980 at 10.25 a.m. at Bologna railway station. In the station's second-class waiting room, a time bomb exploded. Along with the Piazza Fontana massacre (12 December 1969), the Piazza della Loggia massacre (28 May 1974) and the train massacre Italicus (4 August 1974), is considered one of the bloodiest neo-fascist attacks. In fact, 85 people were killed and over 200 injured.

[29] Much has already been written on this very special and fortuitous *lectura*, so we refer to: RINO MAENZA (a cura di), *Carmelo Bene legge Dante*, Venezia, Marsilio, 2007; CARMELO BENE, *Lectura Dantis*, Roma, Luca Sossella, 2004; GIOIA COSTA (a cura di), *A CB. A Carmelo Bene*, Roma, Editoria&Spettacolo, 2003; RINO MAENZA, *Carmelo Bene legge Dante: Per l'anniversario della strage di Bologna*, Venezia, Marsilio, 2007; HELGA FINTER, *Love for Letters or Reading as Performance: Carmelo Bene's Lectura Dantis*, Lecture for the faculty of Arts and Literature at the University of Notre Dame, April 12th, 2006, disponibile sul sito del Gruppo di ricerca sulla vocalità Sciami: https://sciami.com/scm-content/uploads/sites/9/2016/11/Helga-finter-Carmelo-Bene-Dante-reading-as-performance.pdf (last accessed 15/05/2025); RINO MAENZA, *Un 'bene' grande per Bologna. Carmelo Bene sopra le Due Torri*, in GIULIANA SANTARELLI (a cura di), *051. 2012-1970: Bologna, identità e memoria*, Bologna, Bononia University Press, 2012, pp. 220-227; ELIO BALDI, *Carmelo Bene's cannibalization of Dante and Shakespeare*, in «Romance Studies», vol. 35, n. 3 August, 2017, pp. 198-208; SIMONE CAPUTO, *Su Lectura Dantis di Carmelo Bene (con un'apparizione di Salvatore Sciarrino)*, in «Dante e l'arte», n. 2, 2015, pp. 255-274; MARIA ANTONIETTA EPIFANI, *Carmelo Bene: La Lectura Dantis in ricordo delle vittime della strage alla Stazione di Bologna*, in «L'Idomeneo», n. 31, 2021, pp. 221-238; ALBERTO CASADEI, PAOLO GERVASI, *La voce di Dante. Performance dantesche tra teatro, tv e nuovi media*, cit., pp. 52-59; MASSIMO MARINO, *Quando Carmelo Bene apparve alla Madonna. Dante e il phantasma*, in «Dante e l'arte», n. 9, 2022, pp. 59-74; CARLO ROMANO, *L'orchestra in gola di Carmelo Bene. Breve indagine su una voce metaforica e di rappresentazione*, in «Antropologia e Teatro», n. 14, 2022, pp. 1-18; GIULIA VITTORI, FRANCESCO CHILLEMI, CARLO ALBERTO PETRUZZI, *Rapt and En-chanted: Carmelo Bene's Voice and the Beyond of Theatre*, in «California Italian Studies», vol. 11, n. 2, pp. 1-15; PAOLOGIOVANNI MAIONE, *Bene canta Dante*, con appendici di Francesco De Simone, in ROBERTA ALBANO, GIANLUCA BOCCHINO, VENUSO MARIA (a cura di), *Dante performatico. Letture in diffrazione tra letteratura e Performing Arts*, Bologna, Massimiliano Piretti, 2023, pp. 91-106; LEONARDO MANCINI, *I "generi scelti" di Carmelo Bene e la Lectura Dantis di Bologna (1981). In memoria di Rino Maenza*, in ROBERTA ALBANO, GIANLUCA BOCCHINO, VENUSO MARIA (a cura di), *Dante performatico. Letture in diffrazione tra letteratura e Performing Arts*, cit., pp. 145-152.

stage, or rather he "appeared" [30] and caused silence to fall around the Tower; everyone was silent, listening, as if falling prey to enchantment, to seven cantos and two additional sonnets, namely *Inferno* V-XXVI-XXXIII, *Purgatorio* VI-VIII, *Paradiso* VII-XXIII-XXVII and finally from the *Rime* the sonnet, the incipit of which is «Guido, i' vorrei che tu e Lapo ed io», and that from the *Vita Nova*, the incipit of which is «Tanto gentile e tanto onesta pare»[31]:

Un boato salutava il termine della Lectura Dantis d'entusiasmo (in)fondato. Non v'ha dubbio. *Ero apparso alla Madonna*. [...] È a *Madonna la piazza* che si appare. È la folla miracolata in quanto a fronte d'un ascolto non suo, senza il rimedio della replica, esclusa dal discorso e solo e sempre perciò commossa. [...] Si appare alla Madonna soggettivata dalla folla esultante. E così *La Madonna ha le sue visioni*. Allucinazioni di massa in che Nostra Signora incontra, degradata a miraggio, la sua fatale *prostituzione*. E quale altra epoca se non questa nostra, così specifica dei "consumi", può garantire miracoli a ogni istante. L'insensata inflazione del mercatino delle immagini (tele-cinema) è, non a caso, preclusione scontata al miraggio. Perché si dia il miracolo, è necessario svanir nel dire. E *l'apparire della phoné* dice pure il suo stesso paradosso, come "altrove" di massa del discorso[32].

A roar greeted the end of the Lectura Dantis with (un)founded enthusiasm. No doubt about it. *I had appeared to Madonna*. [...] It is to *Madonna the piazza* that one appears. It is the crowd that is miraculous in that in the face of a listening that is not its own, without the remedy of reply, excluded from the discourse and only and always therefore moved. [...] One appears to Our Lady subjectified by the exultant crowd. And so *Our Lady has her visions*. Mass hallucinations in which Our Lady meets, degraded to a mirage, her fatal *prostitution*. And what other age than our own, so specific to 'consumption', can guarantee miracles at every turn. The senseless inflation of the market of images (tele-cinema) is, not by chance, a foregone exclusion to the mirage. For the miracle to occur, it is necessary to vanish into the telling. And *the appearance of the phoné* also says its own paradox, as the mass 'elsewhere' of discourse.

Bene's operation involves his solitary presence in the high tower, declaiming Dante's verses, without commentary: his voice, the microphone and the lectern, alone, to reawaken the primordial spirit of the Florentine poet's poetry, to make it vibrate from within himself in each listener. His formula, which is described with the traits of a religious operation (in the chronicles

[30] «appare»; «Prese a soffiare un vento di scirocco che fastidiava non poco li megafoni issati in su le lance. Io mi forzavo trattener gli spiriti e darmi pace, come usa pugilatore avanti la sua tenzone. Era l'ora. M'inerpicai sui pioli d'una impervia scaletta e finalmente mi mostrai alla folla che, meravigliata forse più di un suo numero che del miraggio mio, salutò in me l'attesa. Fu di plauso un boato indescrivibile, che si ripercoteva dalle piazze lontane e ne le strade adiacenti tutte. Apparvi. Li occhi mia chiusi al leggio luminescente, presi a cantar li versi d'Allegheri. Ma d'altrove, nel tempo delle nevi e del vin cotto di mia parvola vita. E venni meno, e il canto seguitò come profferto da ser Boccaccio in quella villa istessa settecent'anni prima. Li suoni rincorreansi sovra i tetti, e il silenzio divoto de le genti omai fatte incantamento mi suase al dolce vanire»/«A sirocco wind began to blow, which annoyed not a little the megaphones hoisted on the lances. I forced myself to restrain my spirits and give myself peace, as a boxer uses before his tussle. It was the hour. I climbed up the rungs of an impassable ladder and finally showed myself to the crowd who, amazed perhaps more by their act than by my mirage, greeted the expectation in me. There was an indescribable roar of applause, which reverberated from the distant squares and all the adjacent streets. I appeared there. My eyes closed to the luminescent lectern, I began to sing the verses of Allegheri. But elsewhere, in the time of the snows and vin cotto of my childhood. And I failed, and the song followed as Ser Boccaccio had said in that same villa seven hundred years before. The sounds chased each other over the rooftops, and the devout silence of the people as if enchanted persuaded me to fade gently», CARMELO BENE, *Opere*, Milano, Bompiani, 1995, p. 1125.

[31] See the corresponding cantos in Hollander/DOL; description referring to sonnet LII of the *Rime* in Foster-Boyde/DOL; sonnet in Musa/DOL, ch. XXVI.

[32] CARMELO BENE, *Opere*, cit., pp. 1125-1131.

he is described as a *muezzin* calling to prayer)[33], is linked to the *climax* that operates in his constant relationship with musical composers and poetry in the broadest sense. From the outset, writes Leonardo Mancini, Bene's frequentation of and preference for the minor genres of performance and his intense research in the musical and vocal field led him to decline declamation and the genre of the *melologue* in various contexts, preferring the exercise of the revival of the poetic text brought to a new form, elevated by a complete investment of the written text through the sensual carnality of the artistic crossing. From the initial performances-concerts in which he revived the Russian poet Vladimir Vladimirovič Majakovsky (which would see several re-editions by the artist), to the more complete and operatic *Manfred* at La Scala in Milan[34], the artist from Salento rehearses, rewrites, re-proposes his own investigation into the articulatory and sonorous possibilities of the voice in the most disparate spaces, finally even coming to terms with the Bolognese *lectura*, conceiving the first mass Dante, a unique and all-encompassing experience for the widest audience gathered[35]. His interpretation with sound design set the standard and raised the bar for the longest-running practice of Dante reinterpretation to another level:

> Dante non era un poeta "popolare", nel senso di dotato di attrattiva mediatica, e sarà proprio la performance di Carmelo a dare l'avvio a quello che è successo dopo […] il postmoderno e la spettacolarizzazione delle città erano novità molto discusse, e ancora non si era collegato lo spettacolo alla memoria dei lutti collettivi come da allora

[33] ANDREA CORTELLESSA, *Un muezzin per Dante*, in «Alias de Il Manifesto», 10 luglio 2004 disponibile al sito: https://www.quodlibet.it/recensione/26 (last accessed 15/05/2025). Among many reviews, we suggest: MARIA ANTONIETTA EPIFANI, *Il "Dante comunista" di Carmelo Bene. In ricordo della strage alla Stazione di Bologna*, in «Treccani Magazine», 30 luglio 2021, disponibile al sito: https://www.treccani.it/magazine/lingua_italiana/articoli/percorsi/percorsi_330.html (last accessed 15/05/2025).

[34] See CARMELO BENE, *da La Voce di Narciso*, in CARMELO BENE, *Opere*, cit, pp. 991-1047; LEONARDO MANCINI, *La partitura teatrale nella "svolta concertistica" di Carmelo Bene*, in «Mimesis Journal», vol. 7, n. 2, pp. 61-74; LEONARDO MANCINI, *Tra sé e dentro di sé: Carmelo Bene e La voce di Narciso tra poesia e teatro*, in RAFFAELE GIRARDI, ROSA AFFATATO (a cura di), *Gli incanti di Narciso: archetipi, seduzioni, distopie: la genesi di un mito e le sue visioni contemporanee*, Bari, di Pagina, 2020, pp. 158-168. For a better view of Bene's artistic contribution to the theatre of his time, see the studies: PIERGIORGIO GIACCHÈ, *Nota Bene: Vent'anni dopo*, Calimera, Kurumury, 2022; JEAN PAUL MANGANARO, *Oratorio Carmelo Bene*, Milano, ilSaggiatore, 2022; ARMANDO PETRINI, *Carmelo Bene*, Roma, Carocci, 2021; LEONARDO MANCINI, *Carmelo Bene: fonti della poetica*, Udine/Milano, Mimesis, 2020; dossier *Una "scandalosa grandezza". A ottant'anni dalla nascita di Carmelo Bene (1937-2017)*, a cura di Armando Petrini in «il castello di Elsinore», a. XXXII, n. 79, 2019, pp. 9-67; SALVATORE VENDITTELLI, *Carmelo Bene fra teatro e spettacolo*, a cura, introduzione e note di Armando Petrini, Torino, Accademia University Press, 2015; CARMELO BENE, *Che cos'è il teatro?!: La lezione di un genio*, a cura di Rino Maenza, con Dvd, Venezia, Marsilio, 2014; SALVATORE VENDITTELLI, *Carmelo Bene. I primi dieci anni di teatro*, a cura di Armando Petrini, in «Rivista semestrale di studi sulla vita e le forme del teatro», vol. I, n. 2, 2012, pp. 82-106; PIERGIORGIO GIACCHÈ, *Antropologia di una macchina attoriale*, Milano, Bompiani, 2007; CARMELO BENE, GIANCARLO DOTTO, *Vita di Carmelo Bene*, cit.; ARMANDO PETRINI, *Amleto da Shakespeare a Laforgue per Carmelo Bene*, Pisa, ETS, 2004; CARMELO BENE, GILLES DELEUZE, *Sovrapposizioni*, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2002.

[35] At first, given the historical, civil, and political importance of the operation, it was thought to propose the *lectura* live on television and even worldwide. Then this choice was opposed, but video traces still remain thanks to Angela Tomasini's VHS tape footage, rediscovered by Rino Maenza only in 2006 and finally transcribed on DVD, see RINO MAENZA, *Carmelo Bene legge Dante: Per l'anniversario della strage di Bologna*, con DVD, Venezia, Marsilio, 2007.

avverrà proprio con il ricordo della strage della stazione di Bologna o dell'abbattimento del Dc-9 dell'Italia nei cieli di Ustica o di altri avvenimenti che hanno lacerato la nostra società[36].

Dante was not a 'popular' poet, in the sense of being endowed with media appeal, and it was Carmelo's performance that gave rise to what happened later [...] postmodernism and the spectacularization of cities were much discussed innovations, and the spectacle had not yet been linked to the memory of collective mourning, as will happen with the memory of the Bologna station massacre or the shooting down of Italy's DC-9 in the skies over Ustica or other events that have torn our society apart.

Historian Fulvio Conti also emphasises the great importance that this event marked in the contemporary Italian leaden years. «Dante, the ultimate Italian», thanks to the singularity of the performer chosen to give him voice and body, is once again the icon to refer to, a bulwark of civilisation that should remind the entire citizenry what it deeply means to be Italian[37]. However, one cannot fail to notice how Bene's choice is further significant for the type of collaboration established: further supporting his *lectura* there is the composer Salvatore Sciarrino (1947)[38]. Bene's civil oration from the Tower picks up on that 19th-century method of interspersing Dante's chant with meticulously selected music and arias, in order to best support the actor's declamation and give greater vigour to the words uttered, keeping the audience's emotional tension awakened. The attention of the world of music for Dante is not surprising, nor is the close collaboration between the arts for what is now a well-established practice, especially in verse declamations.

Bene's voice competes with Sciarrino's music in an unequal duel where the actor's virtuosity stands out for the uniqueness of this feat. Having appreciated Gassman's intention, his charismatic presence is comforted by a respect for Dante's verse and a diction that tends to be flat; in dealing with the majesty of Bene's voice, one appreciates his ability to enter Dante's verse and make a new creature of it.

The clear structure of the *Commedia* is unhinged by Bene's *body-voice*, which sometimes decides to bend the end of the verse and the metric of the hendecasyllable to its own

[36] MASSIMO MARINO, *Quando Carmelo Bene apparve alla Madonna. Dante e il phantasma*, cit., p. 67.
[37] See FULVIO CONTI, *The ultimate Italian. Dante and a nation's identity*, cit., pp. 174-176.
[38] On the collaboration established between Bene and Sciarrino on electronic music and theatre, read MAURIZIO GRANDE, *L'uso della strumentazione elettronica nell'ultimo Bene*, in RENATO TOMASINO (a cura di), *Il suono del teatro*, Palermo, Acquario, 1982, pp. 45-73; MARCO ANGIUS, *Sui poemi concentrici. Da Sciarrino a Dante (con un'apparizione di Carmelo Bene)*, in «Hortus Musicus», a. III, n. 12, 2002, pp. 50-56; SIMONE BROGLIA, *"Urlar li fa la pioggia come cani". Ambiente sonoro, voce ed elettro-nica nell'Inferno di Sciarrino*, in «Doctor Virtualis», n. 10, 2010, pp. 99-123; CARLO CARRATELLI, *La voce dell'Inferno di Edoardo Torricella e Salvatore Sciarrino*, in ANGELA IDA DE BENEDICTIS, MARIA MADDALENA NOVATI (a cura di), *Il prix Italia e la sperimentazione radiofonica: l'immaginazione in ascolto*, Roma, Die Schachtel-Rai Trade, 2012, pp. 97-113. It is interesting to note how, after some time, the composer continued to be involved in theatrical performances related to Dante, first composing music for the *Paradiso* directed by the Lombardi-Tiezzi company, with dramaturgy by Giovanni Giudici (discussed below), and more recently with the Veneto-based Anagoor company, for whom he lent his music for a calendar of immersive performances in which he again combined Dante's poetry with music, art, theatre and dance, giving it new form (chap. 4).

advantage. As Paologiovanni Maione emphasises, «Bene sings Dante», and constructs a precise score for each canto by modulating his vocal extension, seeking with his voice-orchestra to build a colour, a repeated target-note around the nucleus of the narrated episode, which is stimulated by sudden peaks or drastic lowering, thanks to the technical possibilities provided by the microphone:

I microfoni sono veri e propri strumenti che bisogna saper suonare, soprattutto se ne adoperi cinque o sei insieme. Attraverso tali strumenti (collegati a un mixer, dotato d'equalizzazione ecc.) la voce può permettersi una musicalità di colori insospettata davvero. La voce, per così dire, si riveste, s'abbiglia per spogliarsi a suo piacimento. È in grado di pronunciare l'impercettibile, di giocare armonia e modalità e intervalli propri come un'*orchestra*. Ma, si badi, tutto questo stravolge la tecnica "accademica" del "porgere". Per esempio, il "portare" perentorio è proibitivo (è necessaria una emissione "senza respiro" -respirare è già dire-, se non si vuole ottenere, appunto, un risultato di sciocca amplificazione ecc.). Bisogna, infatti, smontare quanto s'è appreso, sulla voce "viva", senza però scordarsene. È tutt'altro che facile. Non è roba da poco se bisogna alla fine non *servirsi* dei mezzi elettronici, ma *esserlo*; essere microfoni, mixer, equalizzatore, db, *aphex*, *harmonizer* ecc.[39].

Microphones are real instruments that you need to know how to play, especially if you use five or six of them together. Through such instruments (connected to a mixer, equipped with equalisation, etc.) the voice can afford a musicality of colours that is truly unsuspected. The voice, as it were, dresses up, dresses down to undress at will. It is able to pronounce the imperceptible, to play harmony and its own modes and intervals like an *orchestra*. But, mind you, all this disrupts the 'academic' technique of 'offering'. For example, the peremptory 'offering' is prohibitive (a 'breathless' emission is necessary -breathing is already saying-, if one does not want to obtain a result of silly amplification etc.). One must, in fact, dismantle what one has learned, on the 'live' voice, without forgetting it. It is anything but easy. It's no small feat if you have to, in the end, not *use* electronic means, but be one; be a microphone, mixer, equaliser, db*, aphex*, *harmoniser*, etc.

He also decides whether to maintain a linear rhythm or to cadence his declamation, isolating with pauses and restraints certain words or rhyming words (tend to be the verse endings) or to set his reading in a complete crescendo, of intensity and rhythm as in the case of Count Ugolino's song, where the tonic accent of the tenth is recalled in upbeat, offering the audience a looming, nefarious, terrible image of the cruel story narrated.

As Leonardo Mancini highlights, Bene's preparatory reading of Dante's poem, confirmed in the Bolognese *lectura*, is a fine essay of personal Dantesque hermeneutics, crowned by a few examples of *lectio difficilior* and by obsolete forms handed down in the poem's tradition, exhuming the thoughts of Ugo Foscolo, a fine reader and poet himself[40]. On the strength of this in-depth and skilful study, Bene highlights the minimal units of the verse, starting from the syllables and vowels to enrich his interpretation with strong colours: still remaining on the canto di Ugolino, the repeated use of the occlusive voiceless consonants (c, t, p) and occlusive voiced consonants (g, d, b) is insistent, with which Dante's verse is sprinkled.

[39] Quotation from CARMELO BENE, *Sono apparso alla Madonna*, in CARMELO BENE, *Opere*, cit., pp. 1049-1200, quotation at p. 1124, included in the article by PAOLOGIOVANNI MAIONE*, Bene canta Dante*, cit., reference p. 97.
[40] See LEONARDO MANCINI, *I "generi scelti" di Carmelo Bene e la Lectura Dantis di Bologna (1981). In memoria di Rino Maenza*, cit., pp. 145-152.

In his *performance*, during which the canto directly follows that of the episode of the lovers Paolo and Francesca, Bene pays particular attention to the *incipit* of the thirty-third canto, somewhat prolonging the noun mouth, the true place where the count's drama is condensed, and restrains the sound of the voiceless palatal occlusive, popping each *c* of the first triplet to finally define this mortiferous atmosphere with the adjective *guasto*, a word that rhymes precisely with pasto, the condition that codifies the relationship between count Ugolino and Arcibishop Ruggieri, the former eating the latter's skull for eternity:

> La bo**cc**a sollevò dal fiero **pasto**
> quel pe**cc**ator, forbendola a' **c**apelli
> del **c**apo **c**h'elli avea di retro **guasto**[41].

The scholar Helga Finter offers a further overview to complete the picture of the «oral aggressive drive representation» operated by the actor in this particular canto, pointing out how the story of Ugolino, written by Dante, and subsequently performed by Bene, is an example of «cannibalistic lust», the lust for vengeance that leads to the extreme condition of the most violent barbarism that turns against the very nature of man:

> Contra-pointing the transcendental voice of the verse, Bene is erotizising the lust of terror. Murderous violence, punished as an act of cannibalisation, shows murder caused by hate as the contrary of reading, originated in love: the reading mouth is an instrument of sublimed lust, the contrary of the murderous cannibals[42].

Like a diviner, Bene brings to the surface through his own *lectura* the grain of the vocal texture of the song, aided by the dilating and reverberating effect of the microphone, an articulate and involuted tangle of bitterness and violence contrived by Dante mostly on the

[41] *If*. XXXIII, vv. 1-3.
[42] HELGA FINTER, *Love for Letters or Reading as Performance: Carmelo Bene's Lectura Dantis*, cit., p. 13. Of interest in her discussion is the psychoanalytical analysis she offers of Bene's alienating operation of reading Dante and her recourse to the texts of IVAN FONAGY, *Les bases pulsionnelles de la phonation: les sons*, in «Revue française de psychanalyse», vol. 34, n. 1, 1970, pp. 101-136.

vowels o, e and i, to leave the audience shocked into suspension at the verse[43]: «P**o**scia, più ch**e** ‘l d**ol**o**r**, p**oté** ‘l d**i**giun**o**»[44].

The contingency of expressive modalities, chosen form, and composition, together with the music chosen by Bene, fully recalls the experimental and interdisciplinary nature of the operations that were taking place in the artistic field, especially on the peripheries of traditional forms. In the post-war period, before Bene’s operation, others had travelled the paths of collaboration, of hybridisation, especially in the contexts of neo-hermeticist poetry, the neo-avant-garde and the Beat current[45]. Recalling an artist and poet who will later be the subject of

[43] «Il sistema rimico sottolinea invece la particolarità del racconto vero e proprio, in quanto le rime aspre e rare del canto XXXII (ben cinque rime esclusive di questo canto: *-occe*, *-uco*, *-abbo*, *-ebe*, *-azzi* e due che occorrono una sola altra volta, come *-ecchi* e *-eschi*, le quali anche mostrano, con *-ama*, *-agna*, *-azzi*, *-ezzo*, una tendenza a collegare rime diverse con assonanze e consonanze) si interrompono, con l’unica eccezione della rima *-orsi* (vv. 56, 58, 60) per riprendere subito dopo la fine dell’episodio con *-ascia*, *-oppo*, *-osta*, *-egna* e *-igo* (unica nel poema). Riprende altresì il motivo del gelo che caratterizza il canto precedente, rappresentato dai lemmi: *gelata*, v. 91; *cristallo*, v. 98; *freddura*, v. 101; *fredda costa*, v. 109; *duri veli*, v. 112; *raggeli*, v. 114; *ghiaccia*, v. 117; *‘nvetriate*, v. 128; *mi verna*, v. 135. E pure riprende il tono sarcastico e sprezzante del linguaggio che, nel canto XXXII deriva dalla inusitata frequenza di espressioni, indifferentemente poste in bocca a Dante o ai dannati, con valore ambiguamente sospeso tra il metaforico e il letterale (see vv. 60, 108, 117, 139), e nel nostro si evidenzia nelle locuzioni ossimoriche come la *gelata ruvidamente fascia* (vv. 91-92) e *i duri veli* (v.112), o ironiche come il *vantaggio* della Tolomea (v.124)»/«The rhyme system, on the other hand, emphasises the particularity of the tale proper, since the harsh and rare rhymes of Canto XXXII (five exclusive rhymes to this Canto: *-occe*, *-uco*, *-abbo*, *-ebe*, *-azzi* and two that occur only once more, such as *-ecchi* and *-eschi*, which also show, with *-ama*, *-agna*, *-azzi*, *-ezzo*, a tendency to link different rhymes with assonances and consonances) are interrupted, with the sole exception of the rhyme *-orsi* (vv. 56, 58, 60) to resume immediately after the end of the episode with *-ascia*, *-oppo*, *-osta*, *-egna* and *-igo* (the only one in the poem). It also takes up the frost motif that characterises the previous canto, represented by the lemmas: *gelata*, v. 91; *cristallo*, v. 98; *freddura*, v. 101; *fredda costa*, v. 109; *duri veli*, v. 112; *raggeli*, v. 114; *ghiaccia*, v. 117; *‘nvetriate*, v. 128; *mi verna*, v. 135. And also takes up the sarcastic and contemptuous tone of language that, in canto XXXII derives from the unusual frequency of expressions, indifferently placed in the mouths of Dante or the damned, with ambiguous value suspended between the metaphorical and the literal (see vv. 60, 108, 117, 139), and in ours is evident in oxymoronic expressions such as the *gelata ruvidamente fascia* (vv. 91-92) and *i duri veli* (v.112), or ironic such as the *vantaggio* of Ptolemy (v.124)», SAVERIO BELLOMO, *Il canto XXXIII dell’Inferno*, in ANNA CERBO (a cura di), con la collaborazione di Mariangela Semola, *LECTURA DANTIS 2002-2009*, omaggio a Vincenzo Placella per i suoi settanta anni, 4. voll. (2002-2009), Napoli, Università degli studi di Napoli L’Orientale, 2011, 2002-2009, vol. IV (2009), pp. 1369-1385, quotation p. 1370. See also ROBERT HOLLANDER, *Inferno XXXIII, 37-74: Ugolino's Importunity*, in «Speculum», vol. 59, n. 3 July, 1984, pp. 549-555; LUIS BORGES, *Il falso problema di Ugolino [1948]*, in LUIS BORGES, *Nove saggi danteschi*, a cura di Tommaso Scarano, Milano, Adelphi, 2001, pp. 33-40; EDOARDO SANGUINETI, *Inferno XXXIII [1989]*, in EDOARDO SANGUINETI, *Dante reazionario*, Roma, Editori Riuniti 1992, pp. 111-124; CLAUDIA VILLA, *Rileggere gli archetipi: la dismisura di Ugolino*, in LUCIA BATTAGLIA RICCI (a cura di), *Leggere Dante*, Ravenna, Longo, 2003, pp. 113-129; ENRICO MALATO, *La 'morte' della pietà: "E se non piangi, di che pianger suoli?". Lettura del canto XXXIII dell'"Inferno"*, in «Rivista di Studi Danteschi», n. 1 gennaio-giugno, 2005, pp. 1-68; PATRICIA VÁZQUEZ, *Dante's Cannibal Count: Unnatural Hunger and its Reckoning*, in «Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics», vol. 28, n. 1 Spring/Summer, 2020, pp. 67-93.

[44] *If*. XXXIII, v. 75.

[45] In this regard, see Giovanna Lo Monaco’s studies on poets and on the interdisciplinary aspects of the new orality: GIOVANNA LO MONACO, *Scritture selvagge. Letteratura antagonista nell’Italia degli anni Settanta*, Roma, Giulio Perrone, 2022; GIOVANNA LO MONACO, *Creare un luogo. La Neoavanguardia e lo spazio performativo*, in MONICA JANSEN, INGE LANSLOTS, MARINA SPUNTA (a cura di), *Viaggi minimi e luoghi qualsiasi. In cammino tra cinema, letteratura e arti visive nell’Italia contemporanea*, Firenze, Franco Cesati, 2020, pp. 119-127; GIOVANNA LO MONACO, *Dalla scrittura al gesto. Il Gruppo 63 e il teatro*, Novate Milanese, Prospero, 2019; GIOVANNA LO MONACO, *Beat italiano: la poesia del Sessantotto*, in SANDRO DE NOBILE (a cura di), *Il ‘68. Costruzione e decostruzione di un mito*, Chieti, Solfanelli 2018, pp. 11-20. Also see FAUSTO CURI, *Manipolazioni, mescidazioni,*

our discussion, we can mention here as an example the work *Laborintus* by Edoardo Sanguineti (1930-2010)[46]. At the time a young member of the Gruppo 63, and a participant in a reflection on the combinatory possibilities of the gesture inherent in poetry, he wrote this collection of poems and was subsequently contacted by the artist Luciano Berio (1925-2003), to propose a musicalisation of it. Sanguineti's artistically omnivorous nature and his lifelong ability to intercept the co-presence of the arts, also by virtue of his ability to write in notation, gave rise to multiple projects that generated convergences between literature, art, theatre and music[47]. Sanguineti maintains a peculiar poetic note within each collaboration, proving himself to be an extraordinary author, who not by chance intercepts Dante, is its amplifier in the arts and mediator.

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travestimenti, montaggi… Sanguineti e il già scritto, in «Moderna: semestrale di teoria e critica della letteratura», vo. VI, n. 1, 2004, pp. 77- 133.

[46] See EDOARDO SANGUINETI, *Laborintus*, testo e commento a cura di Erminio Risso, San Cesario di Lecce, Manni, 2006[1] [2020]. See also: ERMINIO RISSO, *Laborintus di Edoardo Sanguineti tra viaggi danteschi e mito*, in «Rivista di Letteratura italiana», a. XL, n. 1 (*Dante nella poesia del Novecento e dei primi anni del nuovo millennio II*, a cura di Donato Pirovano, Clara Allasia), 2022, pp. 97-107; EDOARDO SANGUINETI, *Ideologia e linguaggio*, a cura di Erminio Risso, Milano, Feltrinelli, 2001.

[47] From *Laborintus*, and from the collaboration with Berio, came *Esposizione*, an experimental ballet that also saw the collaboration with the dancer Ann Halprin, debuted at the Teatro Fenice in Venice on 18 April 1963, while *Passaggio*, staged by Luciano Berio and Edoardo Sanguineti, was staged at the Piccola Scala in Milan on 7 May 1963, under the direction of Virginio Puecher. In 1965, to coincide with the seventh centenary of Dante's birth, a new production was commissioned to Berio and Sanguineti, who produced *Laborintus II*, a radio recording for the ORTF-Office de Radiodiffusion Télévision Française, which was finalised on 26 September 1965, and was based on the music of the ballet *Esposizione*, and would later also have included a new performance in the theatre, which was never realised. In this regard, listen to the episode dedicated to music and Dante by Alberto Batisti, radio broadcast recorded for Rete Toscana Classica, 27 October 2021, available at: https://www.retetoscanaclassica.it/puntata/dante-in-musica-9/ (last accessed 15/05/2025). See also HENNING HUFNAGEL, *Produttività potenziata. Edoardo Sanguineti e Luciano Berio, da Esposizione a Laborintus II*, in «Versants», vol. 70, n. 2 (*Fascicolo italiano. Co-creare: forme della collaborazione letteraria e interartistica*, a cura di Giovanna Cordibella e Sara Garau), 2023, pp. 81-97; CANDIDA FELICI, *Dante nel labirinto: parole e musica in Laborintus II di Berio e Sanguineti*, in MARIA TERESA ARFINI, ALBERTO RIZZUTI (a cura di), *«AnDante». Dante e la musica: riflessioni interdisciplinari*, Torino, Università degli studi di Torino, 2018, pp. 88-113; DAVID LUMMUS, *Edoardo Sanguineti's New Dante*, in PAOLO CHIRUMBOLO, JOHN PICCHIONE (edited by), *Edoardo Sanguineti. Literature, Ideology and the Avant-Garde*, Leeds, legenda, 2013, pp. 40-55; MARIO MORONI, *The Linguistic Gesture: Edoardo Sanguineti's Theatre*, in PAOLO CHIRUMBOLO, JOHN PICCHIONE (edited by), *Edoardo Sanguineti. Literature, Ideology and the Avant-Garde*, cit., pp. 158-168; EDOARDO SANGUINETI, *Quattro passaggi con Luciano*, in ANGELA IDA DE BENEDICTIS (a cura di), *Luciano Berio. Nuove prospettive / New Perspectives*, Atti del Convegno (Siena, Accademia Chigiana, 28-31 ottobre 2008), Firenze, Olschki, 2012, pp. 49-60; FRANCESCA MARTELLINI, *Anna Halprin: oltre la danza*, in «Teatro e Storia», nuova serie 3, a. XXV, vol. 32, 2011, pp. 317-344; FLORIAN MUSSGNUG, *Writing Like Music: Luciano Berio, Umberto Eco and the New Avant-Garde*, in «Comparative Critical Studies», vol. 5, n. 1, 2008, pp. 81-97; GIOVANNA GRONDA, *Sanguineti, Laborintus II. Un libretto per musica dantesco. Dal prelievo alla composizione*, in GIAN LUIGI BECCARIA, CARLA MARELLO (a cura di), *La parola al testo. Scritti per Bice Mortara Garavelli*, 2 voll., Alessandria, Edizioni dell'Orso, 2002, vol. II, pp. 807-820; ROSSANA DALMONTE, *et al.* (a cura di), *Il gesto della forma. Musica, poesia, teatro nell'opera di Luciano Berio*, Milano, Arcadia 1981; YVONNE RAINER, *Yvonne Rainer Interviews Ann Halprin*, in «Tulane Drama Review», vol. 10, n. 2, 1965, pp. 142-167. The files referring to *Exposition*, *Passage* and *Laborintus II* are accessible on Berio's composer website: https://lucianoberio.org/passaggio (last accessed 15/05/2025). The Centro Studi Interuniversitario Edoardo Sanguineti supported by the University of Turin is responsible for ongoing research on the artist, to which we refer for up-to-date bibliography references: https://www.centrosanguineti.unito.it/it (last accessed 15/05/2025).

Returning to the operation performed by Bene and attempting to trace the acquaintances that supported this acting test, one can count in this sense his personal friendship and collaboration with the artist, director and writer Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922-1975)[48]. Prematurely murdered, Pasolini is the main interpreter of Dante's reception at the time, a fervent elaborator of the Florentine poet's message. In fact, we cannot forget that Pasolini wrote, among many other poetic collections, *Petrolio* and the *Divina mimesis* in the years that saw the young Bene begin his own research practice closely linked to the world of poetry[49], and then maturely landed on the *Lectura Dantis*, equipped with all those hermeneutic but above all artistic tools that contributed to his Bolognese performance[50].

These connections, these frequentations cannot be taken as accidental, nor as negligible, as Dante emerges as a fixed point to have a confrontation and a dialogue with, as the classic unperturbed by time, to reflect more punctually on the evil inherent in society and the need to take a stand, as a citizen and as an artist, just as we had already witnessed during the artistic and theoretical avant-gardes of the early 20th century. Here, the 1970s and 1980s act as a new incubator, at the level of poetics and also of praxis, to once again bring artists (in this case, polyvalent in their definition) to confront Dante's work with full awareness.

It is precisely on the lowest common denominator that exists in friendship, in artistic fellowship, and, in this case, in the sharing of principles on which to build one's poetics, that one can address the next performers who have further revolutionised the *Lectura Dantis* and its definition.

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[48] See GUIDO SANTATO, *Pasolini oggi. Studi e letture*, Roma, Carocci, 2024 (in particolare il cap. 1 *Pasolini e Dante. Dagli esordi a Petrolio*); ALBERTO GRANESE, *Il Dante di Pasolini*, in «Rivista di Letteratura italiana», a. XL, n. 1 (*Dante nella poesia del Novecento e dei primi anni del nuovo millennio II*, a cura di Donato Pirovano, Clara Allasia), 2022, pp. 31-41; GUIDO SANTATO, *Pasolini e Dante: dagli esordi a Petrolio*, in «Studi e problemi di critica testuale», n. 102, 2021, pp. 263-297; ROBERTO ANTONELLI, *Pasolini e Dante*, in «Insula europea», n. 6 Maggio, 2022, disponibile online al sito: https://www.insulaeuropea.eu/2022/05/06/pasolini-e-dante/ (last accessed 15/05/2025); EMANUELA PATTI, *Pasolini after Dante: The 'Divine Mimesis' and the Politics of Representation*, London/New York, Routledge, 2016; FEDERICO BELLINI, *Dante/Pasolini: lo naturale è sempre sanza errore*, in «Ricerche di S/Confine», vol. 6 (*Disïata parola, imagine divina. Parma per Dante 2019-2021,* Dossier a cura di Nicola Catelli, Luca Di Sabatino, Paolo Rinoldi), 2021, pp. 1-16. Indeed, it is interesting to recall that in 2019 director Antonio Latella debuts at the Residenz Theater in Munich (DE) with the show *Eine göttliche Komödie. Dante/Pasolini*, screenplay by Federico Bellini, German adaptation by Katrin Hammerl and Laura Olivi, premiere on 22 March 2019, set design Giuseppe Stellato, costumes Graziella Pepe, music Franco Visioli, lighting Gerrit Jurda, choreography Francesco Manetti, dramaturgy by Federico Bellini und Laura Olivi, with actors Philip Dechamps, Gunther Eckes, Max Gindorff, Franz Pätzold, Nils Strunk, Tim Werths, running time 1 h 40 min without intermission.

[49] See LAURA PIAZZA, *«Volte: e le cose già non sono più». Carmelo Bene per Dino Campana*, in «Mimesis Journal», vol. 6, n. 2, 2017, pp. 65-76.

[50] See AUGUSTO PONZIO, *Interferenze. Pier Paolo Pasolini, Carmelo Bene e dintorni*, Milano, Mimesis, 2012.

3.1.3. Leo de Berardinis and Perla Peragallo

A decisive piece to add to this varied list of protagonists of twentieth-century *Lectura Dantis* is placed by the artistic couple Leo de Berardinis (1940-2008) and Perla Peragallo (1947-2007)[51]. Close to Bene's school, his fellow travellers and first-rate participants in the Nuovo Teatro, Leo and Perla had a rich career, which saw them create an artistic and sentimental association until the 1980s (when they decided to go their separate ways), founding the Teatro Marigliano (1971-1976) and acting as promoters for new realities and personalities in the theatre, creating spaces for research theatre in Southern Italy[52]. After the separation from Perla, and thanks to Berardinis' subsequent relocation to Bologna, all the documentation of the artist and of past collaborations has since found a home in the archives of the *Alma Mater Studiorum* University of Bologna, where it is also possible to consult valuable sources on his Dante elaborations[53] (*Figures 9-10*).

Matteo Tamborrino began the study of these materials, also collecting testimonies of collaborators and spectators on the Dante performances of Leo and Perla[54]. The first approach to Dante came through poetry, supported by Leo's constant frequentation of French *maudit* symbolist poetics and a very strong presence of Pasolini's writings, confirming his desire to

[51] A minimal bibliography on Leo de Berardinis and Perla Peragallo is as follows: LEO DE BERARDINIS, PERLA PERAGALLO, *Attorno all'eliminazione del teatro*, in «La scrittura scenica», I, 3, 1971, pp. 43-57; GIGI LIVIO, *I poeti dovrebbero essere sacri. Perla Peragallo*, in «L'asino di B.», vol. VI, n. 7, 2002, pp. 7-25; MAXIMILIAN LA MONICA, *Il poeta scenico. Perla Peragallo e il teatro*, Editoria & Spettacolo, Roma, 2002; on De Berardinis see the bibliographical references included in the in-depth entry LAURA MARIANI, *Leo De Bernardinis*, in Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani, Treccani-Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, Roma, 2020: <treccani.it/enciclopedia/leo-de-berardinis_(Dizionario-Biografico)>, and the dossier in «Culture Teatrali», n. 28 (*Leo De Berardinis oggi*, a cura di Laura Mariani e Cristina Valenti), 2019. Further studies: MATTEO TAMBORRINO, *'Un mare di parole' tra Assoli e Udunda Indina. Il plurilinguismo "malato" di Leo e Perla nella fase di rientro capitolino*, in «Mimesis Journal», IX, 2, 2020, pp. 63-90; MATTEO TAMBORRINO, *Il cuore della distruzione. La ricerca di Leo e Perla tra Avita murì (1978) e De Berardinis-Peragallo (1979)*, in «Il Castello di Elsinore», XXXIV, 84, 2021, pp. 75-103.

[52] See ANGELO VASSALLI, *La tentazione del sud. Viaggio nel teatro di Leo e Perla da Roma a Marigliano*, Corazzano, Titivillus, 2018; ENRICO PITOZZI, *Contro la rappresentazione. Note sul teatro di Leo de Berardinis e Perla Peragallo*, in MALVINA BORGHERINI, SARA MARINI, ANGELA MENGONI, ANNALISA SACCHI, ALESSANDRA VACCARI (a cura di), *Laboratorio Italia. Canoni e contraddizioni del Made in Italy*, Milano/Udine, Mimesis, 2018, pp. 344-357.

[53] The fund *Leo de Berardinis Archive* (1963-2003) is conserved at the Department of Arts of the Alma Mater Studiorum University of Bologna (curator: Prof. Cristina Valenti, with the collaboration of Prof. Laura Mariani; consultation by Dott.ssa Maria Grazia Cupini), available at: https://archivi.ibc.regione.emilia-romagna.it/ibc-cms/cms.find?flagfind=customXdamsTree&id=IBCAS00303&munu_str=0_1_1&numDoc=7&docToggle=214&docStart=1&hierStatus=4,1,d6,d6,0&docCount=25&perpage=&physDoc=1&comune=Bologna (last accessed 15/05/2025).

[54] See MATTEO TAMBORRINO, *Tra Sommi Poeti ci si intende: Dante 'tradotto' in scena da Leo e Perla*, in LUCA BANI, RAUL CALZONI, THOMAS PERSICO (a cura di), *Traduzioni, Tradizioni e Rivisitazioni dell'opera di Dante. In memoria di Marco Sirtori*, Napoli, La scuola di Pitagora editrice, 2023, pp. 521-542.

confront his own time: «On a par with Leopardi, Poe, Majakovsky, Shakespeare, Rimbaud (not by chance, deities also in Leo's pantheon), Dante is an example of living poetry, a truly experienced culture, an antidote to an alienating, exterior and dehumanising pseudo-art»[55].

The first performance dedicated to Dante still sees the presence of Peragallo, and comes at the end of their common adventure in Marigliano, debuting in 1980 in Rome[56]. As emerges from his later notebooks[57], this event determines the first crossing of Dante and still remains, despite its complexity, a *lectura*.

According to Stefano Casi, the style implemented for this and Leo's subsequent dramaturgy fits in well with the practices of the avant-gardes (or rather neo-avant-gardes, as already found in the case of Bene), in that it re-uses and stitches onto a new canvas what can be assimilated from the classical as in a mosaic, going for those techniques of assemblage and citation that are typical of the second half of the 20th century[58]:

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[55] «Al pari di Leopardi, Poe, Majakovskij, Shakespeare, Rimbaud (non a caso, deità anch'esse nel pantheon di Leo), Dante è esempio di poesia vivente, cultura realmente esperita, antidoto a una pseudo-arte alienante, esteriore e disumanizzante», ivi, p. 525. See also: FILIPPO BETTALLI, *Intervista con Leo De Berardinis*, in «La scrittura scenica», n. XII, 1976, p. 74-94; ALFONSO AMENDOLA, *Per una poetica del molteplice. Dialogo con Leo de Berardinis*, Salerno, Plectica, 2007.

[56] *XXXIII Paradiso* da Dante Alighieri, Divina Commedia, by and with Leo de Berardinis and Perla Peragallo, music by Leo de Berardinis, performed by Leo de Berardinis (tenor sax), Perla Peragallo (alto sax), Beppe Basile (drums), Maddalena Deodato (bass clarinet), Piero Loreti (double bass) and Mario Raja (tenor sax); narrator Leo de Berardinis; production: Teatro di Marigliano; first performance: Rome, II Festival Internazionale dei Poeti, Piazza di Siena, 31 July 1980.

[57] From the extensive holdings in the digitised archive, see in particular the two notebooks ('Dante Alighieri. Studies and variations by and with Leo de Berardinis. Rome Hamlet. Bologna" / "Osric" Rome/Bologna, 29 March 1984 - 05 October 1986 and "Dante's memory of his vision of Paradise..." 1991 - 1992) downloadable under "Quaderni", which contain the Maestro's thoughts and scene notes concomitant with and referring to subsequent and declared performances of Dante, among which *Dante Alighieri*, studies and variations by and with Leo de Berardinis, directed and scenes by Leo de Berardinis, Venice, XXXII International Theatre Festival - La Biennale, Teatro Goldoni, 6 October 1984.

[58] «…l'uso dei frammenti di testo come tessere da incastonare all'interno di un mosaico che sfugge alla tradizionale composizione drammatica corrisponde alla tecnica artistica dell'assemblage, in particolare di ready-made ripresi dagli artisti, decontestualizzati e ricontestualizzati per formare un'opera nuova. […] Il rapporto di Leo con i testi originari è assimilabile, per certi versi, a questa pratica edile medievale e, al tempo stesso, a una tecnica avanguardistica: e in questa similitudine parallela si precisa, evocativamente, proprio la peculiarità dell'artista Leo, antico e contemporaneo al tempo stesso, capace cioè di nutrirsi della storia ma anche di azzerarla per cercare di ricostruirla»/«...the use of text fragments as tesserae to be set within a mosaic that eludes traditional dramatic composition corresponds to the artistic technique of assemblage, in particular of ready-mades taken up by artists, decontextualised and recontextualised to form a new work. [...] Leo's relationship with the original texts is comparable, in some ways, to this medieval building practice and, at the same time, to an avant-garde technique: and in this parallel similarity, the peculiarity of Leo as an artist is evocatively specified, ancient and contemporary at the same time, that is, able to feed on history but also to reset it in an attempt to reconstruct it», STEFANO CASI, *Nel cantiere drammaturgico di Leo*, in «Culture Teatrali», n. 28 (*Leo De Berardinis oggi*, a cura di Laura Mariani e Cristina Valenti), 2019, pp. 51-63, quotation at p. 53. Read also CLAUDIO MELDOLESI, *L'apice di Leo, artista del riso oscuro*, in EVA MARINAI, SARA POETA, IGOR VAZZAZ (a cura di), *Comicità negli anni Settanta. Percorsi eccentrici di una metamorfosi fra teatro e media*, con un'introduzione di Anna Barsotti, Pisa, ETS, 2005, pp. 45-51.

Si tratta di un'operazione che va ben oltre il semplice collage di testi altrui. Nel momento in cui prende i brani che lo interessano, quei brani cessano di provenire da un'altra penna e diventano di Leo. L'impatto più evidente con i materiali di lavorazione custoditi all'Archivio Leo de Berardinis viene dai quaderni nei quali Leo ricopia a mano decine di pagine dalla *Commedia*, dall'*Odissea*, da *Ulysse*s o da *Finnegans wake*. La presenza di numerose fotocopie dei libri scelti (che quindi farebbero intuire la non necessità della copiatura a mano) indica come la compresenza delle pagine manoscritte di quegli stessi brani sia rivelatrice di un processo di trasformazione di quei testi altrui in testi propri. Trascrivendo lunghissimi brani testuali di Dante, Omero e Joyce, Leo diventa Dante, Omero e Joyce, e quei brani, travestiti per dirla con Sanguineti, diventano suoi[59].

It is an operation that goes far beyond the simple collage of other people's texts. The moment he takes the pieces that interest him, those pieces cease to come from another pen and become Leo's. The most obvious impact with the working materials kept in the Leo de Berardinis Archive comes from the notebooks in which Leo recopies by hand dozens of pages from *The Comedy*, *The Odyssey*, *Ulysses* or *Finnegans wake*. The presence of numerous photocopies of the chosen books (which would therefore suggest that hand-copying was not necessary) indicates how the co-presence of the handwritten pages of those same passages is revealing of a process of transformation of those other people's texts into his own. By transcribing very long textual excerpts from Dante, Homer and Joyce, Leo becomes Dante, Homer and Joyce, and those excerpts, disguised as Sanguineti puts it, become his own.

Their reading/concert of Dante cannot fail to remind us of the mass acousmatic experience, created, however, by Bene only the following year. Berardinis's is an operation at the head of poetry, which seeks to bring the verse back to the centre, de-centring it through a mise-en-scène that is so meagre, yet so chaotic and dynamic that, as if by centripetal motion, it brings all the attention back to Dante's word. In their case, too, music and musicality in the broadest sense are therefore not only part of a search on the part of the *actor*, who must sound out the self and the inner self with his voice and microphone, but a broader tension to strive for, for a theatre that wants to go beyond the message prefixed by the text, removing the centrality of authorship and shifting the axis to presence, to the sharing of an experience that touches everyone, participants and performers, making the borderline increasingly blurred.

For the two artists, the performance is assessable as a process of knowledge to be produced together, in the *hic et nunc*, between actor and spectator, «a knowledge that does not take place before, but in the meantime»[60]. From the outset, Leo and Perla activate those prerogatives that have been defined as those of the lyric actor, who delves into a performance-system in solos, as in the most ancient melodrama, being welcomed by a larger *ensemble* that always surrounds her/him, but pronouncing her/himself defiantly, with personality within the scene, of which they are alternately protagonists at one moment, and no longer in the next. The choice of the 33rd canto of *Paradise* is described as follows by Leo himself to critic Franco Cordelli: «it started like this: one night I couldn't sleep and since I can't read any more, Perla,

[59] CLAUDIO MELDOLESI, *L'apice di Leo, artista del riso oscuro*, in EVA MARINAI, SARA POETA, IGOR VAZZAZ (a cura di), *Comicità negli anni Settanta. Percorsi eccentrici di una metamorfosi fra teatro e media*, cit., p. 54.
[60] «una conoscenza che non avviene prima, ma nel *mentre*», DONATELLA ORECCHIA, *La regia della crisi. Frammenti per un dialogo: Carlo Quartucci, Carmelo Bene, Leo De Berardinis e Perla Peragallo*, in ANTONIO AUDINO (a cura di*), Corpi e visioni. Indizi sul teatro contemporaneo*, Roma, Artemide, 2007, pp. 33-60, quotation p. 52.

to console me, to put me to sleep, read me the 33rd canto of Paradise forty times, I mean forty times...»[61].

The *lectura*, here stretched to the limit of its usual scenic practice, is placed in a new evolutionary perspective by the duo. The context of the Roman festival in which Leo and Perla decide to stage Dante and the methods used by the two artists reveal a substantial revival of the 19th-century scheme of interspersing poetry and music; the post-modern dimension appears through the distorting and desecrating destruction of verse and meaning brought into play by the refraction of triplets between Leo's voice on stage, his previously recorded voice and the vocal score decided upon as counterpoint by Perla. To this must be added the *jazz* musicians involved and Leo and Perla themselves, also with a tenor and an alto sax respectively. Dante's song is clearly the subject of their 'singing', but it takes on a whole new form:

Dalla cassa acustica viene la voce di Leo: "Vergine Madre, figlia del tuo figlio", eccetera. Un po' Carmelo Bene (ma appena in eco). Leo fa vocali imprevedibilmente chiare, poi caccia l'ugola nel naso, sonorizza dalle narici come può. […] Ogni tanto dirige, ogni tanto suona il sax, e continua a lampeggiare occhiate di sotto i capelli. Prosegue la dizione dantesca sforacchiata dal jazz. Ma, prima che si arrivi al "Vedi Beatrice con quanti beati", esplode nell'altoparlante un Paganini sbavato, registrato a giri scemanti […], frenetico, iroso, altissimi i decibel! E, a quel punto, come una forza della natura, Perla ci dà dentro. Il verso di Dante si è momentaneamente eclissato: davanti a noi c'è una tarantata quanto mai convulsa che fa tutt'uno con la musica, si inerpica con la forza dei nervi sul vibrare dei piatti (perché la batteria di Basile accompagna Paganini); e balla, balla a terra, gli occhi rovesciati, una mattana che mima il masturbarsi più feroce del maschio. C'è un accenno di litigio col batterista, le parole vengono sommerse dalla musica. Leo interviene col suo fare sfocato da mammasantissima. Poi Dante riprende, per bloccarsi ancora in una nuova interruzione. Dolcissima, quasi rosata, la voce di [Billie Holiday] si sovrappone, dalla cassa acustica, al sax, e Perla viene avanti, belliniana sonnambula, con la caviglia sifolina e il piede valgo. Prenderà un megafono e vocalizzerà anche lei, doppiando in una grammatica disperata la voce della [Holiday]. Di nuovo Dante e di nuovo Paganini. Ma stavolta, su Paganini, fra Perla la tarantata e la batteria, cioè Basile, scoppia la rissa. Tutto si sfascia, tutto romba, mentre Paganini disegna ussari in fuga, cavalli impennacchiati […]. Leo dice: "E ora chi rimette tutto a posto?". Basile risponde "Io". Siamo ancora a Dante, confuso col sax e col contrabbasso, ai vocalizzi megafonici di Perla; e, quando arriviamo, all'"Alta fantasia qui mancò possa", torna [Billie Holiday], rosata ancora di più, a suggerire trionfi e ronde di santi ordinati in una stupefacente chorus line di Broadway. Forse il paradiso è [Billie Holiday], per Leo e Perla. […]. Leo gorgoglia versi come "Da quinci innanzi il mio veder fu maggio". […] Basile era […] legnoso, pallido come un ipertiroideo di razza, puntuale "spalla" da avanspettacolo[62].

From the speaker comes Leo's voice: 'Virgin Mother, daughter of your son', etc. A little Carmelo Bene (but barely in echo). Leo makes unpredictably clear vowels, then chases his uvula into his nose, sonorous from the nostrils as he can. [...] Every now and then he directs, every now and then he plays the sax, and keeps flashing glances from under his hair. He continues the Dante-esque diction churned out by jazz. But, before we get to 'See Beatrice with how many blessed ones', a drooling Paganini explodes into the loudspeaker, recorded at low revs [...], frenetic, wrathful, high in decibels! And, at that point, like a force of nature, Perla gets into it. Dante's verse has momentarily eclipsed: in front of us there is a convulsive tarantata who is at one with the music, climbing with the force of her

[61] «è cominciata così: una notte non riuscivo a dormire e siccome non posso più leggere, Perla per consolarmi, per addormentarmi, mi ha letto il 33° canto del Paradiso quaranta volte, dico quaranta volte...», see FRANCO CORDELLI, *Non era prosa, ma concerto! (It was not prose, but concert!*), review of the performance *Paradiso XXXIII* present in the material digitised Archive Leo de Berardinis 1963 - 2003 / Interventi, scritti, interviste e appunti 1964 - 2002/Leo e Perla spettacoli 1964-2002.

[62] See ENZO SICILIANO, *Il paradiso è Billy Holliday. Leo e Perla al Teatro di Trastevere*, in «Il Corriere della Sera», 17 settembre 1980, review of the play *Paradiso XXXIII* present in the digitised material Archivio Leo de Berardinis 1963 - 2003 / Interventi, scritti, interviste e appunti 1964 - 2002/Leo e Perla spettacoli 1964-2002.

nerves on the vibrating cymbals (because Basile's drums accompany Paganini); and she dances, dancing on the floor, her eyes upturned, a mattana mimicking the male's fiercest masturbation. There is a hint of an argument with the drummer, the words are drowned out by the music. Leo intervenes with his unfocused mammasantissima manner. Then Dante resumes, only to freeze again in a new interruption. Sweet, almost rosy, [Billie Holiday's] voice overlaps, from the speaker, with the sax, and Perla comes forward, Bellini-like somnambulist, with a shaky ankle and a valgus foot. She takes a megaphone and vocalises too, dubbing in a desperate grammar the voice of [Holiday]. Again Dante and again Paganini. But this time, on Paganini, between Perla the tarantata and the drums, i.e. Basile, a brawl breaks out. Everything falls apart, everything rumbles, while Paganini draws hussars on the run, plumed horses [...]. Leo says: "And now who will put everything back in place?". Basile replies, 'Me'. We are still at Dante, confused with sax and double bass, at Perla's megaphonic vocalises; and, when we arrive, at 'Alta fantasia qui mancò possa', she returns [Billie Holiday], rosy even more, to suggest triumphs and patrols of saints ordered in an astonishing Broadway chorus line. Perhaps heaven is [Billie Holiday], for Leo and Perla. [...]. Leo gurgles verses like 'Da quinci innanzi il mio veder fu maggio'. [...] Basile was [...] woody, pale as a thoroughbred hyperthyroid, a punctual "sidekick" from a show business.

Even Giuseppe Bartolucci, with whom Leo had taken his first steps in avant-garde theatre, describes that particular evening and Leo and Perla's approach to Dante as a mixture of «stardust and human breaths, of heavenly signals and the rags of living», which once again denote all the richness of Leo's poetic depth, the strength of Perla's crazy presence and the disturbing dialogue with jazz music in contrast to the degraded and marginal reality they were not afraid to live with[63].

After their experience together, the paths of the two artists definitively parted, however, decreeing for Leo the return, in a constant re-use and re-elaboration, of Dante's material within his own future performances, as Tamborrino traces[64]. Leo himself, in various interviews with critics and scholars[65], stated that his contact with Dante was sapiential, at a level where only art speaks to art, acting as a model for a deeper understanding of his own vocation as an author:

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[63] «di polvere di stelle e di fiati umani, di segnali paradisiaci e di stracci del vivere», see GIUSEPPE BARTOLUCCI, *Teatro Italiano/Italian Theatre. Postavanguardia/Postavantgarde*, Salerno, 10/17 Cooperativa Editrice, 1983, quotation p. 22.

[64] «Dopo l'esperienza pionieristica del 1980, nel corso della sua "terza vita" bolognese, Leo tornò a frequentare ripetutamente le terzine dantesche, dall'emblematico assolo *Dante Alighieri – studi e variazioni* (1984, premio Ubu come miglior attore) al già menzionato *past Eve and Adam's* (2000), passando per le citazioni intarsiate all'interno de *Lo spazio della memoria* (1991) e del progetto-spettacolo *Cento attori* (1994), nella cui chiusura gli eponimi interpreti, mormorando gli ultimi versi del Paradiso e avanzando in proscenio, davano vita al Quarto stato di Pellizza da Volpedo»/«After the pioneering experience of 1980, in the course of his "third life" in Bologna, Leo returned repeatedly to Dante's tercets, from the emblematic solo *Dante Alighieri - studi e variazioni* (1984, Ubu prize for best actor) to the aforementioned *past Eve and Adam's* (2000), passing by the inlaid quotations within *Lo spazio della memoria* (1991) and the project-performance *Cento attori* (1994), in the closing of which the eponymous performers, murmuring the last verses of Paradise and advancing on the proscenium, gave life to Pellizza da Volpedo's Quarto stato», MATTEO TAMBORRINO, *Tra Sommi Poeti ci si intende: Dante 'tradotto' in scena da Leo e Perla*, in LUCA BANI, RAUL CALZONI, THOMAS PERSICO (a cura di), *Traduzioni, Tradizioni e Rivisitazioni dell'opera di Dante. In memoria di Marco Sirtori*, cit, p. 541. See also STEFANO CASI, *Un'affollata solitudine: nel laboratorio di Leo de Berardinis*, in «Hystrio», vol. XXXIII, n. 4, 2020, pp. 28-29; SARA POETA, *Santarcangelo 1994. Variazioni anglo-napoletane sul teatro di Shakespeare*, in «Ariel», a. XX, n. 1, 2006, p. 79-97.

[65] See FERNANDA HRELIA, *Per un teatro gnostico. A proposito di 'Dante Alighieri – studi e variazioni'*, in CLAUDIO MELDOLESI, ANGELA MALFITANO, LAURA MARIANI E DA 'CENTO' TESTIMONI (a cura di), *La terza vita di Leo. Gli ultimi vent'anni del teatro di Leo de Berardinis a Bologna*, Corazzano, Titivillus, 2010, pp. 91-92; MARCO DE MARINIS, *Da Shakespeare a Shakespeare. Intorno al superamento del teatro mediante il teatro*, in DAVID

Dante non inventa, lui sa. La sua intuizione è sapienza. Fa parte di una corrente di tradizione di sapienza, il tramite per lui era Virgilio. […] Da un certo punto in poi non si tratta più di intuizioni, sono trasmissioni sepolte, sono stati di coscienza. Dove sta allora, un possibile spazio di scrittura a questo livello sapienziale? C'è. Prima di tutto c'è la via d'uscita di Dante Alighieri. Usare un codice a quattro livelli e là tagli la testa al toro. […] La reale sapienza che cos'è? Soltanto un risveglio attraverso dei cenni che […] possono essere qualsiasi cosa che tu trovi nella tua vita. Io parlo di gnosi, dal quarto secolo in avanti. Sono cenni che ti fanno scattare la memoria, ecco perché mnemosi è importante[66].

Dante does not invent, he knows. His intuition is wisdom. He is part of a current of wisdom tradition, the medium for him was Virgil. [...] From a certain point onwards, these are no longer intuitions; they are buried transmissions, they are states of consciousness. Where, then, is there a possible space for writing at this sapiential level? There is. First of all, there is Dante Alighieri's way out. Use a four-level code, and there you you settle things once and for all. [...] What is real wisdom? Only an awakening through hints that [...] can be anything you find in your life. I speak of gnosis, from the fourth century onwards. They are nods that trigger your memory; that's why mnemonics is important.

The search for the sapiential, esoteric, mystical character applied to Dante recurs particularly in 20th-century theatre artists and theorists, not sparing Leo, who defines theatre itself as «ignorant, as destruction but also as a permanent school»[67]. His frequentation with the Florentine poet is innervated with theatrical research, along with the overlap with the great Shakespeare and other authors, such as Samuel Beckett, James Joyce and, of course, Pier Paolo Pasolini[68]. Leo and Perla's lesson does not fail to bear ripe fruit not only in their late production but, above all, in the new generation of theatre, which brightens up the tradition of the *Lecturae Dantis* in the new millennium.

BERONIO, CLEMENTE TAFURI (a cura di), *Teatro Akropolis. Testimonianze ricerca azione*, vol. IV, Genova, Akropolis Libri, 2013, pp. 154-191; ALFONSO AMENDOLA, *Per una poetica del molteplice. Dialogo con Leo de Berardinis*, cit.

[66] Conversation held at the Testoni Theatre/InterAction between Leo and the critic Edoardo Fadini during rehearsals for *Hamlet*, published in «InterAction: teatro, musica, danza: periodico di informazione culturale dell'attività del Teatro Testoni/InterAction-Cooperativa Nuova scena», no. 10, February, 1984, taken up in the article FERNANDA HRELIA, *Per un teatro gnostico. A proposito di 'Dante Alighieri – studi e variazioni'*, in CLAUDIO MELDOLESI, ANGELA MALFITANO, LAURA MARIANI E DA 'CENTO' TESTIMONI (a cura di), *La terza vita di Leo. Gli ultimi vent'anni del teatro di Leo de Berardinis a Bologna*, cit., p. 92.

[67] «ignorante, come distruzione ma anche come scuola permanente», MARCO DE MARINIS, *Da Shakespeare a Shakespeare. Intorno al superamento del teatro mediante il teatro*, in DAVID BERONIO, CLEMENTE TAFURI (a cura di), *Teatro Akropolis. Testimonianze ricerca azione*, cit., p. 159.

[68] To be cited in Leo's digitised notebooks, in his later performances of Dante, is precisely the text *Le ceneri di Gramsci (The Ashes of Gramsci*), written by Pasolini in 1957, heir to Gramsci's political writings applied to the Poet and strong in a renewal of Dante's exegesis starting from the realism probed by Gianfranco Contini. See in this regard LAURA MARIANI, *L'amicizia come valore teatrale. Leo e Meldolesi*, in «Culture Teatrali», n. 28, 2019, pp. 177-193, reference at p. 187, footnote 22. See also EMANUELA PATTI, *Pasolini e Dante. La Divina Mimesis e la politica della rappresentazione dell'"altro"*, in «La Rivista di Engramma», n. 189 marzo, 2022, pp. 109-135; GIANFRANCO CONTINI, *Un'idea di Dante*, Torino, Einaudi, 1970; LINO LEONARDI (a cura di), *Gianfranco Contini 1912-2012. Attualità di un protagonista del Novecento*, Firenze, Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2014.

3.1.4. Roberto Benigni

In this review of twentieth-century *Lecturae Dantis*, one cannot fail to mention those who offered Dante the opportunity to become a worldwide commercial mass phenomenon. Academy Award-winning actor and director Roberto Benigni (1952) has had an association with the Florentine language since his childhood, given his Tuscan birth and the particular affection he declares in 'worshipping' the Florentine poet and sharing his mother tongue. At first, he had a fleeting season in the theatre, which began as a *bernesciante* in Prato and continued in Rome[69]. His career found vigour in his meeting with director Giuseppe Bertolucci[70], and was then consolidated in the small and big screen, being consecrated with the film *La vita è bella* (1997).

Serving as methodological support for the subsequent *Lecturae Dantis* undertaking are the series of evenings of the *Tuttobenigni* tour, which began in theatres and at the most popular *Feste dell'Unità* in 1981, and then continued in 1983 and 1995/96, also seeing the production of the film version directed by Bertolucci, shows in which the Tuscan actor proposed to the public a roundup of his most successful characters (especially taking his character *Mario Cioni* as his starting point), touching the chords of irreverence, desecrating comedy, ridiculing the protagonists of the Italian political-social scene, demonstrating his own implacable buffoonery:

> Il linguaggio è quello di sempre: ogni uso strumentale del dialetto è bandito, e se l'attore si avvicina a esso è solo per calarlo dentro un modello di cultura popolare. Il parlare comune è veloce e immediato, permette di dire ciò che è indicibile nella lingua nazionale, piena di divieti e galatei, concede il malinteso, il luogo comune e l'improprietà discorsiva. La maschera paesana, il comico contadino, lo sghignazzo più antico della nostra tradizione popolare scende nuovamente in piazza per farsi proiettare sullo schermo cinematografico. Benigni fa sue le ossessioni verbali di Cioni, la presenza clownesca, quel suo riferirsi al sesso, al cibo, al basso corporeo, la sua visione tragicomica dell'esistenza. E non dobbiamo dimenticare che, già al tempo della nascita di Cioni, fu proprio la scoperta di una comicità giocata sul piano corporale a fare di Benigni l'esponente più innovativo e rivitalizzante della comicità di quegli anni (dominata da modelli borghesi e popolareschi) [71].

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[69] Cristina Borsatti writes that Benigni's first steps into theatre in Prato saw him take his cue from the Tuscan tradition of improvising poets in octave rhyme, called *bernescianti* because they were heirs to the popular tradition whose founder was the poet Francesco Berni (1497-1535), competing and proposing this type of extemporaneous poems of an ironic carnivalesque nature at public political gatherings such as the *Festa dell'Unità* (organised by the then Communist Party) from his youth, see CRISTINA BORSATTI, *Roberto Benigni*, Milano, Il castoro, 2001, p. 15.

[70] See STEFANIA PARIGI, *Roberto Benigni*, Napoli, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1988; CRISTINA BORSATTI, *Roberto Benigni*, cit.; SILVANO AMBROGI (a cura di), *Quando Benigni ruppe il video: i primi testi televisivi di Roberto Benigni*, prefazione di Mario Carpitella, Torino, Nuova ERI, 1992; EVA MARINAI, SARA POETA, IGOR VAZZAZ (a cura di), *Comicità negli anni Settanta. Percorsi eccentrici di una metamorfosi fra teatro e media*, cit.; IGOR VAZZAZ, *Cioni Mario... di Bertolucci-Benigni per Roberto Benigni*, Pisa, ETS, 2017.

[71] CRISTINA BORSATTI, *Roberto Benigni*, cit., p. 49. See also: WILLIAM VAN WATSON, *The Italian Buster Keaton? Roberto Benigni's The Monster and the Comic Machine*, in GRACE RUSSO BULLARO (edited by), *Beyond "Life is Beautiful": Comedy and Tragedy in the Cinema of Roberto Benigni*, Leichester, Troubadour, 2005, pp. 41-65; CARLO CELLI, *The Divine Comic: The Cinema of Roberto Benigni*, London, The Scarecrow Press, 2001.

The language is the same as always: any instrumental use of dialect is banned, and if the actor approaches it, it is only to drop it into a model of popular culture. Common speech is fast and immediate, it allows one to say what is unspeakable in the national language, which is full of prohibitions and etiquettes, it concedes misunderstanding, the commonplace and discursive impropriety. The peasant mask, the peasant comedian, the oldest sneer of our popular tradition once again takes to the streets to be projected on the cinema screen. Benigni makes Cioni's verbal obsessions his own, his clownish presence, his reference to sex, food, the lower body, his tragicomic vision of existence. And we must not forget that, already at the time of Cioni's birth, it was precisely the discovery of a comedy played on the bodily level that made Benigni the most innovative and revitalising exponent of the comedy of those years (dominated by bourgeois and popular models).

Benigni's grotesque presence, and his congenial ability to completely approach the figure of the modern jester, have made the Dantean operation carried out since the early 1990s even more captivating and successful, and then made it globally famous. His first, real *Lectura Dantis* dates back to 1990, performed by invitation at the University of Siena, in the presence of Rector Luigi Berlinguer, triggering a standing ovation from the audience and the admiration of those present. Later, in 1993, the same year in which Gassman's *lecturae* came out, in the television programme *La Torre di Babele* hosted by Corrado Augias, Benigni reproposed the famous episode of Paolo and Francesca from the fifth canto of Inferno *by heart* and from there decreed his own unavoidable presence in the ranks of 20th-century Dante declamators. Benigni does not do Dante, Benigni is Dante. As the scholar Franco Musarra declares, Benigni takes poetic licence with the *Commedia*, he chews and masters the Tuscan language that the poet reproposes with great naturalness, offering his own analysis to comment on the passage, and constantly plays with elements from established Dantean criticism, thus declaring his own preparatory studies on the subject:

La sua è una doppia lettura: da un lato è sostanzialmente orale, con il coinvolgimento costante di un *tu* in cui noi lettori/ascoltatori ci riconosciamo…, dall'altro è scientifica e non solo nel momento della performance recitativa ma anche in quello della lettura/spiegazione del poema, in cui la nota dominante è l'*evidenza*, sino a rendere chiari i versi più complessi[72].

His is a double reading: on the one hand, it is essentially oral, with the constant involvement of a *you* in whom we readers/listeners recognise ourselves..., on the other hand, it is scientific, and not only at the moment of the recitative performance but also at that of the reading/explanation of the poem, in which the dominant note is *evidence*, to the point of making the most complex verses clear.

The subsequent *lecturae* in Piazza Santa Croce (FI) from 2006, which later led to the television format *Tutto Dante*, saw an impressive public response and subsequently became multiple world tours, recorded and broadcast on the most important Italian networks[73] (*Figures*

[72] FRANCO MUSARRA, *Il comico e l'ironico nelle "Lecturae Dantis" di Roberto Benigni*, in FRANCO MUSARRA, PACIFICO RAMAZZONI, NADIA SPARAPANI (a cura di), *"Il mio Dante" di Roberto Benigni*, Firenze, Cesati, 2017, pp. 35-56, quotation at p. 43.

[73] Indispensable texts for understanding Dante's bearing in Benigni are: ROBERTO BENIGNI, *Lettera a Dante*, Alpignano, Coi tipi Talloniani, 2012; ROBERTO BENIGNI, *Tutto Dante*, with DVD, Roma, Melampo cinematografica, 2008; ROBERTO BENIGNI, *Il mio Dante*, con un saggio di Umberto Eco, Torino, Einaudi, 2010.

11-12-13). A few decades later, and in the face of Benigni's investiture with countless honorary degrees, we can better analyse this fairly successful media product. Together with Gassman and Sermonti, and unlike Bene and De Berardinis/Peragallo, Benigni saw his operation gain the widest consensus of the Italian and foreign public, despite an initial diffidence on the part of the academic public, which, thanks to the support of illustrious critics such as Umberto Eco and Franco Musarra, recognised the cultural value of the enterprise as scientifically relevant.

As had already been found in the early phase of his career, the use of irony and a grotesque-joke style allow Benigni to captivate his audience, which not only agrees with his political tirades and his attack on bigotry and false Italian morality of the 1970s/1980s, but also feels cathartically renewed by his absolution of the average Italian, an irresponsible participant in a lost beauty to be melancholically hailed and thus pacified in its shared mediocrity:

La comicità novecentesca è caratterizzata, infatti, da un linguaggio estremamente fantasioso e libero. L'uso del neologismo, del termine straniero, dell'onomatopea, della ripetizione, della deformazione verbale provoca un progressivo annullamento del significato, pur mantenendo intatta la forza critica del discorso. Si tratta di un decostruttivismo volontario che conduce alla messa in opera, da parte dello spettatore, di un processo di comprensione corporale, prima che intellettuale. L'atto di conoscenza passa attraverso una fase di regressione della facoltà psichiche per dar vita ad un fenomeno di comprensione sensoriale, fin quando le due facoltà non trovano un nuovo equilibrio allo scopo di portare a termine il processo di apprendimento del messaggio. *Lingua corporale* e *gestualità vocale* devono riuscire a convivere nell'attore comico come strumenti indispensabili all'elaborazione dell'*actio*[74].

Twentieth-century comedy is characterised by an extremely imaginative and free language. The use of neologism, the foreign term, onomatopoeia, repetition, and verbal deformation provokes a progressive cancellation of meaning while maintaining the critical force of the discourse intact. It is a voluntary deconstructivism that leads to the spectator's implementation of a bodily, rather than intellectual, process of understanding. The act of knowledge passes through a phase of regression of the psychic faculties to give rise to a phenomenon of sensory understanding, until the two faculties find a new balance in order to complete the process of learning the message. *Bodily language* and *vocal gestures* must manage to coexist in the comic actor as indispensable tools for the elaboration of the *action.*

Starting from this type of comedy, within a not always immaculate Dantean exegesis, Benigni succeeds in carving out for himself that protected position of Vate, which offers a contemporary rereading of the *Commedia* safe from any possible censorship, allowing him to present himself in the new guise of humble servant of the fabulous Italian tradition of the Poet Laureates. Dante's words offer themselves as a shield to the comedian's exasperated humour,

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On the criticism produced on his *Lecturae Dantis* read: FRANCO MUSARRA, PACIFICO RAMAZZOTTI, NADIA SPARAPANI (a cura di), *Il mio Dante di Roberto Benigni. Apiro, 18 ottobre 2015*, Firenze, Franco Cesati, 2017; FRANCO MUSARRA, MANOLA GIANFRANCESCHI, PACIFICO RAMAZZOTTI, LAURA NOCCHI (a cura di), *Letture dell'Inferno di Roberto Benigni. Apiro/Jesi 6-7 ottobre 2018*, Firenze, Franco Cesati, 2020; FRANCO MUSARRA, PACIFICO RAMAZZOTTI, ANDREA ALDO ROBIGLIO, BART VAN DEN BOSSCHE (a cura di), *Così «intrai per lo cammino alto e silvestro». Attraversare l'Inferno dantesco con Roberto Benigni*, Firenze, Franco Cesati, 2021.

[74] EVA MARINAI, *Comicità e censura: lo smascheramento profanante dell'attore satirico*, in EVA MARINAI, SARA POETA, IGOR VAZZAZ (a cura di), *Comicità negli anni Settanta. Percorsi eccentrici di una metamorfosi fra teatro e media*, cit., pp. 123-138, quotation at p. 137.

which, despite the initial lashing out at the politics of *tangentopoli* and the Berlusconi era, is no longer relegated to second-rate media spaces but is aired on the flagship networks in prime time. Indeed, it could be objected that Benigni's Dantean parable, after the first shear invectives, becomes more markedly a slow and sweetened attempt to homologate himself in the manner of the greats, so much so that it will incur the 'wrath' of Sermonti, who rightly considers himself plagiarised, and the few hints of Gassman[75].

As Carmelo Galati points out in his study, the presence of Dante, throughout Benigni's career, seems to provide a *letimotiv* that never subsides, from the very first performances such as *Il minestrone* (1981)[76], becoming more and more declared, as in the film comedies *Tu mi turbi* (1983) and *Il piccolo diavolo* (1988), to then explode in *Tutto Dante*[77]. Perhaps more than all his Dantesque trials, with the establishment of the annual *Dantedì* celebration, in the tragic context of the worldwide Covid 19 pandemic and the enduring social distancing, Benigni's choice for a prestigious *Lectura Dantis* in the presence of the President of the Republic, Sergio Mattarella and the Minister of Culture, Dario Franceschini, in the Salone dei Corazzieri at the Quirinale in Rome (25 March 2021) on live TV and live *streaming* on the social channels of the Italian institutions is a clear example of the evolution of the artist's language[78] (*Figure 14*). The irreverent charge of the court jester, the turpiloquy and the marked sexual references give way to a more composed and careful language, which turns its attention to the strings of

[75] If the 20th century is the century of re-use, re-edition and quotation, Benigni does not stray from this category. Sermonti condemns the operation promoted by Benigni as he states that his way of bringing Dante up to date is too trivialised, playing on pleasantness and not providing a good service to the public in this operation of low popularisation. Read in this regard the article by LAURA RIO, *Sermonti bacchetta Benigni: "Così banalizza Dante". A pochi giorni dallo show su Raiuno, lo studioso critica l'attore: "Operazione fatta alla buona"*, in «il Giornale», 19 Novembre 2007, available at: https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/sermonti-bacchetta-benigni-cos-banalizza-dante.html (last accessed 15/05/2025). Moreover, in much more recent times, the satirical programme Striscia la Notizia awarded the tapiro d'oro to Benigni for having once again plagiarised Sermonti by reprising the speech he made in dedication to his wife during the David di Donatello career award ceremony, see https://www.striscialanotizia.mediaset.it/video/tapiro-d-oro-a-roberto-benigni_28232/ (last accessed 15/05/2025). See AGNÈS MORINI, *Dante letto…: Gassman versus Benigni*, in STEFANO LAZZARIN, JÉRÔME DUTEL (a cura di), *Dante Pop. La Divina Commedia nella letteratura e nella cultura popolare contemporanea*, Manziana, Vecchiarelli, 2018, pp. 219-231.

[76] «*Berlinguer ti voglio bene* sarebbe la parodia della psicoanalisi, *Il minestrone* della Divina Commedia»/« *Berlinguer ti voglio bene* is the parody of psychoanalysis, where *Il minestrone* is the one of the *Divine Comedy*», STEFANIA PARIGI, *Roberto Benigni*, Napoli, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1988, p. 58.

[77] See CARMELO A. GALATI, *Benigni's Dante. From the Piazza to the Quirinale*, in FRANCESCO CIABATTONI, SIMONE MARCHESI (edited by), *Dante Alive. Essays on a cultural icon*, London/New York, Routledge, 2023, pp. 213-231.

[78] For the occasion, Benigni chose to interpret the twenty-fifth canto of *Paradise*, because more than others it is the canto in which Dante, questioned by St. James on the theological virtue of hope, offers the reader (and therefore also those who at that moment were experiencing the deepest pain and bewilderment for an inclement and unpredictable present) a guide to face the future.

empathy, care and charity. If before Benigni was the hero of stolen kisses (almost bordering on violence), now he is the dignified knight of long-distance hugs.

In contrast to the solid and constant artisticity of previous performers, Benigni declares precisely with the *Lecturae Dantis* that he is perhaps taking part in the fluctuating and unclear interest of the average Italian audience, willing to feel offended and mocked by their comedians, but in search of constant reassurance about a topicality that is unfortunately anything but edifying.

3.2. The *Lecturae Dantis* of the New Millennium

Having briefly sketched out those who are the greatest interpreters of the *Lecturae Dantis* season of the 20th century, a macroscopic analysis does not overlook the almost total lack of outstanding female interpreters in what is the longest-running practice of performative adaptation of Dante's text. Scholars such as Laura Mariani and Lea Melandri had already posed this question within the framework of studies on 20th century actors, drawing attention to the feminine and the history of actresses, all yet to be written, which does not fail to propose to a more attentive gaze the constant reference to the sacred, the ritual, the collective, the ancestral, reappropriating a presence that amazes[79]: «For it is through the actresses above all that the human face becomes a mysterious landscape of multiple dimensions, riven by the emergence of the luminous stars and the black stars that populate the skies of the world of the soul»[80].

This gendered course is abruptly reversed with the advent of the new Millennium, which sees female voices return as protagonists in this centuries-old practice and shines the spotlight on them. It is no coincidence, in fact, that the actresses of Dante's words are identified as depositaries and pupils of the protagonists of the Short Century, with the exception of the figure of Roberto Benigni, who does not form "schools" in his own path and is characterised by a substantial sterility in the transmission of his art, perhaps precisely in the light of the change

[79] See LEA MELANDRI, *Il linguaggio della Dea. Come liberarsi di un mito*, in LEA MELANDRI, *Le passioni del corpo. La vicenda dei sessi tra origine e storia*, Milano, Bollati Boringhieri, 2001, pp. 44-67; LAURA MARIANI, *Ermanna Montanari. Fare-disfare-rifare nel Teatro delle Albe*, Corazzano, Titivillus, 2012, pp. 285-300 [trad. engl. LAURA MARIANI, *Do, undo, do over. Ermanna Montanari in Teatro delle Albe*, translated by Thomas Haskell Simpson, Corazzano, Titivillus, 2017].

[80] «Perché è attraverso le attrici soprattutto che il volto umano diventa un paesaggio misterioso e dalle molteplici dimensioni, squarciato dall'affiorare degli astri luminosi e dagli astri neri che popolano i cieli del mondo dell'anima», *Attore/attrice*, a cura di Ferdinando Taviani, in Enciclopedia del cinema, Roma, Treccani, 2002, pp. 322-337.

still in progress described above. In order to better contextualise the artistic methods used by the female performers below, it is necessary to make a couple of historical premises to understand how this intention, this research, emerged.

The Nuovo Teatro season, the subsequent Terzo Teatro, the dynamic change between poor theatres, workshop theatres, dislocated theatres, hybrid theatres, group theatres, post-modern temperament, physical theatre and countless other labels, overlapped and sometimes marked very short paths, ascribable to the career of the individual performer or his company. From the 1980s onwards, one observes an incessant formation of theatre companies, which also give rise to some of the most important in contemporary Italian theatre history, and which still have a very strong influence on the European and world stage:

> è la costruzione di una nuova tipologia di gruppo teatrale, così lontana dai gruppi-isola degli anni Settanta, ma anche da tante botteghe e schieramenti poetici; nuova eppure così antica, vicina appunto alle famiglie d'arte, con quanto di naturalità ed efficacia aziendale c'era nelle imprese di questi artisti della vita. Si crea ciò di cui si ha bisogno, si costruisce con quello che c'è[81]
>
> is the construction of a new type of theatre group, so distant from the island groups of the 1970s but also from so many workshops and poetic alignments; new and yet so old, close to the art families, with what was natural and effective in the enterprises of these artists of life. One creates what one needs, and one builds with what is there.

Still far from settling in a reference location or declaring their own artistic boundaries, from these collectives/early experiences a number of companies see the light of day that are bound to each other by common practices and values, and that support each other through a constant exchange of ideas and decisive encounters. Taking Bene's and Peragallo/De Berardinis' artistic research for granted, the Magazzini Criminali, with its reference members such as director Federico Tiezzi and actors Sandro Lombardi and Marion D'Amburgo, and Teatro Valdoca, of Romagna-born Cesare Ronconi and Mariangela Gualtieri, must therefore be taken as a reference. Without making a detailed examination of their boundless productions to date, it is vital to give as an indication of the tangencies, the frequentations that have led these artists to be a fixed point for Italian research theatricality and, first and foremost, for Dante's performers who, will be analysed shortly.

Both Magazzini Criminali and Teatro Valdoca seek an "other" education, free from bourgeois respectability and outside dramatic academies. They all started out very young, accompanying the thirst for research of their own theatrical style with the higher study of

[81] RENATA MARGHERITA MOLINARI, *Alla maniera di una famiglia d'arte*, in MARCO MARTINELLI, ERMANNA MONTANARI (a cura di), *Jarry 2000 da Perhindérion a I Polacchi*, Milano, Ubulibri, 2000. pp. 128-133, quotation at p. 132. See also the related bibliography and studies presented in the dossier *Terzo Teatro: ieri, oggi, domani*, a cura di Roberta Ferraresi, in «Culture Teatrali», n. 27, 2018, pp. 167-223.

historical-artistic subjects (Ronconi and Gualtieri architecture in Venice, Tiezzi art history in Florence) and sustaining their path through a constant co-presence of voices, references and disciplines. They have encounters and contacts with capital artists of the world scene, such as Jerzy Grotowsky, the Living Theatre, Eugenio Barba's Odin Teatret, and Tadeus Kantor; all of them, without exclusion, refer to the lesson of Antonin Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty*; in a special way, the Magazzini declare how, in their formative years, contact with the fascination of the exotic practices of kathakali dances and Japanese Nô theatre was also essential; regular acquaintance with artists, critics, professors, poets and intellectuals profoundly enriches the path of these companies in their artistic development[82]. Fundamental, as already seen in the example of Perla Peragallo, are the modes of expression undertaken by the women in these companies. The actresses thus became the favourite interpreters of the research in vocal dramaturgy, which was later transferred to the *Lectura Dantis*, and to them we owe a more personal but equally universal investigation of Dante's message, which they succeeded, thanks to a new artistic sensibility, in combining with new demands for meaning in Dante's message and its constant reinterpretation in the interconnected and fluid 2.0 world.

Marion d'Amburgo (a.k.a. Loriana Nappini, 1952), with her hieratic presence and magnetism, has been the female presence of the Magazzini trio since its first artistic steps[83] (*Figure 15*). Endowed with a disruptive vocality, her voice and presence is an expression of the Tuscan hinterland, of the hills dense with rustic nature that saw her learn from the sounds of animals, from their pachydermic dullness, an intention, a posture in pursuing her own research as an actress. As Lorenzo Mango writes, in those 1970s of avant-garde and experimentation on a theatrical practice that had yet to be constructed, the action of detachment undertaken by her and her companions should not be framed as a «total absence of technique and even less of a spontaneity of those acting experiences. Rather, it is a limitation of one's own sphere of technical competence, in the sense that 'what needs to be done' is strictly circumscribed to one's own linguistic model of stage writing. [...] training does not precede but accompanies creative activity»[84]. The acting practice that she cultivates, and which becomes a lesson for the female artists who observe her, is the practice of «presence in absence»:

[82] See also DANIELE VERGNI, *Comportamento Performance Art Nuova Performance. L'azione Tra Le Arti In Italia (1960-1982)*, Roma, Bulzoni, 2024.

[83] See LORENZO MANGO, *Marion D'Amburgo: appunti sulla formazione di un'attrice*, in ROBERTA CARPANI, LAURA PEJA, LAURA AIMO (a cura di), *Donne, personaggi e interpreti della realtà. Studi per Annamaria Cascetta*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 2014, pp. 360-366.

[84] «assenza totale di tecnica e tantomeno di uno spontaneismo di quelle esperienze recitative. Si tratta, piuttosto, di una limitazione del proprio ambito di competenza tecnica, nel senso che 'ciò che serve fare' è strettamente circoscritto al proprio modello linguistico di scrittura scenica. […] la formazione non precede ma accompagna

Metto in sintonia la respirazione dell'anima e del corpo, apro i canali del sentimento, il corpo pensa, il cuore cinghia di trasmissione pompa sangue, il ritmo del respiro si compatta con quello del cuore, suggo ossigeno, respiro. Per articolare la parola serve separare, il pensiero prende corpo fuori dall'alveo materno sotto forma di vagito e poi di urlo. Mantengo la parola a mezz'aria, sospesa sopra bollenti correnti contrapposte. Respirare la parola accogliendone il respiro mentre la mente trova asilo nel cuore[85].

I tune the breathing of soul and body, I open the channels of feeling, the body thinks, the heart transmission belt pumps blood, the rhythm of the breath compacts with that of the heart, I suck in oxygen, I breathe. To articulate the word requires separation, the thought takes shape outside the mother's bed in the form of a wail and then a scream. I keep the word in mid-air, suspended above boiling opposing currents. Breathing in the word while the mind finds asylum in the heart.

Her artisticity, falsely described as simple and unsophisticated, continually solicited by the presence of her companions and by her contact with equally experimental international artists, determines this perturbing presence with a convergent aura: the image that the actress projects of herself on stage is none other than the self-determination that she herself has constructed in her own practice of nonrepresentation. The theatrical research proposed by D'Amburgo and the group insists on the need for a presence, on a quality of presence of the artist that is not mimetic, not representative, but the result of a profound research of the intentions themselves, of the possibilities offered by acting, by the constant work and listening of one's own body instrument and by a consciousness that is increasingly attentive to oneself and to the audience, bearer of meaning[86].

His artistic journey together with the Magazzini affected the Italian and foreign theatrical fabric of those years, shaking consciences. Their journey also powerfully touched Dante and his work, setting a milestone for subsequent theatre productions. Through the workshop enterprise in Prato, the three cantiche were staged from 1989 to 1991, and were subsequently presented in one long night at the MittelFest in Cividale del Friuli[87].

In Dante's three canticles, D'Amburgo ranges from impersonating Francesca da Rimini to Dante's Beatrice, whose hieratic presence she recalls thus:

Quando appare è severa, altera, è la coscienza di Dante. Lo sferza, lo mette di fronte a se stesso. Dante è in ginocchio. Non ci sono movimenti, solo un ritmo incalzante senza ripresa di voce. […] Nel *Paradiso* è completamente trasfigurata: è luce e riso. Nella versione di Giudici, per Beatrice c'è poco materiale testuale. Tutto era espressione dinamica corporea che culminava in un movimento circolare, sempre più accelerato, come nella

l'attività creativa», LORENZO MANGO, *Marion D'Amburgo: appunti sulla formazione di un'attrice*, in ROBERTA CARPANI, LAURA PEJA, LAURA AIMO (a cura di), *Donne, personaggi e interpreti della realtà. Studi per Annamaria Cascetta*, cit., p. 360.

[85] Ivi, p. 364.

[86] ERIKA FISCHER LICHTE, *The transformative power of Presence. A new aesthetics*, translated by Saskya Iris Jain, London-New York, Routledge, 2008 [ed. originale ERIKA FISCHER LICHTE, *Ästhetik des Performativen*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, (2004[1]) 2022; trad. ita. ERIKA FISCHER LICHTE, *Estetica del performativo. Una Teoria del teatro e dell'arte*, edizione italiana a cura di Tancredi Gusman, Roma, Carocci, 2014].

[87] The show will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4.

danza Sufi. Avevo un abito di seta bianca e un velo che girava con me e mi cancellava il viso… era come se alla fine mi dissolvessi[88].

When she appears, she is severe, haughty, she is Dante's conscience. She lashes him, confronts him with himself. Dante is on his knees. There are no movements, only a pressing rhythm with no reprise of voice. [...] In *Paradiso* she is completely transfigured: she is light and laughter. In Giudici's version, there is little textual material for Beatrice. Everything was bodily dynamic expression culminating in a circular movement, increasingly accelerated, as in Sufi dance. I had a white silk dress and a veil that spun with me and obliterated my face... it was as if I finally dissolved.

In a piece of writing that has much that is poetic about it, in which she is asked about her own vocal practice, D'Amburgo describes various stages of her own being as an artist and declares openly, without coquetry or modesty:

il pensiero disseziona la parola, esercita la sua azione sulle corde vocali, indi la parola s'inabissa nell'oscurità e rivendica il diritto di esistere, plasmata dagli organi della fonazione, permeabile e porosa si slancia nel mondo, entra nel flusso della vita. Con ingenuità imperdonabile continuo a tradire consapevolmente e inconsapevolmente le regole, per quanto mi riguarda sono incompatibili con ogni forma di arte autentica, la regola interiore, quella, non ammette defezioni. La mia immaginazione magica e mitica appoggia sulla fragranza continuamente rinnovata dell'incontro con il mondo, con l'unione dell'uomo con la natura, con l'esigente fiamma che impedisce di diventare adulti e vede nell'essere umano qualcosa di vivo, la finestra che affaccia sul divino. Rinnovo la mia stretta alleanza con il vuoto[89].

thought dissects the word, exerts its action on the vocal chords, then the word sinks into the darkness and claims the right to exist, moulded by the organs of phonation, permeable and porous it launches itself into the world, it enters the flow of life. With unpardonable naivety I continue to consciously and unconsciously betray the rules, as far as I am concerned they are incompatible with any form of authentic art, the inner rule, that one, does not admit of defection. My magical and mythical imagination rests on the continually renewed fragrance of the encounter with the world, with the union of man with nature, with the demanding flame that prevents us from becoming adults and sees in the human being something alive, the window that looks out on the divine. I renew my close alliance with the void.

Mariangela Gualtieri (1951) comes from the other side of the Italian Apennines and with Cesare Ronconi established a theatrical elaboration that differed in many respects from that of the Magazzini, but which united her, her vocal and dramaturgical research with D'Amburgo (*Figures 16-17*). Although Artaud's lesson is the same for both companies, for Valdoca, the frequentation with the poets intensifies through a "glorious" apprenticeship, from which derives the definitive solicitation to take the road of writing for Gualtieri and try her hand at writing verses and dramaturgy for the company[90].

[88] See the short statement given to Laura Caretti for the theatre magazine Hystrio, in the 2021 dossier dedicated to Dante, LAURA CARETTI, *La Beatrice del nostro tempo: visioni, ricordi e metamorfosi*, in «Hystrio», a. XXXIV, n. 1 (Dossier Dante), 2021, pp. 40-41.
[89] MARION D'AMBURGO, *Rumore bianco*, in VALENTINA VALENTINI (a cura di), *Drammaturgie sonore 2. Saggi e conversazioni*, cit., pp. 29-51, quotation p. 50.
[90] See MIMMA VALENTINO, *L'affresco lirico di Mariangela Gualtieri e Cesare Ronconi*, in «Acting Archives Review», a. VII, n. 14, 2017, pp. 156-180; MARIANGELA GUALTIERI, CESARE RONCONI, *Poesia, corpo, spazio: l'officina teatrale della Valdoca. Intervista di Mimma Valentino*, in «Acting Archives Review», a. VII, n. 14, 2017, pp. 181-197; EMANUELA DALLAGIOVANNA (a cura di), *Teatro Valdoca*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino Editore, 2003; MARIANGELA GUALTIERI, *Subumano-sovrumano*, in TEATRO DELLE MOIRE (a cura di), *Anatomia di un*

Although Gualtieri has never performed *Lecturae Dantis* as commonly understood, his literary works, which are often staged, are themselves a highly personal form of revisitation and direct quotation of Dante's writing. As a poet and playwright, Gualtieri succeeds in condensing within herself that tension of *auctor/agens* that only Dante was able to express and experience in his *Divine Comedy*. When the artist writes her own poems and brings them on stage as dramas, a short circuit is created in which one sees and feels the poet, now actress, crossed by the very poetry she has produced. That performative literary fiction, that characteristic that made Dante's text so intrinsically inclined to be adapted for the theatre and brought to the stage, finds in Gualtieri and her performative poetry that confirmation that corroborates the sonorous nature of poetry: it is sound, it is word, it is action.

On the occasion of a performance she gave in Verona of the play *Cattura Del Soffio* in March 2022[91], it was possible to hear from her own viva voce the sense of that much sought-after presence, which she shares with D'Amburgo, and for her is the reason for choosing a poetic language to create a theatre that is still an occasion for celebration, returning to a shared sacredness at the basis of the theatrical action, tragic because cathartic in its revitalising value for a reunited humanity[92]. Gualtieri has described what the millennial exercise of crossing poetry means to him, which inescapably requires to be said to become communion and real. If no objection is raised to the music-sheet music equation (the score serves us to see the music, to pass it on, but the voice that sings it, the instrument, the skill of the performer are neither debatable nor secondary to its tradition), on the other hand, for the poetry-verse equation, a certain separation is observed in its subsequent oral implication, a division between written and oral that for Gualtieri is the real problem of the weakening and impoverishment of language and therefore of theatre today[93].

corpo scenico, Milano, Mondadori-Electa, 2008, now available in the web-magazine *Sciami* at: https://webzine.sciami.com/subumano-e-sovraumano/ (xxx).

[91] The show *Cattura del soffio (Capture of the Breath*) will be staged at the Camploy Theatre in Verona on 28 March 2022. It will be preceded by a conversation at the University of Verona between Mariangela Gualtieri and Nicola Pasqualicchio, again offering short performances by the actress.

[92] See VALENTINA VALENTINI, *Gli spettacoli-rito del Teatro Valdoca*, in «Arabeschi», n. 11 gennaio-giugno, 2018, pp. 14-22. In her examination, the scholar refers to the elaborations theorised by the scholar Richard Schechner on *performances*, moving from Victor Turner's theories, see VALENTINA VALENTINI, *Professione cartografo*, in RICHARD SCHECHNER, *La teoria della performance. 1970-1983*, a cura di Valentina Valentini, Roma, Bulzoni, 1984, pp. 11-39; VICTOR TURNER, *Dal rito al teatro*, a cura di Stefano De Matteis, traduzione di Paola Capriolo, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2017 [ed. ingl. *From Ritual to Theatre. The Human Seriousness of Play*, New York, Performing Arts Journal Publication, 1982].

[93] See MARIANGELA GUALTIERI, *Lettera su ciò che non scriverò*, in «Culture teatrali», n. 20, 2010, pp. 157-158.

In order to return to giving meaning to the symbolic act of speech, we must start again from the poetic word and its sacred voicing, just as it was in the days of Greek theatre, as it still was for Dante and *donne che hanno intelletto d'amore*[94]:

Il difficile compito che credo mi attenda, come poeta attivo oggi in seno al teatro, va da un lato in direzione semantica, nel rianimare le parole, ricaricarle della loro potenza di significato, e dall'altro nell'apertura alla dimensione sacrale, (anch'essa sempre più negata e surrogata con ritualità inefficaci), dimensione in cui tutti i significati si annientano, o meglio si convalidano, essendo tutti, allo stesso tempo valevoli. […] Ciò che differenzia la poesia dalla lingua corrente è che essa è dotata di ombra, di ritmica e di melodia. La poesia è davvero musica e come per la musica, il passaggio dalla forma scritta alla forma sonora è decisivo, al fine della sua efficacia e compimento[95]

The difficult task that I believe awaits me, as a poet active in the theatre today, goes on the one hand in the semantic direction, in reanimating words, recharging them with their power of meaning, and on the other hand in opening up to the sacred dimension, (which is also increasingly denied and surrogated with ineffective rituals), a dimension in which all meanings are annihilated, or rather validated, being all, at the same time, valid. [...] What differentiates poetry from everyday language is that it is endowed with shadow, rhythm and melody. Poetry is indeed music, and as with music, the transition from the written form to the sound form is decisive for its effectiveness and fulfilment.

She recalls how the dancer Virgilio Sieni said that she was still pervaded by a living presence, in the simplicity of her being on stage with the poem. The decision to remove frills from the word, to know it by heart just like a song, dense in a «phonic enchantment»[96], and also the decision to go so far as to remove the music, to be alone with the microphone, with the «sacred technology»[97] that amplifies and unsheathes the voice, was the most intimate and strongest decision she could take, the most sincere. In her poetry, the acoustic bath that moulds

[94] This expression is a quotation from the note proposed by the poet Milo De Angelis, placed within Gualtieri's poetic collection, which describes the artist's poetry in constant dialogue with the shadows of the fathers or masters, see MARIANGELA GUALTIERI, *Antenata*, Noventa Padovana, Crocetti, 2020, p. 7, which in turn quotations Dante's song «Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore», see Musa/DOL, cap. XIX. For more on Gualtieri's poetry, see: FRANCO NASI, *Ritmi e voci, intorno al Fuoco Centrale di Mariangela Gualtieri*, in «ESPERIENZE LETTERARIE», n. 2, a. 29, 2004, pp. 99-119; GIORGIA BONGIORNO, *Una luce «senza ristoro d'ombra». La poesia di Mariangela Gualtieri*, in «Italies», n. 13, 2009, pp. 445-466; ELVIRA M. GHIRLANDA, *"Sempre a ridosso della scena": il verso e la carne nella poesia di Mariangela Gualtieri*, in DANIELE CERRATO (Edición), *Escritoras y personajes femeninos en relación*, Madrid, Dykinson, S.L., 2021, pp. 508-520.

[95] MARIANGELA GUALTIERI, *Quel baratro tra scritto e orale*, in VALENTINA VALENTINI (a cura di), *Drammaturgie sonore. Teatri del Secondo Novecento*, cit., pp. 139-149, quotation at pp. 141-142.

[96] «incanto fonico», see MARIANGELA GUALTIERI, *L'incanto fonico. L'arte di dire la poesia*, Torino, Einaudi, 2022, p. 9.

[97] «tecnologia sacra»; for Gualtieri, the microphone «non ha solo un ruolo amplificante, permette quasi di parlare all'orecchio di ognuno, in intimità. Mette in evidenza il silenzio di cui è impregnata la parola poetica ed è grande sbugiardatore, amplifica le falsità della voce e le vanità dell'interprete. La poesia è parola veritiera e mal sopporta gli artifici, e soprattutto non ne ha bisogno»/«not only has an amplifying role, it almost allows one to speak into one's own ear, in intimacy. It highlights the silence with which the poetic word is imbued and is a great debunker, amplifying the falsities of the voice and the vanities of the performer. Poetry is truthful speech and does not tolerate artifice, and above all does not need it», MARIA SOFIA MAZZOTTA, *"Liberare nell'aria il verso". L'incanto fonico di Mariangela Gualtieri*, in «PENS: poesia contemporanea e nuove scritture», giovedì 04 maggio 2023, available at: https://www.centropens.eu/archivio/item/221-liberare-nell%E2%80%99aria-il-verso-l%E2%80%99incanto-fonico-di-mariangela-gualtieri#_ftn14 (last accessed 15/05/2025).

the voice, that creates what Alfred Tomatis calls «the vibratory communion»[98], requires extreme concentration to understand even the breaths, the silences[99]. As Enrico Pitozzi summarises well, given his many studies on the subject, what these two artists have in common with the figure of Perla Peragallo is an assiduous and, for those years, foundational study of Italian vocal dramaturgy. The female artists who will follow in the discussion are similar in their methods and choices (in addition to having deep ties of esteem and friendship with these[100]), and they propose, each in their own way, a search in their own interiority to bring out what they have in common. Pitozzi sums up the context that is created in the theatre of sounds:

in ascolto sono coloro che compongono ed eseguono la partitura vocale, così come in ascolto deve essere colui che si dispone ad accoglierla. In entrambi i casi, cambia la percezione dell'essere umano e con esso il pensiero del corpo. Il corpo diviene l'intercessore tra il *continuum* sonoro e la voce che lo ritaglia per esprimerlo in una forma: l'infinito che riverbera in una geometria ossea. Ascoltare, allora, significa penetrare nei gradi di cui è fatto il reale per coglierne l'ampia polifonia: […] porre mente a ciò che tiene insieme le cose; le tiene insieme dall'interno (le aggrega) e nell'esterno (le connette tra loro) come esercizio della pura interiorità. Questa capacità di *essere in ascolto* qualifica ogni esecuzione: non si può produrre vocalmente ciò che non si è in grado di ascoltare[101].

in listening are those who compose and perform the vocal score, just as in listening must be those who prepare themselves to receive it. In both cases, the perception of the human being changes and with it the thinking of the body. The body becomes the intercessor between the sound *continuum* and the voice that cuts it out to express it in a form: the infinite reverberating in a bony geometry. Listening, then, means penetrating into the degrees of which reality is made in order to grasp its broad polyphony: [...] to put one's mind on what holds things together; holds them together from the inside (it aggregates them) and in the outside (it connects them together) as an

[98] «la comunione vibratoria», see ALFRED A. TOMATIS, *L'orecchio e la voce*, Milano, Baldini & Castoldi, 2002.
[99] See MARIANGELA GUALTIERI, *Una parola sul modello del silenzio*, in «Prove di Drammaturgia», a. 9, n. 2, 2003, pp. 9-13. For more on the meaning of silence in vocal performance see CARLO SERRA, *La voce e lo spazio. Per un'estetica della voce*, Milano, Il Saggiatore, 2011; MARIE-MADELEINE MERVANT-ROUX, JEAN-MARC LARRUE (sous la direction de), *Le son du théâtre (XIXe-XXIe siècle)*, Paris, CNRS Editions, 2016; DAVID LE BRETON, *Sovranità del silenzio*, traduzione di Emanuela Mancino, Milano-Udine, Mimesis edizioni, 2016; ELVIRA DI BONA, VINCENZO SANTARCANGELO, *Il suono. L'esperienza uditiva e i suoi oggetti*, Milano, Raffaello Cortina, 2018; DORIANA LEGGE, *Forme del silenzio, tracce del suono. Appunti per un ascolto teatrale*, in «Arabeschi», n. 14 luglio-dicembre, 2019, pp. 86-91 and also the dossier *Teatri di Suono*, a cura di Enrico Pitozzi in «Culture teatrali», n. 27, 2018, pp. 7-168.
[100] A clear example of this can be found in the round table *Building a History*, organised by the University of Bologna and with Gerardo Guccini and Roberta Ferraresi as moderators, which took place during the study day dedicated to the 20th anniversary of the Santarcangelo Festival, on 22 October 2019. Chiara Guidi, Enrico Casagrande and Ermanna Montanari participated as speakers as artistic directors of the editions of the three-year period from 2009 to 2011, helped by Rodolfo Sacchettini, Silvia Bottiroli and Cristina Ventrucci. In the speech recorded and available online, one observes how (with the exception of Casagrande for obvious reasons) a deep understanding and friendship bind Guidi and Montanari (think of the performance *Poco lontano da qui* realised in 2012 after an intense correspondence, a co-production between the two companies). Precisely in the 2011 edition, Montanari asked Mariangela Gualtieri to radiate her poetry through the amplifiers placed throughout Santarcangelo, making her "appear to the Madonna" from the bell tower, a reference to Bene in a new unreleased version of *Bello mondo*, see MARIANGELA GUALTIERI, CESARE RONCONI, *Poesia, corpo, spazio: l'officina teatrale della Valdoca. Intervista di Mimma Valentino*, cit., p. 198. The view of the complete interventions by the artists on their experience in Santarcangelo, but also with insights into their own poetics and artistic experience (e.g. the description of the great artistic debit towards the Magazzini Criminali), is available online, divided into two parts: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=flwO-RQTEls&ab_channel=SantarcangeloFestival (last accessed 15/05/2025).
[101] ENRICO PITOZZI, *Neuma. Quattro diversi modi di comporre in voce*, in VALENTINA VALENTINI (a cura di), *Drammaturgie sonore 2. Saggi e conversazioni*, cit., pp. 257-285, quotation at pp. 281-282.

exercise of pure interiority. This ability to be in listening qualifies every performance: one cannot vocally produce what one is unable to listen to.

To conclude this introductory note, to the question posed on Gualtieri's relationship with Dante and possible future work on Dante[102] , the actress declares that for this she would have needed a whole day of study, because Dante is that poet, the bard and the father, who runs through everything. We quote her poem *Il metro* to underline this *exergue*:

> Lì dove la poesia ha metro, indagare la particolarità ritmica di quel metro. Bello questo.
>
> Lungo respiro di endecasillabo.
> Corsa di novenario. Ottonario favolistico e ballerino. Settenario cantilenante.
>
> Scrivere cento canti di Commedia Divina in endecasillabi.
> Un ordine non vacillante ha dettato questo.
>
> Dante camminatore esule girovagante e nomade. Anni. Suoi passi su vari accenti di endecasillabo, passi di sua danza interiore e cosmica. Pellegrina e avventurosa. Tristissima a tratti. Spaventevole a tratti. Assolata e lieta, a tratti. Tutta pioggiata, sua danza dantesca, su accenti vari e mutevoli e geometrici e perfetti di endecasillabo. Sua patria. Ballerino Dante.
>
> Dove metro non c'è, se metro si nasconde, sapere che c'è. Armonia franta e nascosta. Ma c'è. Più forte della manifesta – a volte.
> Nel rotto frammentato tempo – questo. Nel verso spaccato secco che ci tocca, o narrante e ridondante, trovare la nascosta musica più nascosta, dissonanze e armonie.
>
> Dove tutto è rotto spaccato, poesia diventa esperta di alto rammendo. Di saldamento. Di aggancio. I cocci di questo tempo chiedono anch'essi d'essere amati – ricomposti ricompattati. Copri sepolti in fossa comune, ricomporli arto con arto con teschio con tibia con ulna con radio con falangi delicate di più minuscolo dito.
>
> Lasciando cicatrici. Lasciando cicatrici evidenti di rotta armonia che ci connota.
> Alleanza rotta di respiro con respiro grande dei mondi. Dolore per questo[103].

A final clarification is in order. As you may have gathered, unlike the previous declamations, which were only enjoyed through recordings, videos, and written sources, the *lecturae* discussed below were all seen live, with the opportunity to interview and converse with the actresses in person. This feature unites this chapter with the following ones.

[102] The question was posed as a result of the soliquotations provoked by the information given in the interview with Hystrio, see MARIANGELA GUALTIERI, MARCO MENINI, *Gualtieri, dire le cose più alte con la lingua delle mulierculae*, in «Hystrio», a. XXXIV, n. 1, 2021, pp. 34-35.
[103] For the sake of this project, we think it's not appropriate to translate this poem of Gualtieri.

3.2.1. Chiara Guidi

The artist from Cesena began her artistic career by forming the theatre company *Socìetas Raffaello Sanzio* together with her brother Paolo and siblings Romeo and Claudia Castellucci in 1981 (now *Societas*), a company that soon found a permanent home in 1989 by converting the old Institute and Workshop for Blacksmiths and Iron Turners in Cesena into the Comandini Theatre[104]. Her attention to the study of the voice was immediately used to create, together with her companions, an iconoclastic and post-modern theatre[105], which questioned not only the component of the body, the image produced and the staging, but above all promoted a fully research-based dramaturgy that transcended the text and was capable of delving into the plasticity of sound and its scenic-dramaturgic implications:

Il teatro non è succube della letteratura[106].

Theatre is not subservient to literature.

Da sempre io mi sono concentrata sulla parte più sonora del corpo dell'attore, la sua voce, forse perché dovevo trovare una tecnica per recitare i testi drammatici che Claudia Castellucci scriveva. Come potevo recitarli e ripetere la complessità di quelle parole? Come tradurre con il suono della mia voce la molteplicità dei significati che il testo scritto generava? Come far uscire le parole dalla pagina scritta e trasformarle in aria? Cercai un'idea per la voce sganciandola da ogni cadenza che sottolineasse il significato palese che ogni parola comunicava. Non dovevo sottolineare il significato della parola ma trasferire quel potere manifestativo che il testo testimoniava nel suono della voce. Dovevo paradossalmente dimenticare le parole e, sebbene le usassi con estrema precisione, dovevo ritrovarle nella loro essenza sonora, vocale. Solo in questo modo riconoscevo al pubblico la responsabilità del suo esserci: chi siede in platea decide di ascoltare e chi ascolta non può fare a meno di suonare. […] il libro è stato il punto di partenza di molte rappresentazioni, anche se, spesso, nessuna parola veniva pronunciata sul palco: sempre, comunque, la parola consegnava al corpo dell'attore quel "silenzio del senso" che va sempre cercato[107].

I have always focused on the most sonorous part of the actor's body, his voice, perhaps because I had to find a technique to recite the dramatic texts Claudia Castellucci wrote. How could I recite them and repeat the complexity of those words? How could I translate with the sound of my voice the multiplicity of meanings that the written text generated? How to bring the words out of the written page and transform them into air? I searched for an idea for the voice, disengaging it from any cadence that would emphasise the overt meaning that each word communicated. I did not have to emphasise the meaning of the word but to transfer that manifestative power that the text testified to into the sound of the voice. I had to forget the words paradoxically, and although I used them with extreme precision, I had to find them in their sonorous, vocal essence. Only in this way was I acknowledging

[104] For information on the company, visit its official website: https://www.societas.es/ (last accessed 15/05/2025).
[105] See CLAUDIA CASTELLUCCI, ROMEO CASTELLUCCI, *Il teatro della Societas Raffaello Sanzio: dal teatro iconoclasta alla super-icona*, Milano, Ubulibri, 1992; ROMEO CASTELLUCCI, CHIARA GUIDI, CLAUDIA CASTELLUCCI, *Epopea della polvere: il teatro della Societas Raffaello Sanzio 1992-1999. Amleto, Masoch, Orestea, Giulio Cesare, Genesi*, postfazione di Franco Quadri, Milano, Ubulibri, 2001; CLAUDIA CASTELLUCCI, ROMEO CASTELLUCCI, CHIARA GUIDI, JOE KELLEHER, NICHOLAS RIDOUT, *The Theatre of Societas Raffaello Sanzio*, photographs by Luca Del Pia, London/New York, Routledge, 2007; DOROTA SEMENOWICZ, *The theatre of Romeo Castellucci and Socìetas Raffaello Sanzio: from icon to iconoclasm, from word to image, from symbol to allegory*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.
[106] CHIARA GUIDI, *Cantar recitando. Conversazione di Valentina Valentini con Chiara Guidi*, in VALENTINA VALENTINI (a cura di), *Drammaturgie sonore. Teatri del secondo Novecento*, cit., pp. 159-179, quotation at p. 171.
[107] CHIARA GUIDI, *Il femminile della vocalità. Conversazione con Valentina Valentini*, in VALENTINA VALENTINI (a cura di), *Drammaturgie sonore 2. Saggi e conversazioni*, Roma, Bulzoni, 2021, pp. 19-28, quotation at p. 21.

the audience's responsibility to be there: those who sit in the audience decide to listen, and those who listen cannot help but play. [...] the book was the starting point for many performances, even though, often, no words were spoken on stage: always, however, the word delivered to the actor's body that 'silence of meaning' that must always be sought.

Her research, initiated together with the group, is the acousmatic foundation of the entire company's vocal practice, later deepened also by her collaboration with electroacoustic music composer Scott Gibbons[108]. Guidi describes her vocal practice as a constant search for the voice[109] and its training through an investigation into the expressive potential of this further, mouldable, and at the same time unique and unrepeatable body, other than the itself. That research on the *phonè*, already encountered in Italian artists, also continues thanks to the Cesena-based artist, through a constant *molecular technique of the voice*, a practice that offers a series of exercises and steps through which one can learn to observe and know one's own voice, to decode sounds and other musical elements that can be stored and reproduced through it, in order to be able to use it on stage. The effect resulting from this incessant attention to detail, to the unusual, to the unexpected, captured during a constant exercise of perception, is further consolidated within the artist's performances, which she herself describes by coining a new definition of the quality of restitution of a voice trained in the art as *cantar recitando* (essentially a reversal of the 17th-century concept that is the cornerstone of Monteverdi's musical poetics, *recitar cantando*), that is, «rediscovering the complexity and stratification of life's emotions»[110] through the construction of an artistic body-voice capable of fully representing them: «when I hear something, I see»[111].

In addition to the practice of listening from the outside, Guidi urges, above all, constant attention to the inside of the human body, analysing the effect produced by phonation and breathing on one's organs, delineating a landscape inhabited by the movements of the voice, which can be transcribed on paper by means of drawings and signs that constitute the essential trace for memorisation and subsequent reproduction. Thus, despite the fact that the Societas' first performances saw a close relationship with traditional texts and classics, the approach that

[108] The artist describes this encounter and the way their work is composed in CHIARA GUIDI, *La voce in una foresta di immagini invisibili*, Milano, Nottetempo, 2017, pp. 30-31.
[109] «La scelta della voce è una questione di drammaturgia»/«The choice of voice is a matter of dramaturgy», CHIARA GUIDI, *Cantar recitando. Conversazione di Valentina Valentini con Chiara Guidi*, in VALENTINA VALENTINI (a cura di), *Drammaturgie sonore. Teatri del secondo Novecento*, cit., p. 167.
[110] «ritrovare la complessità e la stratificazione delle emozioni della vita», Ivi, p. 164.
[111] «quando sento qualcosa, io vedo», expression used by Chiara Guidi during the round table *Costruire una storia*, with Chiara Guidi, Enrico Casagrande, Ermanna Montanari (artistic direction 2009-11) and Rodolfo Sacchettini (critical-organisational coordination of the three-year period together with Silvia Bottiroli and Cristina Ventrucci), with Gerardo Guccini and Roberta Ferraresi as moderators, which took place during the study day dedicated to the twentieth anniversary of the Santarcangelo Festival, at the University of Bologna, cit.

Guidi developed to support his vocal dramaturgy increasingly broke free from the hegemony of the text:

Per me non è sufficiente dire il testo. Non basta interpretarlo imitando l'arte del dire ottocentesco. Occorre avere una visione della propria voce in relazione al testo e avere una visione del testo in relazione alla propria voce. Se il punto di partenza è un testo, la scrittura va squadernata con il suono della voce, che ne scrive in questo modo la drammaturgia. […] Ne traccio una partitura. Ne disegno i gesti mettendo dei piccoli segni sulle sillabe del testo che devo dire. Controllo la voce come si controlla il corpo durante la danza o come si esegue una scrittura musicale quando si canta. Per me apire bocca sul palco esige una scrittura musicale che la drammaturgia del lavoro stesso richiama. […] il suono della voce fa parte di un'unità armonica che è lo spettacolo. L'attore che recita non può sganciarsi da questa consapevolezza e deve portare nel suo dire il peso dell'idea che rende necessaria la rappresentazione. La voce che l'attore utilizza, tra le mille che possiede, deve completare la visione, deve diventare essa stessa visione[112].

For me, it is not enough to say the text. It is not enough to interpret it by imitating the art of nineteenth-century saying. One must have a vision of one's own voice in relation to the text and have a vision of the text in relation to one's own voice. If the starting point is a text, the writing must be squared with the sound of the voice, which thus writes the dramaturgy. [...] I draw a score. I draw the gestures by putting small marks on the syllables of the text I have to say. I control the voice as one controls the body when dancing or as one performs a musical script when singing. For me, opening my mouth on stage requires a musical script that the work's dramaturgy recalls. [...] the sound of the voice is part of a harmonic unity that is the performance. The actor acting cannot disengage her/himself from this awareness and must carry in her/his saying the weight of the idea that makes the performance necessary. The voice the actor uses, among the thousands she/he possesses, must complete the vision and must itself become the vision.

The initial reference by the Societas to the poetics of poetry theatre, a theatre that dwells on a strong adherence to images, pictorial references and the visual arts in order to operate a new and evocative alienation from the text and conventions of bourgeois spoken-word theatre, then sees a sharpening of the search for a post-dramatic theatre of cruelty (to recall Artaud[113]) that strongly stimulates the senses, that can shake consciences and include, in its new tragicity as a witness of its own time, a violent annexation of liminal themes, such as illness, ugliness, degradation and violence. This theatrical research pervades Guidi's entire career and takes concrete form in his personal approach to the *Lectura Dantis*.

Their approach to the *Commedia*, or rather their confrontation with Dante's poem, occurs at a moment of transition for the company, which, after this production or already in its realisation, will decide to take different paths, still remaining Societas, but seeing its members take solo paths[114]. The Dante trilogy created for the 2008 Avignon Festival, which also saw the presence of Romeo Castellucci as an associate artist, offers an initial crossing in which to listen to the Florentine poet's words and elaborate its personal message.

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[112] CHIARA GUIDI, *Cantar recitando. Conversazione di Valentina Valentini con Chiara Guidi*, in VALENTINA VALENTINI (a cura di), *Drammaturgie sonore. Teatri del secondo Novecento*, cit., pp. 161-163.
[113] See ANTONIN ARTAUD, *Il teatro e il suo doppio*, a cura di Gian Renzo Morteo e Guido Neri, Torino, Einaudi, 2000.
[114] The split within the company is also the result of the separation of the couple Chiara Guidi and Romeo Castellucci.

2015 is indicated as the auroral moment of this new collaboration in the sign of Dante, between Guidi's larynx and the cello of musician Francesco Guerri. Asked several times what the real debut of their Dantean collaboration between vocal sounds and strings was, the artist told the author of this thesis how perhaps the first appointment came about thanks to the request of the organising committee of the 13th Congress of the Lacanian School of Psychoanalysis (SLP), entitled *Avere un corpo che parla. Emergenze del corpo nella esperienza psicoanalitica*, held in Ravenna, Italy, on 30-31 May 2015[115]. For the occasion, he had read the thirteenth canto of *Inferno*, in which the suicides are found, and had proposed a talk on his artistic practice.

It is important to note two elements: the style that characterises Guidi's personal research, this constant exercise, and how it is associated with her work with Guerri (*Figures 18-19*). In fact, it should be remembered that the collaboration with the cellist Guerri starts precisely from a substantial mutual admiration, on the one hand for the historical bearing that Guidi has had on the history of twentieth century performing arts, starting precisely from Romagna, and on the other hand for the marked ability to articulate a process of research in applied sound that has characterised Guerri[116]. Their work together is strongly conceived and articulated according to a research, a *quête* taken to the extreme consequences of reciprocal listening, of constant practice, of the desire to measure oneself against a limit to be taken ever

[115] One can listen to Dante's performance and further reflection on the *Corpo della voce* at the Lacan Radio site (episodes 16 and 17), which was responsible for recording some highlights of the Congress: https://radiolacan.com/it/topic/601 (last accessed 15/05/2025).

[116] In fact, Guidi states in the interview in Verona in October 2021 that she was very impressed by Guerri's solo works. The musician describes his meeting with Guidi as follows: «Chiara Guidi per me è stato un sogno che si è avverato. Ho incontrato la Societas da relativamente giovane, avevo vent'anni e ho avuto la fortuna di vedere Amleto e poi dopo poco Giulio Cesare. Per me sono state visioni fondamentali. Mi ricordo che ancora frequentavo il conservatorio e la mia classe di violoncello affacciava proprio sull'ingresso del teatro Comandini, sede della Societas. Guardavo quell'ingresso cercando di immaginarmi come fare ad entrarci e provavo un'enorme invidia per tutti quelli che vedevo varcare quella soglia. Una decina d'anni dopo, nel 2012, quando ormai avevo ripreso con fatica il mio percorso di ricerca sul violoncello, Chiara, dopo un mio concerto in solo ad Area Sismica, mi ha chiesto di collaborare con lei e mi ha invitato al festival Mantica che organizzava al teatro Comandini. Da allora abbiamo continuato a lavorare ininterrottamente insieme, sia nella produzione di alcuni spettacoli ma anche, e soprattutto, in un esercizio regolare di prove e incontri casalinghi»/«Chiara Guidi was a dream come true for me. I met the Societas when I was relatively young, I was twenty years old and I was lucky enough to see Hamlet and then shortly afterwards Giulio Cesare. They were fundamental visions for me. I remember that I was still attending the conservatory and my cello class overlooked the entrance to the Comandini theatre, the Societas' headquarters. I used to look at that entrance trying to imagine how I could get in and I felt an enormous envy for everyone I saw crossing that threshold. About ten years later, in 2012, when I had already resumed my research on the cello with difficulty, Chiara, after one of my solo concerts at Area Sismica, asked me to collaborate with her and invited me to the Mantica festival she was organising at the Comandini theatre. Since then we have continued to work together uninterruptedly, both in the production of some performances but also, and above all, in a regular exercise of rehearsals and home meetings», see NAZIM COMUNALE, *Francesco Guerri: acute coincidenze*, in «The New Noise», 13 gennaio 2020, available online: https://www.thenewnoise.it/francesco-guerri-acute-coincidenze/ (last accessed 15/05/2025). The first collaboration with him was on the play *Macbeth su Macbeth su Macbeth. Uno studio per la mano sinistra da William Shakespeare*, with adaptation and direction by Chiara Guidi, original music by Francesco Guerri and Giuseppe Ielasi and artistic collaboration by Francesca Grilli, in 2014.

further, to honour the process of artistic knowledge before the product to be obtained. The definition of the shared working method is also indispensable:

Ci incontriamo ogni lunedì. Ci servirà molto tempo per leggerla tutta. Abbiamo incominciato con l'Inferno realizzando, in un anno, solo quattro canti. Leggere Dante mette in crisi il mio modo abituale di lavorare con la voce perché, su quei versi, non posso aggiungere esclamazioni, aggiungere una E per accentuare un'attesa o una leggera *Oh!* Come vibrazione. […] In Dante la parola suona ancor prima di farsi capire. Testo e musica coincidono: per la voce non c'è un altro spazio di composizione. Nel ventre di Dante deve suonare mentre dice le parole. Con il violoncello mi concentro sul suono. Pascoliamo sugli endecasillabi per cercare tra noi quel legame di necessità compositiva che diventa più importante del Poeta stesso e, senza il quale, Dante stesso non potrebbe esprimersi. E il tempo passa e, forse, qualcosa nella mia voce cambia perché si modella e rimodella continuamente[117].

We meet every Monday. We will need a lot of time to read it all. We started with the Inferno, doing, in one year, only four cantos. Reading Dante challenges my usual way of working with the voice because, in those verses, I cannot add exclamations, add an E to accentuate an expectation or a slight *Oh!* Like vibration. [...] In Dante, the word sounds even before it is understood. Text and music coincide: for the voice, there is no other space for composition. In Dante's belly it must resonate as he says the words. With the cello, I concentrate on the sound. We pass over the hendecasyllables to seek between us that bond of compositional necessity that becomes more important than the Poet himself and, without which, Dante himself could not express himself. And time passes and, perhaps, something in my voice changes because it is continually moulded and reshaped.

For years Guidi has been practising and has made exercise, and workshop work, her trademark, especially in her analysis and research with children and adolescents, cultivating respect for the child's astonishment and wonder in order to transport this same quality of gaze, in the perception of the fantastic and invisible to the eyes, into her own molecular research of the voice[118]. Having developed many 'exercise' paths within the Comandini Theatre circuit, the work process, strong in patience and constancy, is grafted into her personal artistic production[119].

Since 2015, in fact, starting with a few cantos of the *Inferno*, they tackled to measure themselves against the *Purgatorio*, with the support of musicologist Alessandra Fiori, with whom they tackle the intrinsic complexity of the musical contextualisation of Dante's *Commedia* and the sacred and profane music cited in it:

L'Inferno è una favola, a volte comica; il Purgatorio è una cantica corale, c'è una comunità intera che si muove e s'innalza in un'ascesi continua: per questo abbiamo coinvolto Alessandra Fiori e i suoi cori quando l'abbiamo affrontata, per accompagnarci col canto. Il Paradiso, invece, è una sublimazione della corporeità: anche il corpo

[117] CHIARA GUIDI, *La voce in una foresta di immagini invisibili*, cit., pp. 66-67.
[118] In this regard, see the texts produced by the various projects carried out mainly at the Teatro Comandini and in schools in Cesena by the artist: ANNALISA SACCHI, CHIARA GUIDI, *Minimo Theatrum. L'infanzia della scena*, Cesena, Societas, 2015; PIERSANDRA DI MATTEO, *Il piede e la sincope. Pratiche di teatro con gli adolescenti imperniate sulla zoppia edipica secondo il metodo di Chiara Guidi*, Cesena, Puerilia/Societs, 2017; CHIARA GUIDI, LUCIA AMARA, *Teatro infantile. L'arte scenica davanti agli occhi di un bambino*, a cura di Cristina Ventrucci, Roma, Luca Sossella, 2019. See also the in-depth texts on the artist's vocal practice: CHIARA GUIDI, *Interrogare e leggere: la domanda e la lettura come forme irrisolvibili di conoscenza*, cura editoriale di Anna Biagetti e Cristina Ventrucci, Faenza, Sete, 2021; CHIARA GUIDI, *La voce in una foresta di immagini invisibili*, cit.
[119] Dear to the actress is the formula of the exercise, which she also applies to *Edipo Re di Sofocle. Esercizio di memoria per 4 voci femminili*, from an idea by Chiara Guidi in dialogue with Vito Matera, with Angela Burico, Chiara Guidi, Anna Laura Penna, Chiara Savoia, staged in Rome in 2019.

umano diventa luce. Così abbiamo voluto un quartetto d'archi dell'Istituto "Giuseppe Verdi", composto da ragazzi giovani e non professionisti. Tutte le musiche sono originali, tranne i canti che Alessandra Fiori farà eseguire al suo coro: sono gli stessi canti menzionati da Dante nel secondo canto del Purgatorio. Alessandra è una grande musicologa e ha svolto un'indagine storica per ricreare i suoni dell'epoca. Il canto di Casella, ad esempio, è esattamente quello che veniva cantato nel Trecento[120].

Inferno is a fable, sometimes comical; Purgatory is a choral song; there is a whole community that moves and rises in a continuous asceticism: that is why we involved Alessandra Fiori and her choirs when we tackled it to accompany us in song. On the other hand, Paradise is a sublimation of corporeity: even the human body becomes light. So we wanted a string quartet from the 'Giuseppe Verdi' Institute, made up of young, non-professional boys. All the music is original, except for the songs that Alessandra Fiori will have her choir perform: they are the same songs mentioned by Dante in the second canto of Purgatory. Alessandra is a great musicologist and has carried out historical research to recreate the sounds of the time. Casella's chant, for example, is exactly what was sung in the 14th century.

The choral dimension intrinsic to the human canticle *of Purgatorio* offers the artistic duo the opportunity to open up to dialogue with other performers, preparing this poetic chorus of volunteers from time to time with vocal *training* sessions coordinated by Guidi. The first occurrence of this happened in 2018, when *the lecture* of the fifth canto of *Purgatorio* was presented, together with the choir of inmates from the Sant'Anna Prison in Modena, a song that addresses the themes of melancholy and acceptance of one's condition as a sinner with the intonation of the *Miserere*.

In the opening to the heavens *of Paradise*, on the other hand, as in the case of the performances conceived for Ravenna Festival in 2021[121], the presence of a musical *ensemble* and singing is included, recalling the rarefied atmosphere of heavenly bliss.

On the occasion of two performances in Verona, at the Camploy Theatre, on 21 and 22 October 2021, and a workshop for the preparation of the poetic choir (in this specific case, composed of students from the University of Verona), it was possible to observe the working methodology of the artistic couple in action. Unlike the first evening, offered in the usual setting that sees the two performers alone in the midst of a forest of microphones and lecterns, and which envisages the reading of Cantos I, V, VI and VII of *Inferno*, for the second evening dedicated to *Purgatorio* the choice was made to enrich the setting with a few elements, making them act as a counterbalance to the small but incisive vocal action introduced by the poetic choir (*Figures 20-21*).

[120] Chiara *Guidi* in the interview by IACOPO GARDELLI, *Il "cantar recitando" di Chiara Guidi: «Interpreto il suono delle parole di Dante». La fondatrice della Socìetas Raffaello Sanzio al Museo Nazionale con gli "esercizi" sul Paradiso per laringe e violoncello*, in «RavennaeDintorni.it», 7 giugno 2021, available at: https://www.ravennaedintorni.it/rd-cult/teatro/cantar-recitando-chiara-guidi-interpreto-suono-delle-parole-dante/ (last accessed 15/05/2025).

[121] See the materials and iconographic materials related to the performance on *Paradiso* on the Ravenna Festival website: https://www.ravennafestival.org/events/inferno-purgatorio-paradiso/ (last accessed 15/05/2025).

Guidi and Guerri appear on the proscenium, in dark clothes. Behind them stands the chorus, separated from the performers by a diaphragm composed of three long Plexiglas sheets lowered from the lighting bridge. The canto that is represented with the chorus is that of the lustful *in Purgatorio*, the moment when Dante meets the poet Guido Guinizzelli, master of the Dolce Stil Novo, and Arnaut Daniel, the Provençal from whom the Florentine learnt the vertigo of verse and its most ingenious combinatorial crypticities. Red lights radiate softly from behind the choir, recalling the tongue of fire in which they purge themselves in the last frame[122] (*Figures 22-23*).

During the workshop set up in the days preceding the performance, Guidi runs through the entire canto with the students, asking them to read aloud and making them dwell on verbs, sounds, syllables, then vowels, beginning to make them understand her practice of molecularising the elements (*Figures 24-25*). She then helps them to read Dante's words with a newfound sonic focus: what images does Dante evoke? Why does he resort to certain animal metaphors to describe the lustful souls, and finally, who are these love poets and why does Dante make them speak to him, hence to us? From this dialogue with the young people, and the answers that arise from it, a shared vocal score begins to emerge. Several times Guidi urges them to go further, to be bold in their presence on stage, keeping the listening alive among themselves and especially with the inflections given by Guerri's cello.

Dante's verses introducing the Stilnovist poet Guido Guinizzelli are preceded by snaps and kisses, to provide an evocative soundtrack, later also using the rhythmic sound of hands sliding on square sieves, to recall the «sandy sound of the living earth»[123], from which the penitent souls have now detached themselves but which they continue to remember with melancholy, still far from being able to contemplate their blissful future, still too human in renewing the memory of their past lives.

As Valentina Valentini writes, Guidi's work on the voice brings «the word back to its corporeal matrix [...] it constructs space, it creates images: it immerses the spectator in a haptic world-theatre, in which sound wounds him, breath envelops him, silence makes him sensitive to the subtlest sounds»[124].

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[122] "rispondere a me che 'n sete e 'n foco ardo", "né, per lo foco, in là m'appressai più", "che presso avea, disparve per lo foco", "Poi s'ascose nel foco che li affina", *Pg*. XXVI, vv. 18, 102, 134, 148.

[123] «suono sabbiato della terra viva», these words belong to Chiara Guidi and were jotted down during her activity as auditor at the poetry choir training workshop in Verona.

[124] «la parola alla sua matrice corporea […] costruisce lo spazio, crea immagini: immerge lo spettatore in un mondo-teatro aptico, in cui il suono lo ferisce, il respiro lo avvolge, il silenzio lo rende sensibile ai suoni più sottili», VALENTINA VALENTINI, *Contemporary Theatre 1989-2019*, Rome, Carocci, 2020, pp. 136-137.

In this total possession by the voice, Guidi is present and at the same time guided, creature and created, like Dante within his own work (*agens/auctor*). Voice and music become dramaturgical machines that unite in a communion of intent given by the pitiless stubbornness of the artistic cognitive process. The Dante reading they propose is, to all intents and purposes, a crossing, the sharing of a space:

ricerchiamo ogni volta un'architettura che possa manifestare il passaggio di una presenza: un corpo sonoro in transito sulle parole della Divina Commedia. Gli esercizi hanno come scopo la composizione di una partitura che dia valore e celebri l'unione inestricabile di Voce e Violoncello. Lì, sul pentagramma, con disegni tracciamo il suono della laringe umana in stretta relazione con gli endecasillabi e con la notazione musicale del violoncello per dare vita a un'unica forma che, come una linea flessuosa non visibile, ci indichi la chiave di tutto. La scrittura compositiva diventa per noi lo schizzo di un asse generatore che attende, attraverso la nostra interpretazione, di dare forma a una forma che si forma. Tracciamo segni sul cammino di Dante e quei segni diventano il nostro cammino. Per ogni canto scegliamo la lunghezza delle pause, le riprese, le cesure, le emozioni dei tracolli e delle risalite guidati da un sentimento di immagine che, passo dopo passo, ci guida nella composizione finché, giunti al termine del canto, si ricomincia a camminare in un altro spazio[125].

We search each time for an architecture that can manifest the passage of a presence: a sound body in transit over the words of the Divine Comedy. The exercises aim to compose a score that gives value and celebrates the inextricable union of Voice and Cello. There, on the stave, with drawings, we trace the sound of the human larynx in close relation to the hendecasyllable and the musical notation of the cello to give life to a single form that, like an unseen flexuous line, shows us the key to everything. For us, compositional writing becomes the sketch of a generating axis that waits, through our interpretation, to give shape to a form that is formed. We trace marks on Dante's path, and those marks become our path. For each canto, we choose the length of the pauses, the resumptions, the caesuras, and the emotions of the collapses and rises guided by a feeling of the image that, step by step, guides us in the composition until, having reached the end of the canto, we start walking again in another space.

If that between music and declamation is the most usual and widely used way of transporting the *Lecturae Dantis* to European stages and thus around the world from the 19th century to the present, Guidi and Guerri's collaboration between strings bears witness to a further revisitation of the same *topos*. In this case, however, the music of the instrument disregards its ancillary function, becoming a true counterpoint, a second voice necessary to determine the tight involutions of Guidi's vocal mastery of the hidden strings. From the sometimes strident melodic agreement between the two, one can strongly perceive the frequentation and consequent full knowledge they feel. The grafting of further voices, of further sounds is nothing other than a generous opening of the research to the world[126].

[125] Quotation taken from the description of Dante's project on the Societas company website.

[126] It is Guidi who explains how their intention, in the purgatorial songs, is to open up, «trovare persone che desiderano fare teatro, e non vengono dal teatro»/«to find people who want to do theatre, and who do not come from the theatre» and open up its research to them, which will remain so because the performance must maintain its strength, its artistic poignancy: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K4Z8HTNpiVQ&ab_channel=ERCultura (last accessed 15/05/2025).

3.2.2. Ermanna Montanari

Founder of the Teatro delle Albe based at the Teatro Rasi in Ravenna, together with director Marco Martinelli, and her lifelong companions Luigi Dadina and Marcella Nonni, Ermanna Montanari is one of the most influential female actors on the Italian scene today. Winner of prestigious prizes and, over the course of her thirty-year career, also capable of taking on roles of great responsibility, such as artistic director of the Santarcangelo Festival (2011), or artistic director of the Ravenna playbill (to date she is also artistic director for the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza)[127] , she has not been wrongly defined by Laura Mariani as a novel Eleonora Duse or Adelaide Ristori, an actress-author, echoing the definitions given to these capital artists in the history of theatre by Mirella Schino[128].

Starting from Campiano, in rural Romagna, Montanari sustains her artistic career thanks to a deep adhesion to her roots and a very strong curiosity for the world of art and stage design (at university, she followed the archaeological *curriculum*, which determined her passion-obsession for Coptic Christian art)[129].

The spearhead of the Teatro delle Albe, it is difficult to conceive of her artistic career separate from that of her life and art companion Martinelli, as their artistic fortunes are rooted in a generative artistic and life partnership that is nourished by mutual dialogue as much as by their different individualities (*Figure 26*).

Thanks to Laura Mariani's studies first, and then Enrico Pitozzi's, it is possible to understand the formative process and also the multiple instances that have guided the artist in her various creative phases, from the search for her own space (of her own presence), to the spasmodic curiosity towards what permeates space (the voice) and what encodes it (the set and costumes), until arriving at what is powerfully diffused and amplified in it. In fact, it is no coincidence that, in a personal reinterpretation of the motto *Farsi luogo* declared by Martinelli[130] in the book of the same name, she states the following about her own way of conceiving voice theatre:

[127] See the programme produced by Montanari and Martinelli for the programme of classical performances at the Olimpico in Vicenza 2024: https://www.tcvi.it/it/classici/ (last accessed 15/05/2025).
[128] See MIRELLA SCHINO, *Il teatro di Eleonora Duse. Nuova edizione riveduta e ampliata*, Roma, Bulzoni, 2008.
[129] See LAURA MARIANI, *Ermanna Montanari. Fare-disfare-rifare nel Teatro delle Albe*, cit., p. 63.
[130] MARCO MARTINELLI, *Farsi luogo. Varco al teatro in 101 movimenti*, Bologna, Cue Press, 2015.

Farsi eco. Ripetere la voce della nonna e degli animali nella stalla, gli uccelli. Eco del silenzio. Reagire ai suoni. Le parole e la sostanza delle parole non la sua voce quotidiana. Percorrere il tempo in modo verticale, non storico, non negli atti di una comunità[131].

Echoing. Repeating the voice of the grandmother and the animals in the barn, the birds. Echoing the silence. Reacting to sounds. Words and the substance of words, not the everyday voice. Travelling through time vertically, not historically, not in the acts of a community.

We find in her personal vocal practice and in her approach to the voice that same search for the world, of attentive capture of the compositional atom that characterised her friend and companion in various artistic endeavours Guidi[132]. In the strong vindication and mature awareness acquired after her early years of the pride of her rustic, rural, rugged origins, that same iron grain that strikes D'Amburgo's vocal strength is activated in Montanari. Mariani sheds light on how in the Nuovo Teatro and in the female actors of the second half of the twentieth century the will to do was reawakened, to discover the profoundly feminine matrix of the artistic profession and, invariably, common elements were found that constituted the prerequisites for shared practices that could be traced back to gender, but were incapable of clinging to it, because they were intent on constituting a new history, *without gender*, based on the value of inclusiveness, care, waiting, going back to Guidi again, of exercise.

For her, too, Bene and De Berardinis are indispensable masters, especially because the company's gestation period (compared to the Romagna-based Societas and Valdoca) was longer, and gave the actress the opportunity to frequent master puppeteers, learning techniques, manual skills and even organisation, and less 'committed' theatres, which helped her and Martinelli in the constancy of making theatre[133]. However, this apprenticeship of bodies should not be forgotten, produced in the different stages of the company, from its foundation as the collective *Teatro d'Arte Maranathà* to the more mature form of the Albe, during which Montanari had founding encounters, for instance with the Romagnolo poet Nevio Spadoni, with the electro-acoustic musician Luigi Ceccarelli, but above all with the African member of the Albe, with the consequent trip to Africa where she fell ill, which irrevocably marked her stage posture[134].

Returning to Dante, it is useful to recall that Montanari herself, in her manifesto of male and female masters, puts Dante together with Artaud among the various figures to be followed.

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[131] LAURA MARIANI, *Ermanna Montanari. Fare-disfare-rifare nel Teatro delle Albe*, cit., p. 224.
[132] The show featuring Guidi and Montanari together, *Poco lontano da qui* of 2012, is once again recalled.
[133] See LAURA MARIANI, *Ermanna Montanari. Fare-disfare-rifare nel Teatro delle Albe*, Corazzano, Titivillus, 2012, pp. 66-68.
[134] On this specific topic, see also LINDA PASINA, *Takku Ligey: un cortile nella savana. Il teatro di Mandiaye N'Diaye*, postfazione di Marco Martinelli, Corazzano, Titivillus, 2011.

We do not intend to deal here with the complex *Cantiere Dante* project, which starts in 2017 and makes the Teatro delle Albe and above all the city of Ravenna the most representative pole of theatre applied to the Supreme Poet ever, but we will deal only with a moment, which is equally important and which, in the complexity of the shows they produce and offer, has unjustly passed almost unnoticed.

Having already produced *Inferno* (2017) and *Purgatorio* (2019), in addition to the show *fedeli d'Amore* (2018), in which Montanari is the protagonist, the company Albe had planned to bring *Paradiso* to life in 2021, the seven-hundredth anniversary of the poet's death. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures to prevent the proliferation of the contagion did not allow the company to operate as usual, through that contact of bodies, that multitude of volunteers called together. This situation created a moment of great artistic *impasse* that had never been foreseen, and never experienced before.

Resorting to that root that is «living fountainhead»[135] of art, of care, of healing from within, Le Albe organised a special public call, for artists only. All the artists of Romagna, friends who had shared a path with them and new emerging faces, were called upon to recite in their own unique way a song of *Paradise*, to build a social chain[136], a collective prayer, both secular and sacred, so that hope would not die, but be ready to sustain the plague of those horrible years that enveloped the theatres with its miasma.

The long night of Albe, a *happening* from sunset on 25 June 2021 to dawn on the 26th, was realised in the public gardens of Ravenna, in front of the Renaissance façade of the Loggetta lombardesca, a place in the city already selected to host the last cantica in the near future. As in a circular rite, Martinelli and Montanari together opened the dances along the thirty-three cantos of *Paradise*, interspersing their voices and allowing Montanari to awaken all the hieratic strength of the female angelic guide who constellates the journey towards the Empyrean (*Figures 27-28*).

Accompanied by the music of the *ensemble* directed by Ceccarelli and the voice of singer Mirella Mastronardi, the performers who had answered the call paraded along with the slow movement of the stars in the celestial vault, and inevitably the audience, after the first part, began to thin out. Montanari and Martinelli, dressed in their usual white suits, just as in Dante's plays, were always present, seated at the side of the stage, guardians of the feat and, like Dante,

[135] «fontana vivace», *Pd*. XXXIII, v. 12.
[136] «social catena», GIACOMO LEOPARDI, *XXXIV. La ginestra, o il fiore del deserto*, in GIACOMO LEOPARDI, *Canti*, a cura di Giorgio Ficara, con uno scritto di Giuseppe Ungaretti, Milano, Mondadori, 2013 [1987[1]], pp. 221-232, v. 149.

guardians of the journey in which they involve the audience[137]. It is no coincidence that the enterprise had been called a prayer, because it had all its characteristics, especially that of commitment, of protracted effort, of the firm determination to go all the way.

Having reached the end, Montanari again, alone, imposed herself in the last collective effort. At the conclusion of what had all the traits of a dream, tinging this poetic *after* with the diaphanous hues of dawning, at the utterance of the last triplet

> A l'alta fantasia qui mancò possa;
> ma già volgeva il mio disio e 'l velle,
> sì come rota ch'igualmente è mossa,
>
> l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle [138].

those few who remained, as if enchanted by the actress's voice, turned around and among the foliage of the trees in the Ravenna garden saw the first signs of the dawn that brought forth the new day. The uniqueness of this experience added to the uniqueness of the voices that sustained it (*Figure 29*).

Several times Montanari has found herself undergoing the ordeal of the *Lectura Dantis*: since the beginning of their journey, during the annual anniversary of the poet's death in Ravenna, the Albe have been reading Dante's verses, having their actors perform them or entrusting them to illustrious guests. In the various places where the company's Dante project has been exported, also thanks to the mandate obtained from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to be Dante's ambassadors in the five continents, it is Montanari who is the body-voice for the punctual reading of Dante's verses, which otherwise becomes a Dante chorus in the manner of the *chiamate*, often interpolated by other elements[139].

As a further and clarifying example of Montanari's direct filiation of vocal praxis, one may consider, for example, the recent *lectura* of the thirty-third canto of *Paradiso* as part of the international festival "Teatro dei luoghi" (*Nessuna terra in vista*, 15/25 July 2024) in Lecce.

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[137] See the photos taken by the Ravenna Festival and the available materials made for the Happening *Verso Paradiso* at: https://www.ravennafestival.org/events/verso-paradiso/ (last accessed 15/05/2025).
[138] *Pd*. XXXIII, vv. 142-145.
[139] For more information, see the description of the project, which envisaged collaboration between the Italian Cultural Institutes in the five continents (specifically, the cities of New York, Nairobi, Buenos Aires, Melbourne, Jakarta), available on the Ministry's website: https://italiana.esteri.it/italiana/eventi/spettacolo-dante-nei-cinque-continenti/ (last accessed 15/05/2025). Also within the framework of the substantial celebrations of Dante in 2021, a *podcast* was produced in which the various states were asked to read Dante's *Comedy* in the translation pertaining to their own language. Counting no less than thirty-three languages, it offers a guided tour through Dante's three canticles for each one. The episode in Italian is read by Ermanna Montanari and Marco Martinelli, while the captions are by Claudia Sebastiana Nobili of the University of Bologna: https://open.spotify.com/show/2Gdff73bgs84YbHS3LVYkA (last accessed 15/05/2025).

On the evening of 22 July, at 10 p.m., Montanari climbed the bell tower of the cathedral and there, illuminated with a microphone and lectern, that rare overlapping took place, which could easily be interpreted as a tribute to the maestro, as the land of Salento is Carmelo Bene's homeland[140] (*Figure 30*). In the evocative square, surrounded by the candid Baroque architecture, circular fabric skies/heavens are set up to allow the audience to listen to the song while lying down, in contemplation of the celestial vault, in an evocative marvel[141], just as happens in the performance *Paradiso* of Albe. This provides a synthesis of the two-folded dimensions of Montanari's dramaturgical work, having one attention to the body-voice and another to the space of its fruition, leaving nothing to chance:

Quello che non cambia mai è il nostro cercare l'intreccio delle differenti *materie* che costituiscono l'opera: il corpo-voce dell'attore, la scrittura del testo, la concezione dello spazio, le luci, il suono[142].

What never changes is our constant attempt at interweaving the different *materials* that constitute our work: the body-voice of the actor, the composition of the written text, the conception of the space, the lights, the sound[143].

And so the work on the voice, as well as that on space, go hand in hand, with a relentless and maniacal work of research that demands Montanari's own spaces and silences, and then returns as part of the Albe *tribe*:

Nella fase di ideazione Marco ed io procediamo insieme finché io metto l'accento sul mio stare in scena, mi tolgo per poi espormi. Ho di me attore una visione da chirurgo. Ho bisogno di chiudermi per mesi, in silenzio. Ciò che viene prima – il non rappresentabile – fa sì che io possa rappresentare. Mi sono creduta 'irrappresentabile' fino a vent'anni. Cosa mi ha fatto scattare? Figure da scavare, vangare qualcosa che è là sotto ma prende aria gioiosamente. Come inventarmi un'altra vita? Per me quell'origine è distante oggi. Quell'Ermanna non piaceva a nessuno, ma ha fatto sì che inventassi l'altra Ermanna[144].

In the conception phase Marco and I proceed together until I emphasise my being on stage, I take myself off and then expose myself. I have a surgeon's vision of myself as an actor. I need to shut myself away for months, in silence. What comes first - the unrepresentable - makes it possible for me to represent. I believed myself 'unrepresentable' until I was twenty. What triggered me? Figures to dig out, to dig up something that is down there but joyfully takes air. How to invent another life for myself? For me that origin is distant today. Nobody liked that Ermanna, but it made me invent the other Ermanna.

Interesting is what musician Ceccarelli observes about her closeness and alterity to the great Bene's vocal practice: «Ermanna is an extraordinary voice artist, with power similar to

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[140] Lecce also houses the archive with the artist's papers: https://biblioteche.regione.puglia.it/SebinaOpac/.do?sysb=carmelobene (last accessed 15/05/2025).
[141] See the article *Teatro Koreja: dal campanile del Duomo l'otto volte Premio UBU Ermanna Montanari legge il XXXIII canto del Paradiso*, in «CorriereSalentino.it», 21 luglio 2024, available online at: https://www.corrieresalentino.it/2024/07/teatro-koreja-dal-campanile-del-duomo-lotto-volte-premio-ubu-ermanna-montanari-legge-il-xxxiii-canto-del-paradiso/ (last accessed 23/05/2025).
[142] ERMANNA MONTANARI, ENRICO PITOZZI, *Cellula. Anatomy of stage space/An anatomy of stage space*, translated into English by Thomas Haskell Simpson, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2021, p. 133.
[143] Ivi, p. 158.
[144] LAURA MARIANI, *Ermanna Montanari. Fare-disfare-rifare nel Teatro delle Albe*, cit., p. 298.

Carmelo Bene's but with a different quality: Bene is an artist of artificiality as the soul of theatre, in the great sense in which *his* theatre proposes it; Ermanna is "never fake"»[145].

The operation of meticulous work on the score, to create one's own «acoustic image», as already described by Guidi, which brings the eye closer to the ear, asking the mind to operate that creation *in fieri* that is only given through the imagination stimulated by the presence of the artist's body-voice on stage, is once again expressed by Montanari, as an element to be sought in theatrical praxis: «The voice is ear, its tactile communion»[146]. Pitozzi observes how Montanari's voice theatre can be likened, even more profoundly, to a «sonography»:

> la musica è un vissuto istantaneo, appartenente al registro dell'emozione primaria, a partire dalla quale la riflessione si impone solo successivamente, quando il suo effetto sul corpo è concluso, quando l'ascolto è terminato e si tramuta in "visione": quando l'orecchio diviene occhio[147].
>
> music is an instantaneous experience, belonging to the register of primary emotion, from which reflection imposes itself only later on, when its effect on the body is concluded, when listening is finished and turns into 'vision': when the ear becomes the eye.

Montanari's vocal polychromy and her constant study of music and vocality evolved over the years, starting from her dialect of Campiano, her mother tongue, the idiom dear to her, and leading to a focus on words, which were not hers, they were others, in Italian, the second language, learnt at school, like any other foreign language, and demanded attention. Her voice, which in the beginning was ready on the model of Maria Callas to soar in soprano arias (as it had already been for Peragallo)[148], instead found a home in the theatre and built a personal path, in which she benefited from constant study of her instrument, accompanied by frequentation with artists, scholars and specialists[149]. Scholar Kristin Linklater writes:

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[145] «Ermanna è una straordinaria artista della voce, con potenza simile a quella di Carmelo Bene ma con una qualità diversa: Bene è un artista dell'artificialità come anima del teatro, nel senso grande in cui il *suo* teatro la propone; Ermanna non risulta "mai finta"», ivi, p. 212. The quotation comes from an interview Mariani had with the musician Ceccarelli in Rome in December 2010.

[146] «immagine acustica»; «La voce è orecchio, è la sua comunione tattile», ERMANNA MONTANARI, ENRICO PITOZZI*, Cellula. Anatomy of stage space/An anatomy of stage space*, cit., p. 84, engl. p. 104. See also ERMANNA MONTANARI, ENRICO PITOZZI, *Prima voce/First voice*, Ancona, Sigaretten, 2022.

[147] ENRICO PITOZZI, *Acusma. Figura e voce nel teatro sonoro di Ermanna Montanari*, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2017, p. 95.

[148] Listen to the interview conversation with the musicologist Emilio Sala for "Amadeus Magazine", in which the musical aspect in the dramaturgy of the Albe is investigated and, above all, in which Montanari declares how her own lyrical vocation was due to her beloved grandfather, who listened to records with Maria Callas as performer and passed on this passion to her. Interview available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ny311Vxixlk (last accessed 15/05/2025).

[149] From Alfredo Tomatis, Roland Barthes, to the phoniatrist Franco Fussi, the musician Luigi Ceccarelli, to the meetings and exchanges with Guidi, with Gualtieri, with the scholars Pitozzi, Mariani, and under the sign of the greats, Bene, De Berardinis, Peragallo, always supported by Martinelli. Here we list only a few significant presences in Montanari's universe of work and we refer above all to the chapter *Theatre of Voices* in the volume LAURA MARIANI, *Ermanna Montanari. Fare-disfare-rifare nel Teatro delle Albe*, cit., pp. 216-237.

Lo sforzo mentale che l'attore deve compiere nel prendere la parola stampata e trasformarla in parola parlata è quello di silenziare il chiasso del cervello razionale per dar tempo alla scritta della parola di dissolversi e transustanziarsi: nelle immagini, nei sentimenti, nelle sensazioni, negli stati dell'essere, nei desideri e nei ricordi che la parola racchiude. […] Il non verbale, così, accede alla parola[150].

The mental effort the actor must make in taking the printed word and transforming it into the spoken word is that of silencing the noise of the rational brain to allow time for the written word to dissolve and transubstantiate itself: into the images, feelings, sensations, states of being, desires and memories that the word contains. [...] The non-verbal, thus, accesses the word.

This effort in describing her own technique, which Montanari well conceals with a practice of human humility towards the creative act itself, highlights through the interviews she has given a need for adhesion and reprogramming of the words in the artist's memory, which shatters them into digestible atoms and makes them the magmatic matter of her own singing, a meal for her own robust and solid vocal cords from Romagna, genderless, ageless, infinite and primordial, not-Ermanna, but a voice capable of constructing the scene and shaping the space around it.

On the poetic word and her approach to it, these statements by Montanari herself, which support what has been described above for the practice of "saying Dante", apply:

La parola poetica pone sempre delle domande, modifica la voce e la vibrazione del corpo. La parola mi modifica e io divento un'eco. […] Non penso mai a priori a come potrei essere in scena. […] Corpo e voce non sono divisi, sono la stessa cosa. Carne, potremmo chiamarla così, è l'intuizione del sé in quanto parola e corpo insieme. Quando la carne affiora, con verità, allo sguardo degli altri, scaturisce la poesia. E questo vale per un attore come per uno scrittore. La scrittura poetica pone sempre la questione del respiro. Per questo spesso leggo i versi a voce alta e mi piace respirare in relazione alla loro musicalità. Che cosa rende plausibile il dire? […] Corpo e voce devono essere 'cancellati' perché possano riemergere nella sostanza. Da qui nasce la predilezione per la parola poetica[151].

The poetic word always asks questions, modifies the voice and the vibration of the body. The word modifies me and I become an echo. [...] I never think in advance about how I could be on stage. [...] Body and voice are not divided, they are the same thing. Flesh, we could call it, is the intuition of the self as word and body together. When the flesh emerges, with truth, in the gaze of others, poetry springs forth. And this is as true for an actor as it is for a writer. Poetic writing always poses the question of breath. That is why I often read verses aloud and like to breathe in relation to their musicality. What makes saying plausible? [...] Body and voice must be 'erased' so that they can re-emerge in substance. Hence the predilection for the poetic word.

Over the years, given the social-participatory nature of the *Cantiere Dante* project and the production model of choirs tested with the *non-school* by the people of Ravenna and often exported, one can observe how Martinelli's mode is choral, a collective to be directed, whereas Montanari's is centripetal, dreamlike, present and unique.

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[150] KRISTIN LINKLATER, *Freeing the natural voice: imagery and art in the practice of voice and language*, illustrations by Andre Slob, revised and expanded edition, London, Nick Hern, 2006 [trad. ita. KRISTIN LINKLATER, *La voce naturale: immagini e pratiche per un uso efficace della voce e del linguaggio*, traduzione di Alessandro Fabrizi, Roma, Elliot, 2014].
[151] LAURA MARIANI, *Ermanna Montanari. Fare-disfare-rifare nel Teatro delle Albe*, cit., pp. 230-231.

Montanari's way of saying Dante is the source of a continuous revelation: the very voice of poetry, capable of touching the deepest chords of the human soul and taking on the universal message of the Poet, takes shape on stage thanks to the actress, who enchants the audience while acting on stage and remains imprinted in their memory, siren/murderer, ready to sink back into the darkness.

An element that characterises the actress' presence on stage is that of prayer, of oration, which for her sums up in the simplest way the quality of work required to build an instrument that can play divinely:

"Quinci su vò per non esser più cieco" scrive Dante nel XXVI canto del Purgatorio rivolgendosi alle anime dei lussuriosi, e si potrebbe dire "vò largo per non esser più sordo, in alto mare aperto". La voce più seducente è quella della preghiera. Ripetere e ripetere e ripetere. Riconoscere il pericolo del profondo, o dell'ascesa, fino a riceverne la terribile estenuante felicità. "Come osservare la follia della meta, quando tutto ci invita alla normalità alla comodità", così si chiedeva un maestro del Novecento[152].

"Quinci su vò per non esser più cieco", writes Dante in Canto XXVI of Purgatory, addressing the souls of the lustful, and one could say "vò largo per non esser più sordo, in alto mare aperto". The most seductive voice is that of prayer. Repeat and repeat and repeat. Recognising the danger of the deep, or of the ascent, to the point of receiving its terrible exhausting happiness. "How to observe the madness of the goal, when everything invites us to normality to comfort", so wondered a 20th century master.

Accompanying this Dantesque experience, and its constant traversal, is the new venture in having inaugurated *Malagola*, the vocal school and international study centre on the voice in Ravenna, which also houses the archive of the artist Demetrio Stratos, another of Montanari's great loves (*Figure 31*). In this new venture that sees her flanked by the scholar Pitozzi, that reticence to define her own art form finds, in the exchange and plurality of teachers, the generative possibility of asserting itself and becoming a place for new forms of knowledge applied to the voice[153].

3.2.3. Lucilla Giagnoni

Artist, actress, director, from 2016 to today artistic director of the Teatro Faraggiana in Novara where she lives[154], Lucilla Giagnoni trained at Vittorio Gassman's Bottega teatrale, whose

[152] ERMANNA MONTANARI, *Voce, vocazione, invocazione. Conversazione con Ida Alessandra Vinella*, in VALENTINA VALENTINI (a cura di), *Drammaturgie sonore. Teatri del secondo Novecento*, cit., pp. 53-61, quotation at p. 56.
[153] See the school's page at: https://www.teatrodellealbe.com/ita/contenuto.php?id=122 (last accessed 15/05/2025).
[154] The Faraggiana theatre, donated to the citizens of Novara in 1911, had been closed for years and a change of use was being considered. From citizens' enterprise and a planning campaign, the Nuovo Teatro Faraggiana was

declamation exercises she did, among others, on Alighieri's verses. In her artistic career, she combines her great passion for literature, the careful reading of the Holy Scriptures (she knows Greek, Latin and Aramaic) and science with an intense acting practice; perhaps because of this, she landed in 1985 at the Laboratorio Teatro Settimo in the town of the same name in the Turin *hinterland*, directed by Gabriele Vacis, where she worked as an actress and scriptwriter until 2002, to embark then on a solo career: «I wanted to hear what my voice sounded like»[155]. Her screenplays and performances mainly adhere to the genre commonly known as Narrative Theatre, shows with an investigative/research character, which tend to narrate a story or a particular event to the audience present through monologues[156].

Her approach to Dante is mediated by all these elements, and augmented by her Tuscan birth and the popular tradition handed down by her closest relatives. That vernacular Italian language, which the Florentine poet contributed in large part to inventing, was the favourite object of her grandmother Bianca's childish and then adult singing, who, despite the almost non-existent education she received, used to recite the cantos of the *Commedia* by heart, heir to that popular oral tradition that never exhausted its task of being the favourite repository of Dante's work[157]. As Giagnoni declares, her apprenticeship at Gassman's Bottega and having

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reborn in 2015, see article by FRANCESCA SERENO, *Fondazione Nuovo Teatro Faraggiana, quando i cittadini si mobilitano per la cultura*, in «Il Giornale delle Fondazioni», giovedì 14 novembre 2016, available at: http://www.ilgiornaledellefondazioni.com/content/fondazione-nuovo-teatro-faraggiana-quando-i-cittadini-si-mobilitano-la-cultura#:~:text=Il%20Teatro%20Faraggiana%20pu%C3%B2%20cos%C3%AC,eseguite%20dall'Orchestra%20Giovanile%20Dedalo. (last accessed 15/05/2025).

[155] «volevo sentire che voce aveva la mia voce», see the interview given in 2023 to ATER Fondazione as part of the cycle of *Solo al femminile* dialogues, where she describes her own artistic career and training, and finally focuses on her experience with Dante: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A14JfN7of24&t=44s&ab_channel=ATERFondazione (last accessed 15/05/2025).

[156] See JULIET GUZZETTA, *Il teatro di narrazione. Dalle periferie della storia ai grandi teatri italiani*, traduzione di Francesco Bianchi, Monica Capuani, Torino, aAccademia University Press, 2023; Dossier *Teatro di narrazione*, a cura di Claudia Cannella, in «Hystrio: rivista trimestrale di teatro e spettacolo», a.18, n. 1, 2005, pp.2-37; DANIELE BIACCHESSI, *Teatro civile: nei luoghi della narrazione e dell'inchiesta*, Milano, Ambiente, 2010.

[157] «Sono nata a Firenze e sono stata battezzata nel Battistero di San Giovanni, proprio come Dante... scusate se è poco! noi toscani siam fatti così, non sempre siamo umilissimi. Per compensare, devo dire che mia nonna Bianca, che è morta a centootto anni e mezzo, sazia di giorni, era di una famiglia toscana della collina, molto povera e faceva la pastora. Cento anni fa le bambine povere non andavano a scuola, mia nonna ci era riuscita, ma solo per un anno e mezzo, giusto il tempo di imparare i primi rudimenti del leggere e dello scrivere, poi l'avevano mandata a lavorare, cioè a guardare le pecore. Che cosa poteva fare allora una bambina dall'alba al tramonto senza un i-phone, un i-pad, un i-pod? Cantava. Cantava tutto il giorno e tra uno stornello e l'altro cantava interi canti della Divina Commedia, che, come molti della sua terra e della sua generazione, sapeva a memoria: così mi ha tirata su, a Divina Commedia e preghiere a memoria, senza nessuna spiegazione. Dante mi veniva passato insieme al pane e olio, alla bruschetta e al rosario, e a fare questo, all'interno di una tradizione esclusivamente orale, perché la Divina Commedia è stata concepita per essere pronunciata a voce alta, è stata proprio una voce femminile»/«I was born in Florence and I was baptised in the Baptistery of San Giovanni, just like Dante... I'm sorry if that's not enough! We Tuscans are like that, we're not always so humble. To compensate, I must say that my grandmother Bianca, who died at the age of one hundred and eight, sated with days, was from a Tuscan family in the hills, very

had him as a teacher strongly determined her particular attention to verse and its rhythm, later deepened through personal study and the definition of her own method of investigating language, called *mother tongue*[158], built precisely on Dante's text.

Also contributing to her in-depth study of Dante and his poetry was her meeting with Paolo Giuranna, character actor and director, with whom she once again probed the way poetry is said, the essentiality of verse and its construction through images. It is to him, as director and reader, that we owe the initiative of the Teatro Nazionale of Genoa for the centenary of Dante 1965, which for the first time offered a complete reading of the *Comedy* in theatre, thanks to an idea by Carlo Repetti and with the collaboration of the Dante scholar Franco Croce Bermondi (a project exhumed from the archives and now available as a *podcast* for the centenary of Dante 2021 thanks to director David Livermore)[159]. Finally, necessary for her elaboration of the stage space is to have delved into the Steinerian theatrical approach (an author already dealt with in the section devoted to the 20th century), to perceive and refine her own way of assimilating and codifying sound and the space-time relationship[160].

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poor and she was a shepherdess. One hundred years ago, poor girls did not go to school, my grandmother had managed, but only for a year and a half, just long enough to learn the first rudiments of reading and writing, then they had sent her to work, that is, to watch sheep. What could a child do then from dawn to dusk without an i-phone, an i-pad, an i-pod? She would sing. She sang all day long, and between songs she sang entire cantos of the Divine Comedy, which, like many of her land and generation, she knew by heart: that's how she brought me up, to Divine Comedy and prayers by heart, without any explanation. Dante was passed to me along with bread and oil, bruschetta and the rosary, and it was a female voice that did this, within an exclusively oral tradition, because the Divina Commedia was conceived to be spoken aloud», LUCILLA GIAGNONI, *Un punto di vista "altro" sulla Divina Commedia*, in «Dante e l'arte», vol. 9, 2022, pp. 151-154, quotation at p. 151. The play's dramaturgy was previously published in LUCILLA GIAGNONI, *Vergine Madre. Voce di donna nella Commedia di Dante*, prefazione di Enrico Palandri, libro + DVD, Novara, Interlinea edizioni, 2009 [2005[1]].

[158] These elements were revealed to the author of this thesis during a question and answer session made available during the *Dante ad alta voce* conference that saw the artist as the protagonist, organised on the *Meets* platform by the University of Bergamo as part of the *Conversazioni su Dante* cycle, on Thursday 11 March 2021. Please also refer to the pages dedicated to *Lingua Madre* on the artist's official website (http://www.lucillagiagnoni.it/LINGUAMADRE/equindiuscimmo.html last accessed 15/05/2025), on the artist's YouTube channel (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8axNXIXUxJQ&ab_channel=LucillaGiagnoni last accessed 15/05/2025) and on the package of lectures created during the lockdown period within the Faraggiana Theatre website: https://www.teatrofaraggiana.it/teatro-stream-formazione-dettaglio (last accessed 15/05/2025).

[159] The recordings of the theatrical *readings* made in Genoa between 1984 and 1986 in the course of an initiative that for the first time offered the complete reading of the *Divine Comedy* in the theatre, feature first-rate actors such as Arnoldo Foà, Aroldo Tieri, Eros Pagni, Ferruccio De Ceresa, Ugo Maria Morosi, Roberto Herlitzka, Gabriele Lavia, Mariano Rigillo, Massimo De Francovich, Giuseppe Pambieri, Tino Carraro, Paolo Poli, Giulio Bosetti and many others, including the director Paolo Giuranna himself. Available at RaiPlay, thanks to David Livermore's project for the National Theatre of Genoa to repropose that integral review of Dante's readings performed in the very same theatre and now available in full: https://www.raiplaysound.it/audio/2021/05/Cento-giorni-con-Dante-b8887875-9927-44bc-a6da-82a5ec62ae56.html (last accessed 15/05/2025). On the site *Drammaturgia.it* the complete list of the cantos matched to their interpreters: https://drammaturgia.fupress.net/recensioni/recensione2.php?id=8064 (last accessed 15/05/2025).

[160] Once again, reference is made to the dialogue that took place on Thursday, 11 March 2021.

Her first approach to the *Commedia* dates back to 2001 when she wrote and staged for the first time the play *Vergine Madre* (2001). Written on the spur of the moment, provoked by the unified-network broadcasting of the video presenting to Italy the horror of the terrorist attack on the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York on 11 September 2001, the monologue of re-elaboration of the collective mourning against the dismay for the "end of the world" is dedicated to the thirty-third canto of *Paradise*, but sees for the duration of the entire performance (of about 90 minutes) a particular rewriting that touches all the canonical cantos of the *Comedy*, starting from *Inferno* and arriving at *Paradiso*[161] (*Figures 32-33-34*).

In contrast to the previous female actors, in her case narrative theatre fits well with the classical setting of the *Lectura Dantis*, revisiting it in a contemporary key. As was already visible in the works of her master Gassman, but also subsequently of Benigni, the dramaturgy of the performance plays on the two opposing planes of the self and the other, comparing Dante's life, his being a character in the *Comedy*, with episodes from Giagnoni's life or from current events shared with the audience present, structuring itself in macro-sequences: the journey, the woman, the man, the father, the holy child and the mother.

In a constant dialogue between these two planes, the self and Dante, the *incipit* canto of *Inferno*, the episodes of the lustful characters of *Purgatorio* (Pia de Tolomei) and *Inferno* (Paolo and Francesca), the episode of Ulysses and that of Count Ugolino, whose dark notes are contrasted with the whiteness of Piccarda and the conclusion with the thirty-third canto of *Paradiso*[162] are taken up. Singular in this case is the precise desire to emphasise the feminine

[161] The entire show is also available on the YouTube channel of the Teatro Civico in La Spezia, where it was recorded and performed during the pandemic period, in 2020: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NRX8EtTSEcY&ab_channel=TeatroCivicoLaSpezia (last accessed 15/05/2025).

[162] See what the actress herself writes about her own performances: «Un giorno la sottile rete di protezione si è smagliata e sono cadute a una a una le nostre certezze: salute, educazione, lavoro, futuro, democrazia. In molti luoghi si aggiunge la guerra, la fame e il terrore. Dovunque cresce la diffidenza e un'angoscia sottile, quotidiana. Qualcuno ricorda che in fondo la fine del mondo c'è già stata, per altri invece sono i segni di un'apocalisse prossima ventura. Forse non ci resta che pregare. Sei canti della Divina Commedia, probabilmente i più noti. Sei tappe di un pellegrinaggio nel mezzo del "cammin di nostra vita": Il viaggio (Il primo canto dell'inferno), La Donna (Francesca, il V), l'Uomo (Ulisse, il XXVI), il Padre (Ugolino, il XXXIII), la Bambina (Piccarda, il III del Paradiso), la Madre (Vergine madre, il XXXIII del paradiso). È la Commedia Umana di Dante, una strada che si rivela costeggiata da figure "parentali": quello che si compone, guarda caso, è il disegno di una famiglia. Sono parole incantatorie, quelle della Divina Commedia, parole taumaturgiche, rituali. Eternamente ripetute come le preghiere. I canti non vengono spiegati e, per quanto, a essere sinceri, talvolta possano sembrare incomprensibili all'ascolto, sono loro a spiegarci quello che ci sta accadendo. Dalla lettura dei canti scaturiscono storie. Il lato oscuro dell'uomo, l'aspetto meraviglioso e terribile del padre, la santità dei bambini, la prigione della donna, la grandezza della madre che ci indica l'unica strada possibile: la conciliazione degli opposti, l'armonia dei contrari. Un percorso ricco, sorprendente e, soprattutto, confortante. Come la preghiera»/«One day the thin protective net was unravelled and one by one our certainties fell: health, education, work, future, democracy. In many places, war, hunger and terror are added. Everywhere there is growing distrust and a subtle, daily anguish. Some remember that after all, the end of the world has already happened, for others it is the signs of a coming apocalypse. Perhaps

act of appropriating Dante's language, since, Giagnoni says, the language of prayer, that of dialogue with one's conscience, that of introspection comes from the archetypal feminine, and therefore by a woman it must be performed:

A cantare e raccontare storie è una donna. Perché più spesso sono le donne a pronunciare, senza mediazioni, il desiderio di pace. E perché sicuramente l'anima ha una voce femminile. Una donna isolata dal mondo, nel suo giardino, in una notte oscura crea per sé stessa un'isola di pace. Le abbiamo conosciute anche noi certe isole di pace, mentre eravamo turbati per quello che succedeva, là fuori: se ora ci pensiamo bene, spesso erano momenti di poesia, lo strumento migliore per comprendere il mondo rapidamente e in profondità. Forse per stare al passo con le complesse trasformazioni che stiamo vivendo, sarà bene fare tutti una bella scorta di poesia[163].

Singing and telling stories is a woman. Because more often than not it is women who utter, without mediation, the desire for peace. And because surely the soul has a female voice. A woman isolated from the world, in her garden, on a dark night creates an island of peace for herself. We, too, have known certain islands of peace while we were troubled by what was going on out there: if we think about it now, they were often moments of poetry, the best tool for understanding the world quickly and deeply. Perhaps to keep up with the complex transformations we are experiencing, it will be good for us all to stock up on poetry.

For more than twenty years, in this monologue that constantly breaks through the fourth wall and claims direct contact with the audience in the auditorium, Giagnoni has been claiming an archetypal work according to James Hillman's lesson, but which also takes its cue from that sapiential investigation (also found in De Berardinis' practice) that can be traced back to the process of acquiring actorly knowledge preached by Steiner, and thus outlines a reasoned path through the most popular cantos, going through them with Dante, to find a cure for the rampant fear.

The child of civil theatre and decentralisation theatre policies, the show *Vergine Madre* was staged everywhere; in theatres of course, but also in churches, in the woods, in any place where the artist could reach with the few elements of the stage, giving concrete meaning with the experience of her own journey to that of Dante. From the conception of Dante's play, Giagnoni found the cue to continue her investigation into the human and her way of

all that remains is to pray. Six cantos of the Divine Comedy, probably the best known. Six stages of a pilgrimage in the middle of 'the journey of our life': The Journey (The First Canto of Hell), The Woman (Francesca, Canto V), The Man (Ulysses, Canto XXVI), The Father (Ugolino, Canto XXXIII), The Child (Piccarda, Canto III of Paradise), The Mother (Virgin Mother, Canto XXXIII of Paradise). It is Dante's Human Comedy, a road that reveals itself lined with 'parental' figures: what comes together, as it happens, is the design of a family. They are incantatory words, those of the Divine Comedy, thaumaturgical, ritual words. Eternally repeated like prayers. The hymns are not explained, and although, to be honest, they may sometimes seem incomprehensible to the listener, it is they that explain what is happening to us. From the reading of the songs come stories. The dark side of man, the wonderful and terrible aspect of the father, the sanctity of children, the prison of woman, the greatness of the mother who shows us the only possible way: the reconciliation of opposites, the harmony of opposites. A rich, surprising and, above all, comforting path. Like prayer», LUCILLA GIAGNONI, Description of the play *Vergine Madre*, on the website of the Brescia Theatre Centre: https://www.centroteatralebresciano.it/spettacoli/2021/vergine-madre (last accessed 15/05/2025).

[163] *Ibidem.*

approaching knowledge with the plays *Big Bang* and *Apocalisse*, renamed the Trilogy of Spirituality[164].

But never would she have thought that, in 2020, the Dantesque interpretation she experienced as such a personal prayer, set within the safety of her own garden, would turn into reality. The first *lockdown* meant for everyone, especially for artists and cultural workers accustomed to the beauty of the contagion/contact of the scenes, and especially for the northern Italy adjacent to the region of Lombardy, the obligation of waiting and isolation. In this umpteenth moment of great discouragement and collective bewilderment, Dante makes his way back into the thoughts of the Florentine artist transplanted from Novara and thus determines a new and more mature crossing of Dante's work.

Fortunately, being able to benefit from a venue, the Teatro Faraggiana, and from technological means for wide distribution (her husband Paolo Pizzimento is a musician and her now grown-up daughter has become a *video-maker*), Giagnoni decided to read the *Commedia*, in its entirety, and have the community enjoy these *performances* scheduled every evening at vespers, to remain a community despite the distance imposed.

Every evening, from February to May 2020, illusorily thinking that the government directives would cease after a few days, Giagnoni read the hundred cantos of the *Commedia*, crossing the words of the Florentine poet with her body in the cold of the empty, dark theatre, trying to follow the poet's example on that very journey full of unexpected events and calamities, armed only with the equipment and the iron will to respond artistically to that exceptional situation together with her own relatives.

The sacred rituality emphasised by the vespers corresponds to the approach used by the artist in her interpretation of Dante's cantos: the attention to the message of the song, the rhetorical and stylistic construction of the verse, and the in-depth study of Dante's language makes Giagnoni's flat but never banal reading a perfect example of the evolution of the more traditional style of Sermonti and Gassman. Her reading, never grandiloquent, excessive or personalistic, respects the verse and is armed with a warm presence, offering the audience the chance to refresh themselves and question Dante's words as the canto progresses. The naturalness of the spoken, everyday flow of the verse leaves room for incisive flashes that radiate the passages and connections to be emphasised with great wisdom and attention,

[164] All the performances by Giagnoni are available on her website and You-Tube channel.

attempting to traverse the language that Dante alone created, that Dante alone spoke in his work, in the prophetic fiction of the *Commedia*, decreeing its future fortune.

Giagnoni is therefore an illustrious repository of the close relationship between master and disciple that Dante himself describes by pointing to his master Virgil:

> O de li altri poeti onore e lume,
> vagliami 'l lungo studio e 'l grande amore
> che m'ha fatto cercar lo tuo volume[165].

Italian television RAI, having become aware of this borderline clandestine and already stylistically prepared production, decided to propose this integral reading within its own channels on the occasion of the 2021 Dante centenary celebrations on RAI 5, from 21 February onwards at 11 pm, now fully available within the RAIPlay platform. Thus Lucilla Giagnoni became the first woman to have read and recorded the *Commedia in* its entirety[166].

Two clarifications are in order here: only the *lectura* by Carmelo Bene continues to generate art *post mortem*. The American composer Arto Lindsay (1953-) has, in fact, decided to build a musical score around the available recordings of the songs read by Bene on the Torre degli Asinelli in Bologna, an experience he had as a public listener. By re-proposing his *lectura* on stage in a new musical key to coincide with Dante's centenary (*Voce e Vortice, Lectura Dantis* - Ravenna, Rocca Brancaleone, 23 June 2021), the musician succeeds in making the enchantment of the great Salento actor's expressive power endure in the electronic tension of the Rocca in Ravenna. Known for his eclectic, experimental music, which gives space to strong international contaminations, Lindsay, in love with Bene's voice and art, gives him new life in a very personal homage that aims to put beauty and friendship at the centre of Dante's operation[167].

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[165] *If.* I, vv. 82-84.

[166] See the complete list of songs available on the RAIPlay website: https://www.raiplay.it/programmi/ladivinacommedia-vespridanteschi (last accessed 15/05/2025).

[167] «C'ero anch'io tra il pubblico accalcato sotto le torri di Bologna ad ascoltare la *Lectura Dantis* di Carmelo Bene in quella notte di luglio del 1981. Il rumore della folla era alto quasi quanto la voce di Bene che leggeva il miglior libro scritto dagli uomini, come Jorge Luís Borges aveva chiamato la *Commedia*. Carmelo Bene aveva scelto Dante per interrogare e riaffermare le ragioni dell'umano di fronte all'orrore indicibile della bomba alla stazione. Il lutto, lo smarrimento e il conforto divennero una cosa sola. All'epoca non avevo familiarità con l'italiano del XIII secolo e nemmeno troppo con quello del XX. Fu il suono a impossessarsi di me, ad attraversarmi "da interiorità a interiorità". Sentivo, respiravo, afferravo qualche parola. Era musica. Nell'anno in cui portiamo tutti il peso di un'altra peste, abbiamo ancora bisogno di ascoltare la voce di Dante. Voglio suonare ancora quella *Lectura Dantis*, spremerla, esaltarla, farle dire tutto, ascoltarla e parlare con lei. Voglio aggiungere il nostro momento al suo momento, il nostro suono al suo suono, la nostra musica alla sua musica»/«I was also among the audience huddled under the towers of Bologna listening to Carmelo Bene's *Lectura Dantis* on that July night in 1981. The noise of the crowd was almost as loud as Bene's voice reading the best book written by men, as Jorge

In addition, again on the centenaries and more so in the run-up to 2021, other female actors have started to produce Dantean performances in the form of monologues attributable to narrative theatre. It is no coincidence that we find Lella Costa with Gabriele Vacis in *Intelletto d'amore*[168], who together attempt to create a narrative between the female characters of the *Comedy* and the life of the Poet, such as his wife Gemma Donati, emphasising the need for the female voice for and with the *Comedy*, in a contemporary key. It is important to remember that in 2004 Costa had already done a performance dedicated to Canto VI, of an unspecified cantica, about which no further information could be found[169].

Monica Guerritore wrote and directed *Dall'Inferno all'Infinito (From Hell to Infinity)*, a play produced on the occasion of Dante's centenary, created and staged for the Giornate della Lingua Italiana organised by the Accademia della Crusca in April 2015, a performance available online[170], focusing her investigation on the canonical cantos of the *Comedy* and relating them to other poets and artists, actually developing many dramaturgical lines similar

Luís Borges had called the *Commedia*. Carmelo Bene had chosen Dante to question and reaffirm the reasons for the human in the face of the unspeakable horror of the station bomb. Mourning, bewilderment and comfort became one. At the time, I was not familiar with 13th century Italian, nor was I too familiar with 20th century Italian. It was the sound that took possession of me, passing through me 'from interiority to interiority'. I heard, breathed, grasped a few words. It was music. In the year in which we all bear the burden of another plague, we still need to hear Dante's voice. I want to play that *Lectura Dantis* again, squeeze it, exalt it, make it say everything, listen to it and talk to it. I want to add our moment to her moment, our sound to her sound, our music to her music», quotation from the programme proposed by Ravenna Festival as an accompaniment to Arto Lindsay's musical *Lectura* see the programme available at: https://www.ravennafestival.org/events/arto-lindsay/ (last accessed 15/05/2025).

[168] See LELLA COSTA, GABRIELE VACIS, *Intelletto d'amore. Quattro donne e un poeta*, *Dante Aligheri*, Milano, Solferino, 2021. The show *Intelletto d'amore - Dante e le donne*, (premiered at the Chiasso Theatre on 26 June 2021) recorded with TV direction by Roberta Pedrini, was produced and supported by RSI - Radiotelevisione svizzera, Mismaonda and Teatro Carcano. In addition to the show, a *podcast has* been produced that also features Lella Costa as the leading voice, and revisits, in a way, the tradition of Dante read on the radio (all episodes are available on the RSI website: https://www.rsi.ch/rete-due/programmi/cultura/intelletto-d-amore-dante-e-le-donne/ last accessed 15/05/2025). For further information, we feel it is important to point out the interview/dialogue between the two artists conducted during the Mantua Literature Festival, on 10 September 2021, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_6tWSESXyKk (last accessed 15/05/2025).

[169] We refer to her presence in the 2004/5 playbill, already reported for Giagnoni, where for the "Marta Nurizzo" Association appears a *lectura* of the *VI CANTO DANTE. Dalla Divina Commedia di Dante Alighieri* by Lella Costa, Tuesday 5 October 2004, of which, however, other information is currently untraceable: http://www.sangiuseppeonline.it/Content/pdf/LE-NOSTRE-STAGIONI-DAL-1980.pdf (last accessed 15/05/2025).

[170] See *Dall'Inferno all'Infinito (From Hell to Infinity)*, recorded during the performance on 9 July 2021, at the Parco Archeologico del Colosseo in Rome, for the *Dante Assoluto* festival: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0udK9QF--Q (last accessed 15/05/2025). See the file dedicated to the performance on the artist's official website: https://www.monicaguerritore.it/dallinfernoallinfinito.php (last accessed 15/05/2025).

to those already proposed by Lucilla Giagnoni. For Dante's centenary in 2021, the play has regained interest and has been re-proposed in various theatre productions[171].

[171] The one proposed from 14 to 19 December 2021 at the Teatro Nuovo in Verona, see the programme of the *Dante in Scena* review, organised by the Committee for the Celebrations of the Municipality of Verona and the University of Verona: https://www.univr.it/it/dante-in-scena (last accessed 15/05/2025).

FOURTH CHAPTER

CANTICLES AS THEATRICAL PERFORMANCES

> Thus, interpretation is not (as most people assume) an absolute value, a gesture of mind situated in some timeless realm of capabilities. Interpretation must itself be evaluated, within a historical view of human consciousness. In some cultural contexts, interpretation is a liberating act. It is a means of revising, of transvaluing, of escaping the dead past. In other cultural contexts, it is reactionary, impertinent, cowardly, stifling[1].

As already partially observed, the 20th century is a turning point for the theatrical reception of Dante. No longer merely an object of adaptation, through canonical episodes, Dante's subject matter becomes an affirmation, a declaration of poetics for artists confronting Alighieri. A key aspect that emerges is the two-way relationship that this encounter triggers: the desire to challenge (even respectfully) the classic and, diametrically opposed, the anxiety to discover a new way forward. Dante, unlike Shakespeare, who is properly a playwright, is considered a universal classic of literature, but from the nineteenth century onwards, this granitic belonging to the literary genre alone thins out. It provides those who are confronted with it with sufficient space to insert the self, so as not to be crushed by this unequal comparison, confirming once again the maxim of John of Salisbury, when he wrote of his own master, Bernard of Chartres, «dicebat Bernardus Carnotensis nos esse quasi nanos gigantium humeris insidentes»[2].

In order to begin this new part of historical contextualisation and analysis of the ways in which contemporary spectacular Dantean reception evolves and is maintained, especially in Europe, it is useful to provide a couple of examples, to some extent unsuccessful, that condition and pave the way for the future rewritings of Alighieri's works on stage. On the Italian side, the example is provided by director Orazio Costa (1911-1999)[3], who on 2 May 1966 staged *Commedia. Episodi e personaggi del Poema Dantesco*, also passed down in the chronicles as 'the Cathedral' (*Figure 35*). It was an anthological reduction and dramatisation of the *Divine Comedy*, which turned out to be a total fiasco,

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[1] SUSAN SONTAG, *Against Interpretation*, in SUSAN SONTAG, *Against Interpretation and other essays*, London, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1967, pp. 3-14, quotation at p. 7.

[2] IOANNIS SARESBERIENSIS, *Metalogicon*, edited by J. B. Hall, auxiliata K.S.B. Keats-Rohan, Turnholti, Typographi Brepols Editores Ponteficii, 1991, III. 4, p. 116, par. c (45-50).

[3] For a minimal biography of the artist's life, see the entry dedicated to him, *Orazio Costa*, a cura di Paolo Puppa, in DBI (2020). Among his pupils we find prominent names for the *Lecturae Dantis*, such as Roberto Herlitzka (who died recently, on 31 July 2024), frequent collaborations with Mario Luzi and the collaboration with Federico Tiezzi in the realisation of his Trilogia dantesca, see LUCILLA BONAVITA, *Orazio Costa Giovangigli e Mario Luzi: storia di un'amicizia*, in BEATRICE ALFONZETTI, GUIDO BALDASSARRI, FRANCO TOMASI (a cura di), *I cantieri dell'italianistica. Ricerca, didattica e organizzazione agli inizi del XXI secolo*, Atti del XVII congresso dell'ADI – Associazione degli Italianisti (Roma Sapienza, 18-21 settembre 2013), Roma, Adi editore, 2014, pp. 2-7; LUCILLA BONAVITA, *Orazio Costa Giovangigli e la drammaturgia contemporanea: la potenzialità teatrale della pagina scritta di Mario Luzi*, in «Rivista di Studi Italiani», a. XXXI, n. 1 Giugno, 2013, pp. 590-597.

attracting a barrage of fierce criticism about the low quality and unseemly length of the undertaking: «a fruit salad, a piecemeal would-be-but-can't, a procession of wax-museum pictures, immersed in the viscous broth of the usual choral tirades, in unison and in responsory, with which the Academy of Dramatic Art, obsessed with religiosity, has been bothering us for thirty years»[4]. Costa's intention, also thanks to his long friendship with the poet Mario Luzi, was to orchestrate a grandiose Dante performance for stations at the Colosseum and a subsequent production of *Vita Nuova* for RAI[5]. This artistic operation, which remained a constant presence in his thought, extremely linked to the Catholic religious sphere, is a clear indication of how present Dante's influence was in the imagination of one of the most important Italian directors of his time (both for his directorial and dramaturgical and for the pedagogical theories he conveyed), in fact handing on the baton to later companies, and producing, in the meantime, generations of first-rate artists, such as Roberto Herlitzka, later a star in the field of *Lecturae Dantis*[6] (*Figure 36*).

Costa's Dante experiment, despite its miserable failure, confirms a theatrical environment in total ferment, a forerunner in the reworking and appropriation of Dante's material in new artistic contexts. As director Federico Tiezzi writes:

[…] in precedenza c'era stata solo un'occasione di messinscena della *Divina Commedia*, quella realizzata da Orazio Costa. Non conoscevo quello spettacolo, non l'avevo visto; solo più tardi, parlando direttamente con lui, riuscii a farmi mostrare alcune foto […]. Orazio Costa fu senz'altro un bravissimo formatore, ma dopo aver conosciuto la sua estetica e aver visto un suo spettacolo, ecco trovai il suo gusto (almeno secondo il mio parere) di tipo "risorgimentale" (usa questa parola Pressburger – il mio amatissimo Pressburger, il regista – in uno dei suoi romanzi in cui lui, allievo di Costa, attacca Costa: ma io son d'accordo con lui). Io allora volevo toglier un po' di questa messinscena risorgimentale dalla *Divina Commedia*, volevo insomma togliere la polvere dal libro, levarle la patina del capolavoro[7].

[...] Previously there had only been one occasion of staging *the Divine Comedy*, the one staged by Orazio Costa. I did not know that performance, I had not seen it; only later, talking directly to him, was I able to get him to show me some photos [...]. Orazio Costa was undoubtedly a very good trainer, but after getting to know his aesthetics and having seen one of his shows, I found his taste (at least in my opinion) to be '*risorgimentale*' (Pressburger - my beloved Pressburger, the director - uses this word in

[4] «una macedonia, un vorrei ma non posso a pezzi e bocconi, una processione di quadri da museo delle cere, immersi nel brodo vischioso delle solite tirate corali, all'unisono e a responsorio, con le quali l'Accademia d'Arte Drammatica, fissata con la religiosità, ci va rompendo le scatole da trent'anni», CARLO TERRON, *Orazio Costa ha trovato una Commedia: è di Dante Alighieri*, in "Il Dramma", a. 42, no. 357 June, 1966, pp. 47-48, quotation at p. 47. Of the same tenor is the review in ALBERTO ARBASINO*, La maleducazione teatrale: strutturalismo e drammaturgie*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1966, pp. 126-128.

[5] News, always more or less partial, on Costa's Dante initiatives can be found in: ANTONIO ROSSINI, *Dante. Cinema and Television*, in FRANCESCO CIABATTONI, SIMONE MARCHESI (edited by), *Dante Alive. Essays on a cultural icon*, cit., pp. 117-129, riferimento a p. 127; RODOLFO SACCHETTINI, *I vestiti di Dante: un'archeologia della lettura dantesca*, in *Alberto Casadei, Paolo Gervasi*, *La voce di Dante. Performance dantesche tra teatro, tv e nuovi media*, cit., pp. 27-28; RODOLFO SACCHETTINI, *Dante in scena tra radio e tv*, in ACCADEMIA DEI LINCEI (a cura di), *La ricezione della Commedia dai manoscritti ai media*, cit., pp. 403-405; BEATRICE CORRIGAN, *Dante and Italian Theater: A Study in Dramatic Fashions*, cit., pp. 93-94; ANTONIO ATTISANI, STEFANO TOMASSINI, *L'umanità mancata. Dante in scena*, cit., p. 101; MAURIZIO GIAMMUSSO, *La cattedrale di Orazio Costa*, in MAURIZIO GIAMMUSSO (a cura di), *Il Dante di Gassman*, cit., pp 126-132.

[6] See, for example, his contribution in acting schools, or even with director Federico Tiezzi, who called him to hold a few lessons for the *Laboratorio dantesco* he directed in Prato. In this regard, read the articles on him collected by friends and students in the magazine «Ridotto», a. 60, n. 10/11 - ottobre/novembre, 2012.

[7] ANDREA DELLAI, *COMMEDIA DELL'INFERNO: travestimento teatrale di Edoardo Sanguineti tradotto in scena da I Magazzini*, Relatore Prof.ssa Cristina Grazioli, Tesi di Laurea Specialistica in Letteratura e filologia medievale e moderna, A. A. 2017/18, p. 238.

one of his novels in which he, a pupil of Costa, attacks Costa: but I agree with him). I then wanted to remove some of this resurgent mise-en-scène from the *Divine Comedy*, I wanted, in short, to remove the dust from the book, to remove the patina of the masterpiece.

In the same years of Costa's production, Leo De Bernardinis and Perla Peragallo staged the show on which we have already dwelt, later reworked as a solo performance. These milestones and these artists in particular are indispensable points of reference for the Italian and international artistic panorama, and they demarcate a line that will act independently of the outcome of the enterprise for the theatre.

The second example of failure does not so much pertain to the performance itself, but rather to the personal artistic experience of the Jewish writer Peter Weiss (1916-1982). Even abroad, in fact, a new mode of access to Dante's theatrical reception was carried out, contemporarily with its Italian counterpart. It is worth emphasising once again that not only artists of direct or indirect Italian origin arrive at Dante, but above all, the decision to elaborate dramaturgical material starting from Alighieri's works derives from the particular historical moment in which the influence of the *Commedia* intensified: after the drama determined by the First and Second World Wars, mainly in the western imagination, the influence of Dante's works became even more present, providing a concrete reference for horizons of hell as much as for hoped-for paradises, far removed from the new postmodern reality[8].

In order to elaborate on the mourning dripping with revisionism and denial consequent to the Second World War and the devastating realisation of the *Shoah*, Peter Weiss, a German Jewish artist, decided to use the *Comedy* as a footprint for his own oration denouncing the enduring German political situation at the end of the war, elaborating an intense project on Dante's work that found its

[8] See ROSSEND ARQUÉS, *Dante nell'inferno moderno: la letteratura del dopo Auschwitz*, in «Rassegna europea di letteratura italiana», n. 33, 2009, pp. 87-109; MICHAEL GOTTLIEB DALLAPIAZZA, *L'inferno è il presente, non l'aldilà. Dante nella letteratura tedesca dell'esilio*, in RITA UNFER LUKOSCHIK, MICHAEL GOTTLIEB DALLAPIAZZA (a cura di), *La ricezione di Dante Alighieri: impulsi e tensioni*, Atti del convegno internazionale all'Università di Urbino (26 e 27 maggio 2010), 2010, pp. 129-143; THOMAS TATERKA, *Dante Deutsch: Studien zur Lagerliteratur*, Berlin, Erich Schmidt, 1999; ENZO TRAVERSO, *Auschwitz e gli intellettuali. La Shoa nella cultura del dopoguerra*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2004; CHRISTOPH WEIß, *Auschwitz in der geteilten Welt. Peter Weiss und die Ermittlung im Kalten Krieg*, St. Ingbert, Röhrig Univeristätsverlag, 2000; SARA CALDERINI, MARINA RICCUCCI, *L'ineffabilità della nefandezza: Dante 'per dire' il Lager. Un sondaggio preliminare nelle testimonianze non letterarie*, in «Italianistica. Rivista di letteratura italiana», vol. 49, n. 1, 2020, pp. 213-228; ALBERTO CASADEI, *Dante nel ventesimo secolo (e oggi)*, in «L'Alighieri», n. 35, 2010, pp. 45-74; ALESSANDRO COSTAZZA (a cura di), *Rappresentare la Shoah*, Atti del Convegno (Milano, 24-26 gennaio 2005), Milano, Cisalpino, 2005.

first expressions in *Die Ermittlung* [*The Investigation*] (1965)[9] and, only as a posthumous work, in the drama *Inferno* (2003)[10].

Weiss's play is one of the earliest examples of a *Dokumentartheater*, a performance in which direct testimonies are assembled, edited and reported by actors in order to build up a complete picture of the events being talked about in order to give as objective a commentary as possible[11].

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[9] For the works cited by Peter Weiss, see: PETER WEISS, *Die Ermittlung. Ein Oratorium in elf Gesängen*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1965 [trad. ita *L'istruttoria. Oratorio in undici canti*, traduzione di Giorgio Zampa, Torino, Einaudi, 1966]; PETER WEISS, *Inferno*, Stück und Materialien mit einem Nachwort und herausgegeben von Christoph Weiß, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 2003 [trad. ita. PETER WEISS, *Inferno*, testo drammatico e materiali critici a cura di Marco Castellari, Milano/Udine, Mimesis, 2008]. See also PETER WEISS, *Notizbücher 1971-1980*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1981; PETER WEISS, *Notizbücher 1960-1971*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1982; PETER WEISS, *Conversazioni su Dante*, in PETER WEISS, *Inferni. Auschwitz Dante Laocoonte*, a cura di Clemens Carl Härle, Napoli, Cronopio, 2007; PETER WEISS, *Gespräch über Dante*, in PETER WEISS, *Rapporte*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 2010, pp. 142-169; PETER WEISS, *Meine Ortschaft*, in PETER WEISS, *Rapporte*, cit., pp. 113-124; PETER WEISS, *Vorübung zum dreiteiligen Drama Divina Commedia*, in PETER WEISS, *Rapporte*, cit., pp. 125-141.

[10] «Si desume in questo modo l'esistenza di due ramificazioni indipendenti, e temporalmente separate, dell'intricato dantismo di Peter Weiss: nella seconda metà degli anni Sessanta lo scrittore avrebbe tentato ripetutamente di riscrivere il poema medievale, attualizzandone in forma di trilogia drammatica i contenuti (ndr. *DC-Projekt*); negli anni Settanta, una volta abbandonato definitivamente tale progetto, integrerà tutte le conoscenze accumulate sulla e a partire dalla *Commedia* nell'ideazione e stesura dell'*Estetica della Resistenza*»/«One thus deduces the existence of two independent, and temporally separate ramifications of Peter Weiss's intricate Danteanism: in the second half of the 1960s, the writer would repeatedly attempt to rewrite the medieval poem, updating its contents in the form of a dramatic trilogy (ed. *DC-Projekt*); in the 1970s, once he had definitively abandoned this project, he would integrate all the knowledge he had accumulated on and from the *Commedia* into the conception and drafting of *Estetica della Resistenza*», CARLOTA CATTERMOLE ORDÓÑEZ, *«E donna mi chiamò beata e bella»: incroci danteschi tra Peter Weiss e Walter Benjamin*, in «Italianistica», a. L, fasc. 1, 2021, pp. 343-358, citazione a p. 344. In order to contextualize Weiss' reception of Dante, see: MARTIN RECTOR, *Sechs Thesen zur Dante-Rezeption bei Peter Weiss*, in «Peter Weiss Jahrbuch», n. 6, 1997, pp. 110-115; B. BRUNNER, *Peter Weiss und das Inferno. Über ein unveröffentliches Stück, die Ermittlung und das Verhältnis zu Nachkriegsdeutschland - eine Auseinandersetztung mit den Interpretationen von Christoph Weiß*, in «Peter Weiss Jahrbuch», n. 11, 2002, pp. 56-83; YANNICK MÜLLENDER, *Peter Weiss', Divina Commedia'-Projekt (1964-1969). „... läßt sich dies noch beschreiben". Prozesse der Selbstverständigung und der Gesellschaftskritik*, St. Ingbert, Röhrig Universitätsverlag, 2007; CARLOTA CATTERMOLE ORDÓÑEZ, *Il dantismo allegorico di Peter Weiss: il dramma Inferno come opera inorganica*, in «L'Alighieri», a. LX, n. 54 luglio-dicemnbre, 2019, pp. 135-153; CARLOTA CATTERMOLE ORDÓÑEZ, *De la Divina Comedia de Dante Alighieri a la Gottlose Komödie de Peter Weiss. Alegoría y crítica política en el drama Inferno (1964)*, in «Revista de Filología Alemana», n. 28, 2020, pp. 55-74; GIUSEPPE DOLEI, *"Tu duca, tu segnore e tu maestro": Dante come compagno di resistenza nell'esilio di Peter Weiss*, in «Strumenti critici», n. 1, 2008, pp. 55-74; MICHAEL HOFMANN, *Peter Weiss' Dante-Rezeption und die poetische Erinnerung der Shoah*, in «Peter Weiss Jahrbuch», vol. VI, 1997, pp. 94-109; CHRISTINE IVANOVIC, *Der Schritt zur Vernunft. Peter Weiss' Dante-Diskurs als Paradigma einer Dichtung nach Auschwitz*, in «Peter Weiss Jahrbuch», vol. VI, 1997, pp. 68-93; CAMILLA MIGLIO, *Dante dopo Auschwitz: l'"Inferno" di Peter Weiss*, in «Critica del testo», vol. 14, n. 3, 2011, pp. 293-315; JOCHEN VOGT, *Peter Weiss: mit Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten*, Reinbek bei Hamburg, Rowohlt, 1987.

[11] On political, investigative and later documentary theatre, which in Italy produced a long tradition of performances applied to the form of narrative theatre, see: ERWIN PISCATOR, *Das politische Theater*, Schultz, Berlin, 1929 [trad. engl. *The Political Theatre*, translated with chapter introductions and notes by Hugh Rorrison, London, Eyre Methuen, 1980]; BRIAN BARTON, *Das Dokumentartheater*, Stuttgart, J.B. Metzler, 1987; ARND BEISE, *Peter Weiss*, Stuttgart, Reclam, 2002; CAROL MARTIN, *Theatre of the Real*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013; la voce *Documentary drama and theatre*, a cura di Derek Paget, in DENNIS KENNEDY (edited by), *The Oxford Companion to Theatre and Performance*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, available online; GREGORY MASON, *Documentary Drama from the Revue to the Tribunal*, in «Modern Drama», vol. 20, n. 3 September 1977, pp. 263-278; ALISON FORSYTH, CHRIS MEGSON (edited by), *Get Real: Documentary Theatre Past and Present*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2011; PETER WEISS, *Rapporte 2*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1971, pp. 91-104 (*Notizen zum dokumentarischen Theater*); ANKE VAN KEMPEN, *Die Rede vor Gericht: Prozess, Tribunal, Ermittlung: forensische Rede und Sprachreflexion bei Heinrich von Kleist, Georg Büchner und Peter Weiss*, Freiburg, Rombach, 2005; WILL HAMMOND, DAN STEWARD (eds.), *Verbatim Verbatim: Techniques in Contemporary Documentary Theatre*, London, Oberon Books, 2008; ALINE VENNEMANN, *Zwischen Postdramatik und Postdokumentarismus. Peter Wagner, Elfriede Jelinek und das Dokumentartheater*, in «Germanica», n. 54, 2014, pp. 25-

In this case, the play *Die Ermittlung* focuses on the trial of the Nazi hierarchs at Nuremberg, emphasising the «banality of evil»[12] that persisted in the society inhabited by Weiss. The author, who shares with Dante the imposed condition of exile, seeks to make the audience reflect on the root causes that led to the annihilation not only of the Jewish population but, above all, of the loss of humanity and judgement in the man of his time. *Die Ermittlung*, whose subtitle is an *Oratorio in eleven cantos*, plays on the plurality of the meanings and historical implications of each term: on the one hand, the clear replica of the Nuremberg courtroom (at the time of writing still in progress, 1963-1965), from which the oral testimonies of the victims and the chilling statements of the executioners are taken; on the other hand, at the dramaturgical level, the echo of the setting of the 17th-century genre of oratory, where episodes from the Holy Scriptures are brought to the fore through a dramaturgy for poetry and music, to the detriment of the other scenic elements, thus emphasising the importance of what is reported and the solemnity of the spectacular moment. Lastly, the Dantesque influence is interwoven throughout the drama[13]: the structure is divided into eleven cantos, each of which is further subdivided into three parts, recovering the structure of Dante's canticles[14]: «the timelessness and immobility of Inferno are revealed in a path defined in stages»[15].

Weiss's writing itself recalls the poetic scansion of Dante's chained tercets, dividing the periods and leaving them suspended in *enjambment* to offer the audience the feeling of speech not divided into verses. Dante's text is a search for the ultimate, eschatological truth of human existence that periodically faces the superhuman difficulty of having to describe what is impossible to

37; PRISCILLA WIND, *Wissensbearbeitung im Produktionsprozess des zeitgenössischen Dokumentartheaters*, «Studia theodisca», n. XXIII, 2016, pp. 89-102; SONJA BOOS, *Peter Weiss*, in SONJA BOOS, *Speaking the Unspeakable in Postwar Germany. Toward a Public Discourse on the Holocaust*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press and Cornell University Library, 2014, pp. 159-194.

[12] HANNAH ARENDT, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: Ein Bericht von der Banalität des Bösen*, München, R. Piper & Co., 1964 [trad. ita. *La banalità del male. Eichmann a Gerusalemme*, prefazione di Ezio Mauro, traduzione di Piero Bernardini, Milano, Feltrinelli, 2023; trad. engl. *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A report on the banality of Evil*, revised and enlarged, New York, Penguin Books, 2006].

[13] See MARIA MADERNA, *«L'istruttoria» (1965). Il prototipo del teatro documentario*, in ANNAMARIA CASCETTA, LAURA PEJA (a cura di), *La prova del Nove*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 2005, pp. 59-96 (inside there is an in-depth note on the *Shoah*, pp. 87-96).

[14] Ivi, pp. 63-64. The eleven cantos are: 1. Gesang von der Rampe-Il canto della banchina, 2. Gesang von der Aufnahme-Il canto del lager, 3. Gesang von der Schaukel-Il canto dell'altalena, 4. Gesang von der Möglichkeit des Überlebens-Il canto della possibilità di sopravvivere, 5. Gesang vom Ende der Lilly Tofler-Il canto della fine di Lilly Tofler, 6. Gesang vom Unterscharführer Stark-Il canto del Unterscharführer Stark, 7. Gesang von der schwarzen Wand-Il canto della Parete nera, 8. Gesang vom Fenol-Il canto del fenolo, 9. Gesang vom Bunkerblock-Il canto del Bunkerblock, 10. Gesang vom Zyklon B-Il canto del Zyklon B e 11. Gesang von den Feueröfen-Il canto dei forni. As Maderna points out, an interval is inserted between cantos seven and eight, and one can recognise in this passage a *discrimen* between the narration of the individuals and the narration of the fate of the masses from the eighth canto onwards, ivi. pp. 70-71.

[15] «l'atemporalità e l'immobilismo dell'Inferno si rivelano in un percorso definito in tappe», ivi, p. 79.

describe[16]. Unfortunately, in being a truth-seeker himself, a «Wahrheitsucher»[17] by means of his own documentary drama, Weiss's substantial difference lies in proposing Dante's afterlife in the starkest post-war reality and making the Poet's dialogues with historical figures and literature into dialogues between the oppressed and the torturers. Weiss, who seeks the contingent truth, the unmasking of man's terrible actions against his own humanity, in his *Die Ermittlung* juxtaposes fragments of personal stories and masses of innocent subjects with the statements and reports of the Nazis, leaving the audience to decode their own demand for justice. Scholar Irene Orlandazzi reflects on this mirroring at a distance of centuries between the two authors, Dante and Weiss, and writes:

Quello che Peter Weiss vuole riprendere da Dante, e che rappresenta in ultima analisi l'essenza di tutti i richiami danteschi della letteratura moderna e contemporanea, è il valore attribuito al linguaggio, il quale diviene, prima nelle cantiche dantesche poi nella Nachkriegsliteratur, un insieme di parole volte a esprimere e a ricercare la verità: «gelang es Dante / Worte zu finden für einen Stoff, der allen gehörte, doch / ungreifbar schien, / und was sich bisher der Sprache entzogen hatte, war jetzt / vernehmbar». Grazie a questo continuo sforzo nella ricerca di una parola che possa farsi testimone oltre le difficoltà espressive, Dante diviene un modello del superamento dello scacco espressivo valido ancora oggi, ed è proprio questo valore testimoniale della parola che sopravvive anche nella rielaborazione del Divina Commedia-Projekt[18].

What Peter Weiss wants to take from Dante, and which ultimately represents the essence of all Dantean references in modern and contemporary literature, is the value attributed to language, which becomes, first in Dante's cantiche and then in the Nachkriegsliteratur, a set of words aimed at expressing and searching for truth: "gelang es Dante / Worte zu finden für einen Stoff, der allen gehörte, doch / ungreifbar schien, / und was sich bisher der Sprache entzogen hatte, war jetzt / vernehmbar". Thanks to this continuous effort in the search for a word that can become a witness beyond expressive difficulties, Dante becomes a model of overcoming expressive failure that is still valid today, and it is precisely this testimonial value of the word that survives even in the reworking of the Divina Commedia-Projekt.

The ultimate mission is once again to ask what art is for and how to make art so that it can be a testimony and a place of confrontation on the identity and nature of the human being. Throughout his life, therefore, Weiss placed Dante's model alongside his artistic production, trying to complete a *Projeckt-DC* (i.e. *Divine Comedy*) that unfortunately never came to fruition. The posthumous *Inferno*, the only surviving example of the ambitious project to adapt all three canticles to the *Dokumentartheater*[19], vigorously declares how pregnant Dante's imagery was in the poetics of the survivors of the *Shoah*. Indeed, many scholars point out how, in those years, parallelism was created between the works and dramas of Weiss, the political and ideological rewritings of Pier Paolo

[16] See LUIGI TONELLI, *Dante e la poesia dell'ineffabile*, Firenze, G. Barbèra, 1934; GIUSEPPE LEDDA, *La guerra della lingua. Ineffabilità, retorica e narrativa nella «Commedia» di Dante*, Ravenna, Longo, 2002.
[17] See MARCO CASTELLARI, *"Der Wahrheitssucher". Su Peter Weiss, Dante e l'utopia*, in ALESSANDRO FAMBRINI, FULVIO FERRARI, MICHELE SISTO (a cura di), *Sull'utopia. Scritti in onore di Fabrizio Cambi*, Trento, Università degli Studi di Trento, 2017, pp. 301-317; MARCO CASTELLARI, *Documento e allegoria. Strategie di rappresentazione ne "L'istruttoria" di Peter Weiss*, in ALESSANDRO COSTAZZA (a cura di), *Rappresentare la Shoah*, cit., pp. 203-219.
[18] IRENE ORLANDAZZI, *Il Divina Commedia-Projekt di Peter Weiss. La parola di Dante nella Germania del secondo dopoguerra*, in «La Torre Di Babele», n. 17, 2022, pp. 33-50, citazione alle pp. 44-45.
[19] See C. HEINRICH, *Zur Kenntlichkeit entstellt. Vergleichende Analyse des Librettos von Johannes Kalitzke zur Operinszenierung Inferno und des Texts des gleichnamigen Theaterstücks von Peter Weiss*, in «Peter Weiss Jahrbuch», n. 15, 2006, pp. 69-96; TABEA KRETSCHMANN, *Höllenmaschine/Wunschapparat. Analysen ausgewählter Neubearbeitungen von Dantes Divina Commedia*, Bielefeld, transcript, 2012, pp. 25-77; U. WEYMANN, *Lasst alle Zweifel fahren. Die Uraufführung des Infernos in der Inszenierung von Thomas Krupa*, in «Peter Weiss Jahrbuch», n. 17, 2008, pp. 167-173.

Pasolini, or the very publication of *If This is a Man* by Primo Levi, indissolubly linking the vision of Dante's *Inferno* with the existential drama of the victims and the survivors, of those who suffered first-hand the discrimination and insane violence of human beings who decided to build a system committed to iniquity and the annihilation of the different[20].

Despite the fact that the mighty project of staging the entire *Comedy* foundered and saw several second thoughts on the part of the German author, the impact caused by the publication and staging of *Die Ermittlung* shook the consciences of public opinion not only in Germany but also in Europe, calling everyone to the need for active remembrance, demanding a new and more committed confrontation with the historical truth that they sadly only wanted to forget. The *premiere* of the oratorio *Die Ermittlung* took place on 19 October 1965, simultaneously in fifteen theatres, providing for the divided Berlin of the time two directorships: in the BRD it was directed by Erwin Piscator at the Freie Volksbühne, while in the DDR it was shared between Karl von Appen, Lothar Belag, Erich Engel, Manfred Wekwerth and Konrad Wolf at the Deutsche Akademie der Künste[21]. In this group, one theatre stands out for its importance and, above all, for being the only one not belonging to the German-speaking sphere. Director Peter Brook staged the play with the Royal Shakespeare Company in London at the Aldwych Theatre, as a *reading* translated by Alexander Gross and with the title *The Investigation*[22].

This Dantesque seed passed on by Weiss to director Brook offers a bright glimmer to begin evaluating the works and projects that happily testify to the power of Dante's generative imagery in European theatre in the second half of the 20th century.

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[20] See in this regard also the *Chronological Table* of Project DC in PETER WEISS, *Inferno*, testo drammatico e materiali critici a cura di Marco Castellari, cit., pp. 287-289; MARCO CASTELLARI, *Dei molti inferni. La Shoa, Dante e Peter Weiss,* in PETER WEISS, *Inferno*, testo drammatico e materiali critici a cura di Marco Castellari, cit., pp. 237-261; PETER KUON, *"Lo mio maestro e'l mio autore". Die produktive Rezeption der Divina Commedia in der Erzähllitertur der Moderne*, Frankfurt am Main, Klostermann, 1993; PETER KUON, *...dieser Portalheilige zur abendländischen Kunst... Zur Rezeption der Divina Commedia bei Peter Weiss, Pier Paolo Pasolini und anderen*, in «Peter Weiss Jahrbuch», n. 6, 1997, pp. 42-67; MEYER, M., *Bergpredigt-Dante-Odysseus-Levi. Ein Intertextueller Kommentar zu zwei Sätzen im Gesang vom Lager in Peter Weiss' Ermittlung*, in «Peter Weiss Jahrbuch», n. 9, 2009, pp. 102-114; JÜRGEN WÖHL, *Intertextualität und Gedächnisstiftung: Die Divina Commedia Dante Alighieris bei Peter Weiss und Pier Paolo Pasolini*, Frankfurt am Main, Lang, 1997.

[21] «UA zeitgleich am 19.10.1965: Freie Volksbühne Berlin regie Erwin Piscator; Deutsche Akademie der Künste (Berlin) regie Karl von Appen, Lothar Belag, Erich Engel, Manfred Wekwerth, Konrad Wolf; Theater der Stadt Cottbus/ Staatstheater Dresden regie Heinz Pietzsch; Städtische Bühnen Essen regie Erich Schumacher; Städtische Bühnen Gera regie Jürgen Kern; Volkstheater Rostock regie Hans Anselm Perten; Schauspiel Köln regie Joachim Mühsam; Landestheater Halle/Leuna regie Klemm, Kramer Röpke, Veth; Royal Shakespeare Company London regie Peter Brook; Meininger Theater regie Dieter Groß; Münchner Kammerspiele regie Paul Verhoeven; Friedrich-Wolf-Theater Neustrelitz regie Reiner R. Lange; Hans-Otto-Theater Potsdam regie Peter Kupke; Württembergisches Staatstheater Stuttgart am 23.11.1965 regie Peter Palitzsch; Nationaltheater Weimar regie Helmut Pollow», See all fifteen venues where the play debuted are listed on the Suhrkamp publishing house website: https://www.suhrkamptheater.de/stueck/peter-weiss-die-ermittlung-tt-100805 (last accessed 25/05/2025).

[22] In 1964, Brook had staged Weiss' earlier *play, The Marat/Sade* (1964). See the digital archive of the Royal Shakespeare Company: https://collections.shakespeare.org.uk/search/rsc-performances/inv196510 (last accessed 25/05/2025).

This example has been singled out in order to emphasise how the choice of some artists to re-elaborate Dante's text in a spectacular context is the result of a particular historical moment or a specific cultural *milieu* to which the artists themselves contribute and are part of. According to others, the decision to adapt Dante also stems from direct contact with other artists, especially by participating in the same festivals or cultural events, being part of some companies and then moving to others, observing and learning from each other. That direct filial relationship that has been described in particular in the context of the *Lecturae Dantis* becomes more complicated and opens up to new combinatorial possibilities, offering artists diversified opportunities to learn and share ideas.

In this vein, then, many years after the London staging of Weiss, Brook lets Dante's influence sprout in one of his latest plays, which follows on from those investigating human nature and its potential associated with science, religion and mysticism[23]. In 2014, Brook staged *The Valley of Astonishment*, which is based on the Persian mystical poem *The Conference of the Birds* [in Persianمنطق الطير, *Manṭiq aṭ-ṭàir*] by Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār (1145/46-1221)[24]. In the play, profiles of exceptional mental and psychological abilities are drawn, including Sammy Costas, a woman with a synesthetic memory. In the scenes offered by the play, we see the woman being diagnosed as a 'phenomenon' for her exceptional memory capacities, thus triggering a cascading change in her existence, leading her to question the meaning of having such an incredible memory, questioning her innermost human condition.

In the prodigy of the character's personal history, in one of the various experiments to which the woman is subjected by a medical team particularly attentive to the human side, she is asked to recite the first verses of the *Divine Comedy*. According to the scheme of personal connections, which delve into her life experiences and unpredictably link events to situations, the woman, who does not speak Italian, is able to recall the first tercets of *Inferno*, according to a mechanism involving the rhetorical figures of alliteration, personification, synecdoche and metaphor, typical of Dante's poetic language:

NEL	il miglior amico a scuola (Nell).
MEZZO	a scuola le dicevano che non sarebbe stata un soprano, ma un mezzo soprano.
DEL	il negozio Dehli dove compra sempre il pastrami.
CAMMIN	come in
DI	il suo amico D. Walaski, detto D.
NOSTRA	una parola che sentiva da sua madre.
VITA	il suo amico gay Vittorio detto Vita.

[23] See ANNAMARIA CASCETTA, *"Je suis un phénomène" (1988). L'universo della mente dal testo scientifico alla scena*, in ANNAMARIA CASCETTA, LAURA PEJA (a cura di), *La prova del Nove*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 2005, pp. 495-514; ANNAMARIA CASCETTA, *Teatri del mondo*, in «Drammaturgia», 5 marzo 2016, disponibile online al sito: https://drammaturgia.fupress.net/saggi/saggio.php?id=6489#_ftn1 (last accessed 25/05/2025).
[24] FARĪD AL-DĪN ʿAṬṬĀR, *Il verbo degli uccelli*, a cura di Carlo Saccone, Milano, SE, 2014 [1986[1]].

MI	del piano.
RITROVAI	retro del café e il lamento dell'amico Walaski («o vai vai»).
[…]	
UNA	Uma Thurman, attrice protagonista di film molto violenti.
SELVA	una magnifica parola.
OSCURA	camera oscura.
LA	come dicono le signore parigine.
DIRITTA	il suo cocktail preferito, "Margarita".
VIA	viaduct.
ERA	viviamo in un'era di oscurità[25].

NEL	the best friend at school (Nell).
MEZZO	at school they told her that she would not be a soprano, but a mezzo soprano.
DEL	the Dehli shop where she always buys pastrami.
CAMMIN	as in
DI	her friend D. Walaski, known as D.
NOSTRA	a word she heard from her mother.
VITA	her gay friend Vittorio called Vita.
MI	of the plan.
RITROVAI	back of the café and the lament of her friend Walaski ('o vai vai').
[...]	
UNA	Uma Thurman, actress starring in very violent films.
SELVA	a magnificent word.
OSCURA	darkroom.
LA	as the Parisian ladies say.
DIRITTA	her favourite cocktail, 'Margarita'.
VIA	viaduct.
ERA	we live in an era of darkness.

As was the case with the direct collaboration with Weiss, Dante's word digs deep into director Brook's imagination, surfacing in his memory, in his dramaturgy, almost naturally, just like the triplets for Sammy. The polarisation, or rather the search for good and evil, its meaning, as well as its definition, in order to exorcise them or to return to find an understanding, a reproducibility, are at the basis of this constant presence of Dante in the artistic imagination up to the most recent contemporaneity.

The second half of the 20th-century, as already highlighted in these few but meaningful examples, is the historical period that marks a new definition and investigation of the role of art and the artist in life. If Dante has for centuries been the example, the icon, of this search for artistic identity and the search for a structuring of vision, then once again we discover artists ready to confront him in order to construct a new and proper definition of poetic. Reflecting on this European context, which now becomes the full custodian of Dante's presence as inseparable from its own widely understood imagery, the watershed years that act as a link and begin to rework his legacy are the years between the late 1980s and the early 1990s. From the *Lecturae Dantis*, which began to gain resonance in Italy and around the world, and especially with the works of the artists already mentioned, Dante found concrete form in the theatre of poetry. This operation came about following in the footsteps of so

[25] See ANNAMARIA CASCETTA, *Teatri del mondo*, cit.

many who, in those years, question themselves[26], intersecting the paths of the written word, in its metrical, defined form, with the magmatic reality of the theatre, between gesture, body and text, as attested by the director of the then Magazzini Criminali, Federico Tiezzi:

È stato sulle considerazioni che Pasolini fece a Pesaro nel 1966 distinguendo un "cinema di poesia" da un "cinema di prosa" che è nata l'idea (una metafora quasi) di "Teatro di Poesia". […] Nel "teatro di poesia" si perde il concetto di messinscena: non esiste il testo di un autore da ridare scenicamente (da tradurre) (il teatro insomma come ancella del testo) ma una scrittura scenica autonoma nella quale il gruppo l'autore o il regista diventano **autori**. E il "testo" che dal lavoro deriva è qualcosa di molto complesso poiché si tratta di una "partitura" (molto, molto simile a quella musicale o a quella letteraria, che so, della "canzone" o del "sonetto") in cui la drammaturgia è un "**insieme**" di parole, movimenti, suoni, voci, luci, musiche; un "testo" che risulta dunque alla dine del percorso di lavoro. […] Teatro di poesia dunque come elemento disordinante all'interno della prosa intesa come trascrizione critica e ragionata di un ordine (quello storico della civiltà bianca occidentale). La poesia induce e reclama il disordine della visione; la prosa progetta e reclama l'ordine del mondo. In più (per la sensibilità nervosa) la poesia ammette una forte dose di irragionevolezza e di segreto (il segreto metrico, l'indecifrabilità poetica) e vuole essere percepibile non comprensibile, pronta per i nervi e non per la ragione[27].

It was on the considerations Pasolini made in Pesaro in 1966 distinguishing a 'cinema of poetry' from a 'cinema of prose' that the idea (almost a metaphor) of 'Theatre of Poetry' was born. [...] In the 'theatre of poetry' the concept of staging is lost: there is no author's text to be staged again (to be translated) (theatre, in short, as a handmaiden of the text) but an autonomous scenic writing in which the group, the author or the director become **authors**. And the 'text' resulting from the work is something very complex, since it is a 'score' (very, very similar to the musical or literary 'song' or 'sonnet') in which the dramaturgy is an '**ensemble**' of words, movements, sounds, voices, lights and music; a 'text' that is therefore at the end of the work process. [...] Poetry theatre therefore as a disorderly element within prose understood as a critical and reasoned transcription of an order (the historical order of western white civilisation). Poetry induces and reclaims the disorder of vision; prose plans and reclaims the order of the world. In addition (for the nervous sensibility) poetry admits a strong dose of unreasonableness and secrecy (the metric secret, poetic indecipherability) and wants to be perceptible not comprehensible, ready for the nerves and not for reason.

An anti-naturalist theatre, but not for this reason distant from reality, capable of achieving the harmonic tension between the arts professed in composer Richard Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* and thus emblematic of the return to its most auroral poetic definition, that of Greek tragedy, a sacred and civil rite par excellence.

Before delving into the examination of Magazzini Criminali's work with Dante, a fundamental adaptation of Dante's three canticles, on which much has already been written, it will be useful to report on a European case study which, at the same chronological height, gives evidence of a similar vision to that operating in Italy and, once again, does so in the sign of Dante.

[26] One thinks of Giuliano Scabia, of Edoardo Sanguineti himself, whom we have already begun to talk about, of Mario Luzi and many others, but also and above all of Mariangela Gualtieri, to be mentioned later on, all of them protagonists of this particular artistic season.

[27] In the complete intervention it is clear how the Steinerian vision, and above all certain elements already described of eurythmy (see, for example, the passage on the total correspondence between metre and actor's gesture management), was engrained in director Federico TIEZZI's way of conceiving poetry and thus his own theatre, see FEDERICO TIEZZI, *Teatro di poesia dei Magazzini criminali*, in «Salvo Imprevisti. Quadrimestrale di poesia», a. XI, n. 31/32 gennaio-agosto, 1984, pp. 17-18. See PIER PAOLO PASOLINI, *Cinema in forma di poesia*, a cura di Luciano De Giusti, Pordenone, Cinemazero, 1979.

4.1. *Vita Nova*, *Het Nieuwe Leven, naar Dante Alighieri*: the case study of Gent

Unlike the Italian scenario, but actually in line with the adaptations made even by artists who are more familiar with Dante's works (in this case, the way of approaching Dante is very similar to that encountered with Peter Weiss and, in particular, the fact of having close ties with German culture, which is strongly linked to Dante's works and his reception), the play in question was created by a Belgian collective, working on an adaptation of Dante's prosimeter *Vita Nova*. Unfortunately, many aspects of this case study still remain obscure, as they belong to field research that saw several difficulties related to the COVID-19 pandemic[28].

In fact, it should not seem strange to find Italian subject matter, especially referring to literature, when Italy and an author as important for the 20th-century reception of Dante as Pasolini are the protagonists of a play by the playwright Renè Kalisky, *La Passion selon P. P. Pasolini* (1978). In those years, in fact, even the dense Belgian artistic context, in its plurality of languages and cultures, as a country strongly marked by territorial and administrative divisions, developed instances very close to those already described for the Italian scene in the form defined as Jeune Théâtre[29], starting from a strong need to define its own identity, and from a distancing from traditional theatre, rediscovering all its own symbolic-grotesque and metaphysical aspects:

> Così l'insopprimibile antirealismo, connaturale a tutto il teatro belga, procede da allora a un confronto più diretto con la realtà in mutamento. […] Al dibattito delle idee, alla problematica etica incarnata dai personaggi "eroici" (sebbene Closson attesti un'acuta sensibilità per il diverbio essenza/apparenza del reale, d'indole autenticamente pirandelliana), viene sostituendosi l'esaltata percezione della concretezza dell'allestimento coi suoi nuovi valori simbolici e sociali. […] Direzioni differenti di un'esplorazione di territori impervi e ignoti, battute contemporaneamente al sorgere di una pratica teatrale (dal progetto di regia alla prestazione attoriale) attenta alle esperienze di smontaggio e rimontaggio semiotico del testo, di enfatizzata presenza della corporeità e dell'immagine. La tendenza più recente propone la coesistenza, né stabilizzata né obbligatoriamente feconda, di personalità registiche, di progetti collettivi e di invenzioni d'autore, in una rete intricata di tentativi innovatori e di riproposte collaudate. Specie nel dominio dell'intenzione scenica sperimentale o scopertamente politica, sono meglio rilevabili certe analogie con quanto è accaduto in Italia, a partire dagli anni Settanta.

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[28] In this context, I would like to deeply thank Charlotte Wellens and Elisabeth De Loore. They opened the doors to Belgium for me, which I was able to get to know, not least of all the actress Twiggy Bossuyt, in one of those moments of pure mystical chance. Moreover, thanks to Mr. Paul De Loore, Elisabeth's father, I came to know about a contest at the Gent Academy of Fine Arts, KASK & Conservatorium / School of Arts Gent, in which her father (later a professor at the Academy itself) won with a project dedicated to Dante in 1928, thanks to a tympanum in which he painted a triumphant Dante, in the romantic style of Gustave Dorè (*Figure 37*).

[29] Not going particularly deep into this definition, we report what Gianni Poli summarised: «La complessità del percorso del Jeune Théâtre -più di effetti ed eventi confluenti che di intenti concordati- implica gli aspetti ideologici, estetici e formali appena evidenziati. Presenta, inoltre, quale svolta importante, l'irruzione della storia nel copione, dell'attualità della cronaca nella drammaturgia. I temi emergenti da quel momento (anche stimolati dalla sensibilità delle comunità degli immigrati, in particolare extraeuropee) si caratterizzano nella critica al potere costituito, alla guerra, all'emarginazione e alla discriminazione nei vari aspetti»/«The complexity of the Jeune Théâtre's path - more of confluent effects and events than of agreed intentions - implies the ideological, aesthetic and formal aspects just highlighted. It also presents, as an important turning point, the irruption of history into the script, of the actuality of the chronicle into the dramaturgy. The themes emerging from that moment (also stimulated in the sensitivity of immigrant communities, particularly non-European ones) are characterised in the critique of constituted power, war, marginalisation and discrimination in its various aspects», GIANNI POLI, *Una "fantastica" centralità*, in GIANNI POLI (a cura di), *Altri sogni. Altre scene. Antologia dei drammaturghi belgi contemporanei*, Genova, Il melangolo, 2004, pp. 11-46, citazione a p. 23.

Infatti, dopo l'ondata spiccatamente formalistica della ricerca, un teatro del tempo presente, necessario e sia pure condizionato da altri *media*, appare ancora affidato, in Belgio come altrove, all'apporto di attore e regista all'origine della scrittura dell'autore[30].

Thus the irrepressible anti-realism, connatural to all Belgian theatre, proceeds from then on to a more direct confrontation with changing reality. [...] The debate of ideas, the problematic ethics embodied by the 'heroic' characters (although Closson testifies to an acute sensitivity to the essence/appearance divergence of the real, of an authentically Pirandellian nature), is replaced by the exalted perception of the concreteness of the staging with its new symbolic and social values. [...] Different directions of an exploration of impervious and unknown territories, beaten at the same time as the emergence of a theatrical practice (from the directing project to the actor's performance) attentive to the experiences of semiotic disassembly and reassembly of the text, of emphasised presence of corporeity and image. The most recent trend proposes the coexistence, neither stabilised nor necessarily fruitful, of directorial personalities, collective projects and author's inventions, in an intricate web of innovative attempts and tested re-proposals. Especially in the domain of experimental or overtly political stage intentions, certain analogies are best detected with what has happened in Italy since the 1970s. In fact, after the markedly formalistic wave of research, a theatre of the present time, necessary and albeit conditioned by other *media*, still appears entrusted, in Belgium as elsewhere, to the contribution of actor and director at the origin of the author's writing.

In Belgium, too, young artists from universities and academies want to confront the uncomfortable reality around them in a different way, detaching themselves from a theatrical practice divorced from real life, and presenting themselves as a fracture between the tradition taught to them and new perspectives proposed not least by Barba-Grotowski's Third Theatre.

In 1994, the Kollektiev D&A (now become Theater De Toemskt, but with different components) decided to stage the *Vita Nova*, *Het Nieuwe Leven, naar Dante Alighieri*[31] (*Figure 38*). The drama plays on the *topos* of the vision, of Dante's vision of Beatrice, his inspiring muse, but also that of the artist who 'sees' his own work in its completion and experiences the long dissension in composition, thus following the classical myth of Pygmalion.

We will not go into a precise analysis of the text of the play here, which consists of one act divided into thirty-three scenes (a number that in itself recalls the scansion into cantos of the *Comedy* rather than the total of forty-three of the prosimeter), written in the Flemish-Belgian dialect[32] (*Figure 39*). Only Dante and Beatrice are on stage: it has been vital to have an initial interview with the interpreter of Beatrice, in this case the second in chronological order to impersonate her. Twiggy Bossuyt, then a *freelance* actress and now a children's writer[33], talked about her experience in the

[30] GIANNI POLI, *Il "regno impossibile" dei drammaturghi belgi*, in GIANNI POLI (a cura di), *Teatro belga contemporaneo*, Genova, Costa&Nolan, 1984, pp. 5-30, quotation at pp. 8-9.

[31] The first production was *Het Nieuwe Leven, naar Dante Alighieri* bewerking Dirk De Keyzer, met Elise Bundervoet en Luc Van Autreve, muziek Bart Vandewege, scenografie Ignace Devoldere en Dirk De Keyzer, regie Dirk De Keyzer, co-productie Limelight, staged on 28 January 1994 at the Teaterbarrikade in Gent. Thanks to the information found, we have the script of Beatrice interpreted by Twiggy Bossuyt, dedicated to the performances of 16-18 November 1994, at the Nieuwpoortteater in Gent. More information on the company can be found on the website of Dirk De Keyzer's widow, Reinhilde Van Driel, also an actress and her husband's artistic partner until his untimely death: https://reinhildevandriel.com/theater-detoekomst (last accessed 25/05/2025).

[32] During the interview, there are many passages in which the actress refers to the importance of having preserved in the text the different dialectal traits from the different towns from which each artist comes, offering the listener a plurality of different *nuances* deliberately characterising, so as not to flatten to a standard language but to transport Dante's story within the Flemish territory, between Gent and the surrounding towns.

[33] See her personal website, where she also gathers information on her past acting career: https://www.waltzingmathilde.be/twiggybossuyt (last accessed 25/05/2025).

company, being called to play the part at short notice, as the actress chosen for the first performances (Elise Bundervoet) was pregnant. Her script had few captions and Bossuyt herself jotted down in pen the director's notes provided during rehearsals, as well as a personal contextualisation of the poet Dante, his artistic work and his time on the title page. In fact, the collective and inclusive nature underlying the artistic operation is emphasised, everyone can participate in the artistic creation, bringing to the stage a plural, inclusive, mestizo product. The artists wish to free themselves from traditional formalisms and a hierarchisation of roles and tasks, preferring instead the creation of unprecedented dramaturgies, conceived in dialogue between the members and taking inspiration from lesser-known works (frequently more literary than theatrical in the strict sense). They also distanced themselves from set acting, preferring a more natural, but not naturalistic one, and also made room for the regional nuances of the different performers, bringing to the stage the plurality of a region rich in micro-dialects, almost ascribable to individual cities of Flanders. Especially on this point, it is useful to quote what Erwin Jans wrote, translated by Gianni Poli:

Oltre che alla pratica scenica, la scrittura teatrale fiamminga s'è alimentata a un'altra fonte viva, l'idioma fiammingo. Da quando l'autonomia fiamminga è effettiva, il rapporto con la sua lingua è cambiato radicalmente. Il nederlandese d'"oltre Moerdijk"- parlato nei Paesi Bassi - non è più norma assoluta per l'eloquio e la scrittura teatrali. Scrittori come Jan Decorte, Arne Sierens, Filip Vanluchene, Erik De Volder e Josse De Pauw si sono creati ciascuno la propria lingua teatrale, volutamente fiamminga: plastica, immaginifica, ricca di suoni e colori, dalla grammatica assolutamente non nederlandese. Hugo Claus e Walter Van den Broeck sono stati grandi precursori di questa avventura, ma la nuova generazione s'è spinta ancor oltre nell'uso del dialetto, relegando il nederlandese standard in secondo piano[34].

In addition to stage practice, Flemish theatre writing has been nourished by another living source, the Flemish idiom. Since Flemish autonomy became effective, the relationship with its language has changed radically. The Dutch 'beyond Moerdijk' - spoken in the Netherlands - is no longer the absolute norm for theatrical speech and writing. Writers such as Jan Decorte, Arne Sierens, Filip Vanluchene, Erik De Volder and Josse De Pauw each created their own theatrical language, deliberately Flemish: plastic, imaginative, rich in sound and colour, with a completely non-Dutch grammar. Hugo Claus and Walter Van den Broeck were great precursors of this adventure, but the new generation went even further in the use of dialect, relegating standard Dutch to second place.

From his account, it emerges how director Dirk De Keyzer and Dante's interpreter Luc Van Autreve[35] were the real promoters of the adaptation and choice of Dante's text, especially thanks to the latter's knowledge of German, who formally worked as the company's *dramaturg* for this specific work, delving into the issues related to Dante's language and his history as a medieval poet. Even more interesting, with a view to reflecting on Dante's artistic operation within the work itself (an element that is carried over from the *Vita Nova* to the more mature *Commedia*), is the decision to enrich the adaptation with a Pirandellian substratum.

[34] ERWIN JANS, *Uscire dal solco in Fiandra*, tradotto in italiano da Gianni Poli, in GIANNI POLI (a cura di), *Altri sogni. Altre scene. Antologia dei drammaturghi belgi contemporanei*, Genova, Il melangolo, 2004, pp. 47-50, quotation at pp. 48-49.

[35] Waiting for a confrontation with the artist, it emerges from Bossuyt's accounts how he had studied Germanistics and to his inspiration also owed his later work on Goethe's epistolary novel *Het lijden van de jonge Werther* naar Johann Wolfgang von Goethe bewerking Luc Van Autreve.

Diana e la Tuda (1926) and *Trovarsi* (1932) are the two texts indicated as undercurrents for this reworking of Dante, as in both Luigi Pirandello focuses on the man-woman relationship and the creator-creature relationship, which are particularly akin to Dante's prosimeter. Pirandello also wrote these dramas expressly for the muse and actress Marta Abba[36]. The two dramas investigate the discrepancy between reality and fiction, mirroring themselves in the love relationship of their unhappy protagonists: in *Trovarsi* the mirror, where Donata Genzi looks at herself and questions her own life as an actress, reveals the lack of a clear boundary between reality and fiction, leaving the only key to accessing the truth in the play and in the characters played. In *Diana e la Tuda*, the morbid fascination of Sirio Dossi, a young sculptor, for the body of the model Tuda leads to the woman's total alienation from reality, destined to annihilate herself physically because the love she believes she can have for herself is only linked to the art object he is making and therefore never referred to her human and immanent living presence.

Both women, in fact, are destined to see their love unsatisfied, continuing to ask themselves insistently what is reality, what is truth, what is the right choice to make in order to try to reverse their destiny. Pirandello's influence opens up the possibility of a more modern interpretation of Dante's text. If in the traditional Stylnovistic and troubadour imagery, the figure of a woman is distant, angelic and unattainable, thanks to Pirandello's texts, Beatrice casts off her ethereal Pre-Raphaelite garments and assumes a completely different posture: she becomes *loquens*, enterprising and very carnal. In his *Vita Nova*, Dante suffers for not being able to have Beatrice, he experiences the dissension of the loss until, in the final pages, he decides that a time will come when he will be able to pay full homage to his beloved and, not least, give full proof of his own mastery.

Bossuyt again recalls how Beatrice in the Belgian drama was particularly incisive, generating a real contrast with her partner, and had to insist heavily on her own seductive powers throughout the play, in an exasperated attempt to bring the poet's attention back to herself, becoming once again the object of his attention and not letting herself be overshadowed by the idea of herself (capable of creating the immortal work in the poet's imagination). In this the focus on the actress's physicality was decisive: Bossuyt recounts that during the play, in itself very meagre and minimal in terms of the set design, which included a bare stage, with a table and a sofa, a couple of chairs, as well as a few

[36] For more on the complex relationship between the actress and the 'meastro', as she called him, see also their correspondence from when she joined Pirandello's company until 1936: LUIGI PIRANDELLO, *Lettere a Marta Abba*, a cura di Benito Ortolani, Milano, Mondadori, 1995. See also: DANIELA BINI, *L'ultimo teatro di Pirandello come sublimazione dell'erotismo*, in «Italica», vol. 70, n. 1 Spring, 1993, pp. 46-59; FRANCESCA CHIOSTRI, *La perdita della sessualità come conquista della donna pirandelliana*, in «Carte Italiane», vol. 1, n. 14, 1994, pp. 69-81; DANIELA BINI, *Il carteggio Luigi Pirandello-Marta Abba*, in «Italica», vol. 72, n. 3 Autumn, 1995, pp. 356-366; FRANCO ZANGRILLI, *Pirandello e il mondo greco*, in «Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica», vol. 53, n. 2, 1996, pp. 181-204; PIERLUIGI PELLINI, *Il tema del quadro animato nella letteratura del secondo Ottocento*, in «Belfagor», vol. 56, n. 1, 2001, pp. 11-33; ROSALBA GALVAGNO, *Diana e la Tuda: Il miracolo di Pigmalione*, in «Pirandelliana», vol. 5, 2011, pp. 131-142.

screens to the side on which images were sometimes projected[37], she had to change clothes up to five times, performing a *climax* of undressing that culminated in her wearing a peculiar little black dress with two cuts on her breasts, which in fact remained uncovered (together with her hair, an element of the female body characterised by strong eros), unlike Dante, who instead wore black, almost mourning. In this way, Beatrice was associated with the ambivalent imagery of the chthonic figure of the mother, the source of life, and the *femme fatale* with voyeur/sadomasochistic traits (*Figure 40*).

Once again, Alighieri's artistic *quête* is compared to Pirandello's, in a constant tension towards the search for the accomplished work, the relationship with it and the artist's perception of the world. This same vein persists throughout the drama, leading the characters to ask themselves what is the *Vita Nova* (the new life) that the author/character Dante and Beatrice herself should begin.

This work offers an international example akin to the theatre of poetry inaugurated by Magazzini Criminali, favouring a direct approach to the text, a meticulous work on language and its externalization, a particular attention to space and the conception of the stage alongside a new and

[37] «In februari 1994 keerde D & A terug naar de Suikerij voor Het Nieuwe Leven, een produktie gebaseerd op het werk van Dante Alighieri. Oorspronkelijk aangekondigd als een "theater-video-projekt" bleef er uiteindelijk van die videotoestanden niet veel meer over dan een toestel dat in de verte stond te spelen en dat (naar het schijnt, want mijn eigen ogen lieten mij in de steek) een "alternatieve" versie van het toneelstuk bracht. Vroegere repetities werden immers geregistreerd. Misschien heeft dit tot het uitstekende spel bijgedragen, maar tijdens het stuk zelf kan het hoe dan ook niet veel belang gehad hebben, want na de pauze werd het toestel gewoon afgezet. Toch was dit een uitstekende voorstelling (misschien juist daarom). Dirk De Keyzer verdient als regisseur en vooral als tekstbewerker alle lof. Zelfs zijn muziekkeuze ("trage slepers" uit de jaren zestig van "Eenzaam zonder jou" tot "The most beautiful girl") paste uitstekend bij de speelse en toch emotionele sfeer. Als regisseur leidde hij Elise Bundervoet als Beatrice en Luc Van Autreve als Dante uitstekend, al mag het grootste deel van de prachtige akteerprestatie natuurlijk op rekening van de akteurs zelf worden geschreven, in een sober maar effektief dekor van Ignace Devoldere. Deze stond ook in voor de kostuumkeuze, wat vooral bij Beatrice tot nogal wat verkleedpartijen leidde, o.a. ook in een sexy pakje dat bij SM aanleunde. Dit laatste was dan in het kader van de dichter die zozeer met Amor, met de Liefde-met-hoofdletter bezig is, dat hij de geliefde zelf eigenlijk in de kou laat staan. Tegelijk streeft hij naar een perfekte zegging op papier, maar in de realiteit slaagt hij er niet in met zijn geliefde te communiceren. Niet in woorden (met alle misverstanden vandien, eigenlijk jaagt hij haar zelfs voortdurend de bomen in) en zeker niet in daden (wanneer ze zich verleidelijk met haar rug voor hem uitstrekt, is het enige wat hij kan bedenken engeltjes tekenen op haar rug!). Slechts op het einde kan hij stamelen: "Ik zie u graag." En zij: "Ik u eigenlijk ook." Want dit stuk is in het "algemeen beschaafd dialect", omdat "La vita nuova" ook het eerste literaire meesterwerk in het Italiaans is (i.p.v. in het Latijn). En dit is het werk van Dirk De Keyzer, die zich uiteraard ook door de twee akteurs liet assisteren, omdat het van primordiaal belang is dat de tekst erg goed in hun mond ligt. Daarnaast wordt ook nog ene Bob Van de Putte zowel als auteur en als akteur gesignaleerd, maar buiten het feit dat dit wellicht diegene is die samen met Dirk tijdens de gehele voorstelling achteraan aan een tafel zit, is me niet duidelijk wat zijn aandeel is. Ook het aandeel van componist Bart Vandewege was deze keer gering. Het probleem met de liefde en de formulering van de liefde is hetzelfde als dat van de kunst. Als Dante op een bepaald moment zegt: "Je kan zo sterk op het abstrakte begrip liefde ingaan, dat het een ontstellende boel shit wordt. Ik denk direct aan mensen die op die manier kunst benaderen. Je kan daar op een zodanige analytische manier op ingaan, zodat kunst iets wordt waarvan normale mensen zeggen: daar wil ik eigenlijk niets mee te maken hebben." Dan is dit duidelijk een referentie naar zijn opmerkingen over de migranten waarmee hij heeft trachten te werken (het is uiteindelijk mislukt)», one of the few further testimonies on the company and the show is provided by journalist Ronny De Schepper, who has seen the evolution of the artistic thinking of the collective and the director, on his own website: https://ronnydeschepper.com/2020/11/22/kollektief-da/?unapproved=118221&moderation-hash=140520fc721b8b94df75678c90131ff3#respond (last accessed 25/05/2025). Another of the few references currently available can be found in the short extract «Kollektief D & A. Artistiek leider van dit gezelschap is Dirk de Keyzer. De groep werkt in Gent en kwam vorig jaar aan bod in het zOO!-project. Dit jaar stond Het Nieuwe Leven in Teaterbarrikade. Het uitgangspunt was Vita Nuova van Dante, 31 gedichten waarin Dante zijn liefde voor Beatrice belijdt. Tekst en voorstelling kwamen collectief tot stand», see BART VAN DEN EYNDE, *'t Wordt beter weer*, in «Publicatie Etcetera», a. 12, n. 45 aprile, 1994, p. 12-13, citazione a p. 13.

transgressive acting that privileges the body and its centrality, taking up a classic, in this case foreign and minor, to offer a new perspective to metatheatrical reflection on the artist-work relationship.

For the time being, we postpone to a later stage of research, preferably interdisciplinary, the possibility of studying this drama in greater depth and perhaps finding recordings of the rehearsals that would have been made precisely to create an artistic double on stage, proposing ways of projecting during the performance to create an artistic double for the characters, both real and multimedia.

4.2. The First Dante Trilogy: The *Commedia* of the Lombardi-Tiezzi Company

As previously mentioned, the company now known as Lombardi-Tiezzi is the company that, at the Italian level, but also internationally, has defined a model for adapting Dante and his *Comedy* for the stage. Originating as a collective from a simple Tuscan reality such as Il Carrozzone (1972)[38], the company began to make its way as Magazzini Criminali in the Eighties, and then received full support as Magazzini, before finally splitting off and remaining in the formation Lombardi-Tiezzi[39].

Numerous studies of Dante's spectacular reception have analysed the unrepeatable event that saw the company first create three performances for each *cantica*, and then present the entire spectacular trilogy in a single performance, in the evocative setting of the Mittelfest in Cividale del Friuli, appropriating the entire town for one night and making it the great stage for the journey into the three otherworldly realms[40] (*Figures 41-42*). Having assessed the importance of Marion

[38] The debut performance with which the company inaugurated its career was in Florence with the show *La donna stanca incontra il sole.* This show was to have such an impact on the Italian scene that even in the performance by the Teatro delle Albe company, the actress Montanari offers a direct quotation with her character to the costume and visual imagery offered by the Carrozzone with D'Amburgo, see the photos in ROSSELLA BONFIGLIOLI (a cura di), *Frequenze barbare. Teatro Ambiente/Cinema/Mass Media/Metropoli/Musica/Pornografia nel Carrozzone Magazzini criminali Prod.*, Firenze, La Casa Usher, 1981, pp. 25, 28, 31, 127.

[39] See especially the chapter *Gli anni di formazione* in LORENZO MANGO*, Teatro di poesia. Saggi su Federico Tiezzi*, cit., pp. 49-104. From a conversation at the University of Turin, on the occasion of a workshop on the poetic reading of the *Commedia* held by Sandro Lombardi (26-28 September 2024), with subsequent return in a recital at the Roman Theatre in Turin (28 September 2024) (*Figures 62-63-64-65*), it was possible to ask the reason for this dissolution. As in many companies, after the birth of her first child, D'Amburgo decided to retire from the stage and the paths of the company's founding members separated.

[40] The trilogy *LA DIVINA COMMEDIA* included three performances in Cividale from dusk to dawn (27 July 1991), directed by Federico Tiezzi and featuring Sandro Lombardi and Marion D'Amburgo. The touring performance took place between the Convitto Paolo Diacono boarding school, the streets of Cividale and the Duomo: *Commedia dell'Inferno - Un Travestimento Dantesco*, by Edoardo Sanguineti, scenes by Manola Casale; *Il Purgatorio - La Notte lava la mente*, by Mario Luzi, scenes by Pasquale Grossi; *Il Paradiso - Perché mi vinse il lume d'esta stella*, by Giovanni Giudici, sets by Manola Casale), costumes by Giovanna Buzzi, lighting by Iuray Saleri, with Alessandra Antinori, Alessandra Celi, Pietro Conversano, Marion D'Amburgo, Giovanni Fochi, Sandro Lombardi, Laura Martelli, Adonella Monaco, Enrico Pallini, Gabriele Parrillo, Graziano Piazza, Aurelio Pierucci, Ivan Polidoro, Marcello Prayer, Paolo Ricchi, Emanuela Villagrossi, Paolo Zuccari. See LORENZO MANGO, *Teatro di poesia. Saggi su Federico Tiezzi*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1994;

D'Amburgo's artistic work for female actors confronting the *Lectura Dantis*, it is now useful to understand which elements of the company's history then decreed the decision to confront Dante's text for the Magazzini.

Necessary was the transition from their first type of work as image-theatre (sequences of image plans rather than actual dramaturgies) to their maturation into poetry-theatre, described in the opening of this very chapter by director Tiezzi. The general character of their works, from the very first attestation, is connoted as violent, at times pornographic, erotic, and overwhelming, and can be attributed to the matrix of experimentation stretched to the limit, inherited *in primis* from the American avant-garde such as the Living Theatre and the experimentation of the performing arts[41].

The Magazzini Criminali's productions preceding *the Commedia* involve a special focus and conception of artistic paths in trilogies. *Perdita di memoria*, the first and most decisive, consists of three separate stage plays, written for the first time entirely by Tiezzi: *Genet a Tangeri* (1984), *Ritratto dell'attore da giovane* (1985) and *Vita immaginaria di Paolo Uccello* (1985). Above all, the play *Genet a Tangeri*, staged during the Festival of Santarcangelo in 1985, determined a point of no return for the group's theatrical activity: the decision to set the drama in Riccione's slaughterhouse, with the surgical operation of slaughtering a horse in the time of the play, produced an unprecedented media case, which had a strong impact on the reputation and future possibilities for the company[42]. This first theatrical trilogy is followed by the "triptych on the nullity of being", which, unlike the previous one, envisages the use of different dramaturgs in order to "translate" the text of other authors in the context of the programmatic reference of poetry theatre: *Come è* (1987) by Samuel Beckett with the dramaturgical adaptation entrusted to Franco Quadri, *Hamletmaschine* (1988) and *Medeamaterial* (1988) both by Heiner Müller with the dramaturgical adaptation entrusted to Achille Mango and Renata Molinari. The latter also included the intermezzo of the *Artaud* drama realised for the German Documenta festival, again with the help of Renata Molinari in 1987.

SIMONA MORANDO, FRANCO VAZZOLER, *La trilogia dantesca di Federico Tiezzi*, in «Dante e l'arte», n. 1, 2014, pp. 117-138; SARA FONTANA, *Dante on stage*, in FRANCESCO CIABATTONI, SIMONE MARCHESI (edited by), *Dante Alive. Essays on a cultural icon*, cit. The programme of Mittelfest 1991 is available at: https://www.mittelbabel.org/edizione-spettacolo/1991/ (last accessed 25/05/2025).

[41] ROSSELLA BONFIGLIOLI, *Geografia degli spostamenti (Contaminazioni-citazione-appropriazione)*, in ROSSELLA BONFIGLIOLI (a cura di), *Frequenze barbare. Teatro Ambiente/Cinema/Mass Media/Metropoli/Musica/Pornografia nel Carrozzone Magazzini criminali Prod.*, Firenze, La Casa Usher, 1981, pp. 67-83; ROSSELLA BONFIGLIOLI, *Teatro/Pornografia*, in ROSSELLA BONFIGLIOLI (a cura di), *Frequenze barbare. Teatro Ambiente/Cinema/Mass Media/Metropoli/Musica/Pornografia nel Carrozzone Magazzini criminali Prod.*, cit., pp. 105-108, LORENZO MANGO, *Teatro di poesia. Saggi su Federico Tiezzi*, cit., pp. 66-71.

[42] The company was invested by the press and consequently by the discredit of public opinion, leading to a distancing from the parties (e.g. the PCI) that through the Florentine local administrations supported its artistic work and the drastic reduction of funds at their disposal, as well as a banishment from places of promotion and production in the city, see FERDINANDO TAVIANI, *Macello ovvero La mossa del cavallo. Come i media creano uno scandalo*, in «Patalogo», n. 9 (a cura di Franco Quadri), 1986, pp. 217-223.

On the one hand, therefore, one perceives the shadow hovering over the company, which echoed a more serpentine and subtle disquiet towards the world of research theatre, conceived as distant and excessive; on the other, their presence continues to be indispensable and influential in the Italian and international artistic imagination. With all these assumptions in mind, Tiezzi was offered the direction of the Laboratorio related to the Consorzio Teatro Metastasio in Prato, inaugurated by director Luca Ronconi.

Precisely in the sign of Ronconi, who had staged another classic of Italian literature, *Orlando Furioso*, in 1969, and in the sign of the artistic and pedagogical operation of the French Jacques Copeau[43] (in this case mediated by the teachings of Orazio Costa and the direct confrontation with him), Tiezzi decided to accept this challenge and «do a show as if it were a school and do a school as if it were a show»[44]:

Lo stimolo a realizzare la *Divina Commedia* in qualche modo mi è giunto proprio da quei festival a cui partecipavo. […] La *Divina Commedia*, simile ad una cappella Sistina di immagini, penetra nella mia testa grazie ai discorsi fatti con altri teatranti, registi, musicisti, danzatori o artisti visivi che frequentavo in quelle occasioni internazionali (da Laurie Anderson a Hermann Nitsch), con i quali collaboravo insieme alla Compagnia per *performance* collettive, che intersecavano teatro, musica, danza e arti visive. Ricordo che proprio durante queste sedute di lavoro ho parlato spesso della *divina Commedia*, che rimane fin dal titolo un grande testo teatrale. Teatrale in sé stesso, direi. Poi l'idea si è fatta strada e rafforzata nella concretezza del palcoscenico. L'idea di teatralizzare il poema ha insomma radici lontane: l'atto di passare alla scena risale al momento in cui la direzione del Teatro Metastasio e il Comune di Prato mi chiesero nel 1989 di dare una ideale continuazione al Laboratorio di Progettazione teatrale che Luca Ronconi aveva attivato nel 1976 in quella città: vi ero stato portato assieme a Sandro Lombardi da Franco Quadri. All'interno di quel Laboratorio avevo cominciato a capire cosa significhi lavorare su un testo teatrale: proprio vedendo le prove di *Calderon* di Pasolini, avevo compiuto un secondo apprendistato teatrale. Gli spettacoli di Ronconi che seguivo erano materia di studio e di riflessione accanto a quelli del Living Theatre (di cui avevo visto *Antigone* e *Paradise Now* a Urbino), di Peter Brook (ero presente al *Sogno*

[43] «Pretendevo di rivolgermi all'uomo nella sua interezza, fargli prendere coscienza di tutte le sue facoltà di espressione rispetto al teatro, mandare l'attore alla scuola di poesia e il poeta alla scuola di scena. Volevo sostituire all'allenamento intensivo subito dall'attore in funzione dei bisogni immediati della rappresentazione, alle brutali e sommarie lezioni inflitte all'autore dai suoi brevi incontri con la realtà tecnica, un'ampia cultura professionale, una libera vita drammatica comune agli uomini di teatro. Bisognava dare più ampia apertura e più profonde radici allo spirito di compagnia; creare abitudini di vita favorevoli al mestiere, un'atmosfera di formazione intellettuale, morale e tecnica, una disciplina, delle tradizioni. Il rinnovamento del teatro [...] mi appariva in primo luogo un rinnovamento dell'uomo nel teatro»/«I wanted to address man in his entirety, to make him aware of all his faculties of expression in relation to the theatre, to send the actor to the school of poetry and the poet to the school of the stage. I wanted to replace the intensive training undergone by the actor according to the immediate needs of the performance, the brutal and cursory lessons inflicted on the author by his brief encounters with technical reality, with a broad professional culture, a free dramatic life common to theatremen. The spirit of the company had to be given wider scope and deeper roots; life habits favourable to the profession had to be created, an atmosphere of intellectual, moral and technical training, discipline, traditions. The renewal of the theatre [...] seemed to me first and foremost a renewal of man in the theatre», JACQUES COPEAU, *Souvenirs du Vieux-Colombier*, Paris, Les Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1931, p. 90 [ed. ita. JACQUES COPEAU, *Ricordi del Vieux Colombier*, traduzione di Annamaria Nacci, Milano, Il Saggiatore, 1962]. The quotation is quoted within the larger volume by Marco Miglionico, which offers a more exhaustive overview of the artist and frames the pedagogical aspect in his production of the Théâtre et l'École du Vieux Colombier years, see MARCO MIGLIONICO, *Il progetto educativo del teatro di Jacques Copeau e l'Educazione alla Teatralità*, Arona, Editore XY.IT, 2009 (available online in open access).

[44] «fare uno spettacolo come fosse una scuola e fare una scuola come fosse uno spettacolo», quote from the interview with Tiezzi published in VALERIO CAPPELLI, *«Il mio Inferno sarà geometrico»*, in «Corriere della Sera», 28 maggio 1989, p 18. The artist's same positions are also upheld in FEDERICO TIEZZI, *Un Istituto per l'Arte e il Pensiero del Teatro*, in «Hystrio», luglio-settembre, 1989, pp. 76-77.

shakesperiano messo in scena alla Fenice nel 1973), di Grotowski (avevo assistito ad *Apocalypsis cum figuris* alla Biennale Teatro del 1975) [45].

The stimulus to realise the *Divine Comedy* somehow came to me from those very festivals in which I participated. [...] The *Divine Comedy*, similar to a Sistine Chapel of images, penetrated my head thanks to the conversations I had with other theatrical performers, directors, musicians, dancers or visual artists that I frequented on those international occasions (from Laurie Anderson to Hermann Nitsch), with whom I collaborated with the Company for collective *performances* that intersected theatre, music, dance and visual arts. I remember that during these work sessions I often spoke about the *Divine Comedy*, which remains a great theatrical text right from its title. Theatrical in itself, I would say. Then the idea made its way and strengthened in the concreteness of the stage. In short, the idea of theatricalising the poem has distant roots: the act of moving to the stage dates back to the moment when the management of the Teatro Metastasio and the Municipality of Prato asked me in 1989 to give an ideal continuation to the Theatre Design Workshop that Luca Ronconi had activated in 1976 in that city: I had been brought there together with Sandro Lombardi by Franco Quadri. In that Laboratory, I had begun to understand what it meant to work on a theatrical text: it was while watching the rehearsals of Pasolini's *Calderon* that I had completed a second theatrical apprenticeship. Ronconi's plays that I was following were subjects of study and reflection alongside those of the Living Theatre (whose *Antigone* and *Paradise Now* I had seen in Urbino), Peter Brook (I was present at the Shakesperian *Dream* staged at La Fenice in 1973), Grotowski (I had attended *Apocalypsis cum figuris* at the Theatre Biennale in 1975).

The director's words highlight important elements necessary for the production of the *Commedia*: the stimulus of the international artistic collectivity pushes towards universal elements to refound a common feeling (the main characteristic of Dante's *Commedia*); the example of Ronconi and Costa act as an "all-Italian" directorial spur for a production that interrogates the foundations of the artistic imagination, and above all that "mother tongue" that Tiezzi and his colleagues closely share with Alighieri. Lastly, as ever-present pillars, prerequisites for this theatrical investigation by the director, we find the omnipresent theatre of Beckett, the teachings of Artaud and those of Steiner, sealing a full appropriation of the most innovative twentieth-century theatrical theories in Dante. Let us briefly review what happened.

The undertaking involves working on the three canticles for three years, for each one selecting a contemporary poet as a playwright (who better than a poet to understand another poet). Every year, young actors are selected from the most prestigious drama schools in Italy[46], introducing them to the Theatre of Poetry, in order to obtain a completely new performance, a unique and unrepeatable

[45] TERESA MEGALE, FEDERICO TIEZZI, *Per visitatori notturni e diurni dell'immaginario. Conversazione sulla trilogia dantesca*, in «Paragone», a. LXXII, serie III, nn. 153-154-155 gennaio- febbraio, 2021, pp. 171-188, quotation at pp. 172-173.

[46] Even if Tiezzi sees sense in this choice, at that time he understood that the education of the actor to be moulded according to the project only goes so far, opting therefore for the last cantica for a call aimed at performers who had already demonstrated that they had the characteristics to work with a certain mode of interpretation and had already had experience with important directors such as Luca Ronconi or Peter Stein: «Insomma ero giunto alla conclusione che quelle scuole non potevano darmi ciò che stavo cercando, tant'è che il primo anno scelsi per *Commedia dell'Inferno* gli attori più outsider, direi i più particolari; per il *Purgatorio* scelsi degli attori che mi sembrava potessero avere una recitazione più colloquiale (ma ci furono comunque lunghi mesi di prove per lavorare proprio su una recitazione che non doveva essere realistica); e poi ci furono gli attori molto bravi (i più bravi) del *Paradiso* che venivano da questi grandi registi e che mi permisero uno spettacolo più attento»/«In short, I had come to the conclusion that those schools could not give me what I was looking for, so much so that the first year I chose for *Commedia dell'Inferno* the most outsider, I would say the most peculiar actors; for *Purgatory* I chose actors who I felt could have a more colloquial acting style (but there were still long months of rehearsals to work on the very acting that was not meant to be realistic); and then there were the very good actors (the best) of *Paradise* who came from these great directors and allowed me a more careful performance», ANDREA DELLAI, *COMMEDIA DELL'INFERNO: travestimento teatrale di Edoardo Sanguineti tradotto in scena da I Magazzini*, cit., p. 243.

compositional event. Tiezzi inserts a pedagogical objective: to investigate the roots of the Italian language. Therefore, the Laboratorio becomes, to all intents and purposes, an artistic research community to which artists, directors, university professors and renowned critics are invited. Tiezzi's goal is to create a new balance, actively involving the actors in the scenic writing, conceiving the performance as a poetic-musical-theatrical composition, according to Valentini's quote: «words, not texts»[47].

In 1989, at the Teatro Fabbricone in Prato, the first *cantica* of the poem was staged: *Commedia dell'Inferno: Un travestimento dantesco*[48], written by the poet Edoardo Sanguineti, who defined his work as a disguise, as had already happened with his previous theatrical experiences on Goethe and Ariosto[49]. With each of the chosen authors, Tiezzi built a personal dialogue, not without hitches, to give the right space for the language to be investigated and for the scene to develop in total autonomy. With *Inferno*, the director tackles the auditory fundamentals of Dante's multilingualism and a great contribution in this is offered by Sanguineti who, given his personal background with music and the stage, conceives his dramaturgy as a *Sprachgesang*, crushed, enucleated, strident. There are strong contaminations from classical to modern literature, with frequent quotations and passages in Latin, without neglecting theatrical authors such as Shakespeare or Beckett. It is precisely along this line of constant overlap between literary and dramatic tradition, and thanks to Sanguineti's meticulous captions, which prefigure a scene of circus *mirabilia*, as in a sort of *Wunderkammer* where the various characters and episodes from Dante's work are set, that Tiezzi focuses on the stage, a huge machine made of self-propelled platforms that ideally represents the limbs of the human body, of Dante himself, "lying" on a huge puddle of mud[50] (*Figures 43-44-45*). The scenography, a great practicable

[47] «parole, non testi», VALENTINA VALENTINI, *Alla ricerca delle storie perdute. Il teatro di poesia e i tre metodi del testo*, in «Biblioteca teatrale», nn. 74-76 aprile-dicembre (*Il teatro di fine millennio*, a cura di Valentina Valentini), 2005, pp. 49-76, quotation at p. 63, in the section on the interview with Federico Tiezzi.

[48] The play made its debut at the Teatro Fabbricone in Prato on 27 June 1989. The dramaturgy and some notes were published in EDOARDO SANGUINETI*, Commedia dell'Inferno. Un travestimento dantesco*, Genova, Costa & Nolan, 1989 and subsequently EDOARDO SANGUINETI, *Commedia dell'Inferno. Un travestimento dantesco*, a cura di Niva Lorenzini, Rome, Carocci, 2005. Following this first experience, the following Dante *recitals* were also performed: *Variazioni dantesche per trio* (Erice, Gebel Ahmed Theatre, 13 September 1989), by Edoardo Sanguineti, directed by Federico Tiezzi, with Marion D'Amburgo, Sandro Lombardi, Enrico Pallini, Federico Tiezzi, company I Magazzini; *Pagine di Dante* (Poggio a Caiano-FI, Teatro di corte della Villa Medicea, 21 May 1990), readings by Marion D'Amburgo, Sandro Lombardi, Federico Tiezzi; *Commedia dell'Inferno e del Purgatorio* (Lecco, Teatro Sociale, 30 September 1990), from the respective dramaturgies of Edoardo Sanguineti and Mario Luzi, scenic space, video and direction by Federico Tiezzi, with Alessandra Antinori, Alessandra Celi, Marion D'Amburgo, Sandro Lombardi, Laura Martelli, Graziano Piazza.

[49] See FRANCO VAZZOLER, *Il chierico e la scena. Cinque capitoli su Sanguineti e il teatro*, Genova, Il Nuovo Melangolo, 2009, pp. 23-47 (*All'origine dei travestimenti: Faust*). Also see SABRINA STROPPA TOMASI, *La Commedia dell'Inferno, quindici anni dopo. Conversazione con Edoardo Sanguineti*, in ERMINIA ARDISSINO, SABRINA STROPPA TOMASI (a cura di), *Dialoghi con Dante. Riscritture e ricodificazioni della Commedia*, Atti del Convegno (Torino, 17-18 maggio 2004), Roma, Storia e Letteratura, 2007, pp. 89-96; MARIA DOLORES PESCE, *Edoardo Sanguineti e il teatro. La poetica del travestimento*, Alessandria, Dell'Orso, 2003.

[50] Tiezzi reveals how this image had already been part of his imagery, later discarded, for another project on Beckett (*How it is*), and that starting from the indications on language given by Sanguineti, rather than from his captions that instead

theatrical machine also stretched out in the midst of the audience, becomes a metaphor for a shrank Leonardo's Vitruvian man: the secular *homo faber fortunae suae* is no longer the centre of the world but dramatically the main interpreter of perdition and his own ruin[51]. On this strange stage, each actor articulates his character on the basis of a specific and repetitive gesture, surrounded by sounds, howls and shouts echoing from the loudspeakers. Sanguineti's choice of chaotic, corrosive, fragmented words, in the monologuing, isolated *palus putredinis* of each subject within the drama who desperately seeks a semblance of light, of dialogue, stands out against the magmatic dynamism of the space, conceived by the set designer Manola Casale, which, in its clattering mechanics, succeeds in the one thing the damned lack: it is actually part of a very organic and well-conceived whole, while in the desolate human limbs dwells the gloomy shadow of loneliness. The resulting geometric composition, a *decoupage* of almost cinematographic excerpts orchestrated by Tiezzi as director and Sanguineti in the dramaturgy, once again questions the necessity of a work, the value of art (and of what art is) in the age of technique at its top[52].

Despite an initial scepticism, Mario Luzi later participated in the project for *Purgatorio*[53]:

Tutto Dante è un dramma che cerca di ricomporsi in una suprema catarsi e in una raggiunta armonia: forse lo sapevo già, ma allora era divenuto evidente. […] Ho, se mai, avuto dubbi su di me, sulla mia inventiva mirata a questo fine. […] Dovevo trovare il fermento primo intorno a cui lievitasse la massa umana del *Purgatorio*. Mi parve di trovarlo nel tempo. Il *Purgatorio* è l'unico regno e l'unica cantica in cui il tempo vige: e vige nel suo doppio potere di nostalgica rammemorazione del passato e di tormentosa remora all'eterno su cui il desiderio, in forma di attesa sempre più bruciante, si sposta. Tempo che divide dal mondo e tempo che divide da Dio. […] È un filo che unisce pena, pazienza e attesa: e unisce anche le anime espianti con i due grandi testimoni e pellegrini, Dante e Virgilio, in una comune esperienza ascensionale – all'interno di se stessi[54].

The whole of Dante is a drama that seeks to recompose itself in a supreme catharsis and in an achieved harmony: perhaps I already knew this, but it had then become evident. [...] I had, if ever, doubts about myself, about my inventiveness aimed at this

declared a swimming pool (in Malebolge), he decided to stage that mud, a "visible correlative" to the scene of the *putredinis* described by Sanguineti, See Mango, poem, p. 32, footnote 6. Moreover, in the interview with Lapini, he states: "*Inferno* for me is a geometric space, within which each character has his vanishing point, which the actor must seek out. I saw *Inferno* as geometric and at the same time structured like a human body. I asked Manola Casale for a set design that would draw a human body. There is a large red curtain (almost the only note of colour in a substantially monochrome scene) that acts as a test; a neck, represented by a raised walkway; two arms, which are two side turrets; a torso, which is a back stage (connected to the two turrets) on which the damned speak; and legs, consisting of another walkway. And there is also the dress, formed by an enormous mud pool underneath, in which the actors, as the action goes on, are forced to act, immersing themselves in it", LIA LAPINI, *I Magazzini: materiali di laboratorio sulla "Commedia dell'Inferno"*, in "Il Castello di Elsinore", a. 2, no. 4, 1989, p. 95-111, quotation at p. 107.

[51] It is also interesting to recall that in those very years, Marina Abramović was beginning to become famous with her performances, and one of these, *Rhythm 5*, involved the artist lying inside a star/pentacle that was set on fire. She herself, in her autobiography, reflects on the symbolism of the star, which she had chosen as a critique of communist ideology for this particular performance, where she had moreover lost her senses due to the complete combustion of oxygen, and in her vision we also find that universality of the imaginative portrayal that Dante himself had once again drawn on.

[52] See FEDERICO TIEZZI, *Introduzione (teatrale) a commedia (cinematografica)*, in EDOARDO SANGUINETI, *Commedia dell'Inferno. Un travestimento dantesco*, cit., 1989, pp. 5-14, reference p. 22.

[53] The play made its debut at the Teatro Fabbricone in Prato on 2 March 1990. The dramaturgy and some reflections are published in MARIO LUZI, *Il Purgatorio: la notte lava la mente: drammaturgia di un'ascensione*, Genova, Costa & Nolan, 1990. In this paper, reference will be made to the later edition included in Luzi's Teatro, MARIO LUZI, *Appendice. Il Purgatorio: la notte lava la mente*, in MARIO LUZI, *Teatro*, postfazione di Giancarlo Quiriconi, Milano, Garzanti, 1993, pp. 415-489.

[54] MARIO LUZI, *Notizia*, in MARIO LUZI, *Teatro*, cit., pp. 491-493, quotation at pp. 491-492.

end. [...] I had to find the first ferment around which the human mass of *Purgatory* would rise. I seemed to find it in time. *Purgatory* is the only realm and the only cantica in which time exists: and it exists in its double power of nostalgic remembrance of the past and of tormenting regret of the eternal on which desire, in the form of ever more burning expectation, moves. Time that divides from the world and time that divides from God. [...] It is a thread that unites sorrow, patience and waiting: and it also unites the expiating souls with the two great witnesses and pilgrims, Dante and Virgil, in a common ascending experience - within themselves.

In *Purgatorio. La notte lava la mente: Drammaturgia di un'ascensione*, poet Mario Luzi remains more faithful to the source text, thinking differently about his own possibility to operate on the text, and treats Dante's *cantica* as an «unassailable entity»[55], reducing the frequent interpolations and manipulations adopted by Sanguineti. Instead, Luzi develops a research on dialogue, melancholy, and the psychological environment that pervades the penitent human in the contemplation of his own interiority. The drama is divided into three sections: the *Anticamera del Purgatorio*, the *Ascesa* and the *Paradiso Terrestre*. An ascetic light box frames the main set design: the theatrical action begins directly on the beach of the Ante-Purgatory, and a platform leads to the stage proper, the Purgatory Mount, formed by a platform/pedestal divided into four parts that rise and fall as needed, allowing new souls to enter the scene[56] (*Figures 46-47-48*).

It constantly reverberates, like a psalmodic refrain, the purifying presence of water, which Luzi inserts in his captions, the suffused presence of hymns and psalms, which acts as a buffer to the conversations and monologues of the various characters, and the light, ascetic, cold, constitutes a crescendo, up to the dazzling appearance of Beatrice, in the Earthly Paradise. Sanguineti's incisiveness, almost aggressive, is replaced by a different point of view applied to the text by Luzi, which maintains that 'cinematographic' quality already experienced in the conception of space, but evaluates it no longer as *découpage*, but as an amplification, and a construction by long shots that give depth to the scene, coordinating with Tiezzi's direction[57]:

Si vedono, simili a un film, scorrere alcuni esempi di superbia punita – come effetto di una incessante metamorfosi (Niobe, la caduta di Troia, etc.). In sottofondo si sentono voci ineffabili che cantano, seguite da quelle di Dante che parla fra sé, en passant, come in un soliloquio[58].

One sees, like a film, some examples of punished pride - as the effect of an incessant metamorphosis (Niobe, the fall of Troy, etc.). In the background one hears ineffable voices singing, followed by Dante speaking to himself, en passant, as in a soliloquy.

In piena luce una mappa sintetica della Toscana nella quale compaiono i simboli delle città (la Toscana è protagonista di questo canto). Due parvenze esprimono meraviglia, stupore, spaesamento[59].

In full light a synthetic map of Tuscany in which the symbols of the cities appear (Tuscany region is the protagonist of this canto). Two entities express wonder, amazement, and bewilderment.

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[55] «entità inattaccabile», ivi, p. 492.
[56] LORENZO MANGO, *Teatro di poesia. Saggi su Federico Tiezzi*, cit., pp. 38-42.
[57] See TERESA MEGALE, FEDERICO TIEZZI, *Per visitatori notturni e diurni dell'immaginario. Conversazione sulla trilogia dantesca*, cit., pp. 178-183.
[58] MARIO LUZI, *Appendice. Il Purgatorio: la notte lava la mente*, cit., pp. 443-444.
[59] IVI, p. 447. This caption is relevant because such a scenographic solution would be implemented, only with the map of Italy, by the company Teatro delle Albe, confirming the debt and the close link of visual correspondences generated between the two companies (*Figure 136*).

Le metamorfosi del carro sono visione e sogno nello stesso tempo. Silenzio e immagine, si impongono durante una pausa molto forte. Viene introdotto l'elemento dell'acqua: acqua come flusso, acqua come riflesso. Il Letè è stato presupposto. Invece si dovrebbe vedere l'Eunoè[60].

The metamorphosis of the float is a vision and a dream at the same time. Silence and image impose themselves during a strong pause. The element of water is introduced: water as flow, water as reflection. The Leté has been presupposed. Instead one should see the Eunoè.

Decisive is the creation of the Poem-character[61], a double of the poet himself but ideally separated from it, a *Coryphaeus*, who dialogues on stage like Dante and Virgil. His didactic and interactive role finds its greatest expression in the Terrestrial Paradise, where there is an overlap between Dante's voice *agens*/character and that of the Poema-character, as if in a uniqueness of creator-creature, a symbiosis, only to return finally to the dissolution of the roles, in which the Poema-personage takes the floor autonomously to present the future coming of Beatrice to the audience[62]. Luzi also inserts an off-screen Voice, a sort of speaking caption, Brechtian, his personal double on stage, with whom the chorus of penitent souls tends to converse, and this Voice is offered to be present, to be there, thus also enabling Luzi to be *auctor* and *agens* in his dramaturgy:

> CORO DI ANIME: Esiste il tempo?
>
> VOCE FUORI CAMPO (*con tono grave*): Sì, ed esiste il travaglio.
>
> *La risposta è di una voce invisibile lontana. Poi la frase è ripetuta durante la scena come un leit-motiv*[63].
> CHOIR OF SOULS: Does Time Exist?
>
> VOICE-OVER *(in a serious tone*): Yes, and there is labour.
>
> *The response is from a distant invisible voice. Then the phrase is repeated throughout the scene like a leitmotif.*

In the *Purgatorio* canticle, the most human one, as Dante did with Virgil, a master who becomes more and more of a friend along the narrative and prepares the poet to be responsible for himself in the new realm, so too do the poet-playwright Luzi and director Tiezzi architect a very special dialogue, amidst sound, light and visionary presences, in which the scene and its action go hand in hand, fraternally, demonstrating a mutual understanding that is difficult to reproduce[64].

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[60] MARIO LUZI*, Appendice. Il Purgatorio: la notte lava la mente*, cit., p. 488.
[61] Which Luzi describes in the opening caption: «Il Poema potrebbe essere rappresentato da un mascherone simile a una bocca della verità, a una fontana che versa: è la perennità della voce umana, del discorso umano»/«The Poem could be represented by a mask similar to a mouth of truth, to a fountain that pours: it is the perpetuity of the human voice, of human speech», IVI, p. 419.
[62] See SIMONA MORANDO, FRANCO VAZZOLER*, La trilogia dantesca di Federico Tiezzi*, cit., pp. 126-127.
[63] MARIO LUZI, *Appendice. Il Purgatorio: la notte lava la mente*, cit., p. 419.
[64] However, after this first enterprise, the three of them (Sandro Lombardi is Luzi's fraternal friend, with whom he maintains a long-standing friendship) worked together again for *Felicità rubate* (1995), a dramaturgy and performance realised for the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino on the occasion of the anniversary of the painter known as Pontormo (Jacopo Carucci da Pontormo), see EMILIANO VENTURA, *Mario Luzi. La poesia in Teatro*, Roma, Scienze e Lettere, 2010, pp. 66-71. Also see ALFREDO LUZI, *Dante nella poesia di Mario Luzi*, in ERMINIA ARDISSINO, SABRINA STROPPA TOMASI (a cura di), *Dialoghi con Dante. Riscritture e ricodificazioni della Commedia*, cit.; ANTONIO SACCONE, *Notazioni su Mario Luzi*

The last *cantica* involves a real difficulty, for the director and for the writer: how to delineate full and authentic happiness? After an initial refusal by Andrea Zanzotto and Clemente Rebora[65], it is entrusted to Giovanni Giudici. As Lucia Amara recalls, Mario Fubini states that in *Paradiso* «there is no song, but a series of liturgical formulas, which are composed in unity on the mouth of the saint»[66]. Giudici, the only one who had previously had no experience with the theatre, but moving from a career as a poet and translator, moves towards the paradisiacal word, the creative act par excellence, the summit of the intellect, starting from a fruitful and personal relationship with Dante's poetry[67] and from this encounter comes *Il Paradiso: Perché mi vinse il lume d'esta stella*[68]. In an interview, Tiezzi revealed:

> Inizialmente […] volevo una serie di apparizioni come se il *Paradiso* fosse un'allucinazione da LSD, ma infine non ci capimmo, perché io immaginavo la scena in maniera più astratta. Chiesi, quindi, a Giudici di trasferire il tutto come se fossimo nello studio di Dante, luogo in cui sarebbero apparsi al poeta tutti i personaggi del Paradiso e fu un successo[69].

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interprete di Dante, in «Rivista di Letteratura italiana», a. XXXIX, n. 3 (*Dante nella poesia del Novecento e dei primi anni del nuovo millennio I*, a cura di Donato Pirovano, Clara Allasia), 2021, pp. 173-180; SANDRO LOMBARDI, *Parola della realtà. La presenza viva di Luzi in me*, in «Quaderni del Centro Studi Mario Luzi», vol. IX, 2008, pp. 15-34.

[65] «Decisi, dunque, di costituire una trilogia che doveva però essere scritta per me da quelli che consideravo tre grandissimi poeti: Sanguineti, Luzi e Zanzotto. Per una serie di motivi, però, Zanzotto alla fine non poté più esserci perché era già in obbligo, in quel periodo, di scrivere un libretto per musica (scoprii più tardi che la musica era stata scritta dal suo dentista). Mi ricordo che Luzi si dispiacque dell'assenza di Zanzotto. Mi rivolsi allora a Raboni che per me è, insieme a Luzi e a Sanguineti, il più grande poeta della seconda metà del Novecento italiano (oltre a Pasolini, certo). Raboni, poeta immenso e persona di una gentilezza e di una intelligenza uniche, mi confessò che era da poco diventato critico teatrale del Corriere e che, quindi, si vedeva costretto a declinare l'invito per un evidente conflitto di interessi. Fu lui a consigliarmi di rivolgermi a Giudici, cosa che feci e, davvero, anche Giudici fu una proposta azzeccata. Affidai a questi tre grandi poeti l'intera scrittura, dando loro il progetto di fondo»/«I decided, therefore, to set up a trilogy that was to be written for me by what I considered three great poets: Sanguineti, Luzi and Zanzotto. For a number of reasons, however, Zanzotto could not be there in the end because he was already obliged, at that time, to write a libretto for music (I found out later that the music had been written by his dentist). I remember that Luzi regretted Zanzotto's absence. I then turned to Raboni who for me is, together with Luzi and Sanguineti, the greatest poet of the second half of the 20th century in Italy (besides Pasolini, of course). Raboni, an immense poet and a person of unique kindness and intelligence, confessed to me that he had recently become the Corriere's theatre critic and was therefore forced to decline the invitation due to an obvious conflict of interests. He was the one who advised me to turn to Giudici, which I did and, indeed, Giudici was also an apt proposition. I entrusted the entire writing to these three great poets, giving them the basic project», ANDREA DELLAI, *COMMEDIA DELL'INFERNO: travestimento teatrale di Edoardo Sanguineti tradotto in scena da I Magazzini*, cit., p. 239.

[66] «non c'è canto, ma una serie di formule liturgiche, che si compongono in unità sulla bocca del santo», LUCIA AMARA, *Metro, corpo, voce. Annotazioni pe uno studio sulla metrica nel teatro del primo Novecento*, in VALENTINA VALENTINI (a cura di), *Drammaturgie sonore. Teatri del Secondo Novecento*, cit., pp. 237-257, indirect quotation at p. 257 from MARIO FUBINI, *Metrica e poesia*. *Lezioni sulle forme metriche italiane*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1962, p. 52.

[67] See GIORGIO BÁRBERI SQUAROTTI, *Dante per antifrasi: la poesia di Giudici*, in ERMINIA ARDISSINO, SABRINA STROPPA TOMASI (a cura di), *Dialoghi con Dante. Riscritture e ricodificazioni della Commedia*, cit., pp. 51-80; ERMINIA ARDISSINO, *'Perché mi vinse il lume d'esta stella'. Giovanni Giudici's Rewriting of Dante's Paradiso for the Theatre*, in MANUELE GRAGNOLATI, FABIO CAMILLETTI, FABIAN LAMPART (ed. by), *Metamorphosing Dante: Appropriations, Manipulations, and Rewritings in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*, cit., pp. 137-152; GIULIO FERRONI, *Dante, Zanzotto e Giudici*, in «Rivista di Letteratura italiana», a. XL, n. 1 (*Dante nella poesia del Novecento e dei primi anni del nuovo millennio II*, a cura di Donato Pirovano, Clara Allasia), 2022, pp. 11-17; CARLO DI ALESIO, *Sul Dante di Giudici*, in ALBERTO CADIOLI (a cura di), *Metti in versi la vita: la figura e l'opera di Giovanni Giudici*, Roma, Storia e Letteratura, 2014, pp. 33-52.

[68] The play made its debut at the Teatro Petruzzelli in Bari on 27 March 1991. The play and other notes are published in GIOVANNI GIUDICI, *Il Paradiso: perché mi vinse il lume d'esta stella: satura drammatica*, Genova, Costa & Nolan, 1991.

[69] ANDREA DELLAI, *COMMEDIA DELL'INFERNO: travestimento teatrale di Edoardo Sanguineti tradotto in scena da I Magazzini*, cit., pp. 239-40.

Initially [...] I wanted a series of apparitions as if *Paradise* were an LSD hallucination, but in the end we did not understand each other, because I imagined the scene in a more abstract way. I therefore asked Giudici to transfer it as if we were in Dante's study, where all the characters of Paradise would appear to the poet, and it was a success.

Divided into a prologue and nine scenes, *Paradiso* begins with the spectators observing Dante working on the last triplet of the *cantica*, exhausted, and immediately the Cleric and the Modern Literate enter the scene, followed finally by St. Augustine, immediately highlighting how at the centre of the dramaturgical adaptation is precisely the artistic operation and its tradition, the difficulty that lies in giving a full description of the creative act.

The narrative of Dante's journey through the kingdom of heaven is overshadowed by this very dense poetic *saturation* where the intention is to give an account of Paradise, of the possibility of experiencing it, despite knowing that this desire is almost impossible, like a Heiddegerian *Holzweg*[70], or as Dante himself describes it:

> Qual è colui che sognando vede,
> che dopo 'l sogno la passione impressa
> rimane, e l'altro a la mente non riede,
>
> cotal son io, ché quasi tutta cessa
> mia visione, e ancor mi distilla
> nel core il dolce che nacque da essa[71].

Therefore, other saints, protagonists of mystical *visiones* or interpreters of theological knowledge (such as Aquinas, Augustine and Bonaventure), are called upon in the dramaturgy, together with poets of modernity, who are read according to Dante's perspective such as Pound, Eliot, or Kafka, creating a new artistic and theological cenacle to retrace the path of knowledge and faith undertaken by Dante before.

In this canticle, Giudici, too, decides to split Dante into *Viator* and *Auctor*, emphasising the difficulty of being both interpreter and narrator of one's own story. What emerges is an iridescent mosaic, offering an anthology of Dante's passages juxtaposed with «a thicket of modern, testamentary, *vetero* testamentary and other exquisitely literary voices»[72].

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[70] «Holz suona un antico nome per la selva. Nello Holz ci sono Wege, sentieri che, per lo più accidentati, cessano all'improvviso nell'impervio. Si chiamano Holzwege. Ogni Holzweg s'inoltra per conto suo, ma nella medesima selva. Spesso sembra che siano l'uno uguale all'altro. Ma sembra soltanto. Taglialegna e guardaboschi conoscono i sentieri. Sanno cosa vuol dire "essere su uno Holzweg"»/«Holz sounds an ancient name for the forest. In the Holz there are Wege, paths that, mostly rough, suddenly cease in the impassable. They are called Holzwege. Each Holzwege goes its own way, but in the same forest. It often seems as if they are one and the same. But it only seems. Lumberjacks and foresters know the paths. They know what it means to be on a Holzweg», MARTIN HEIDEGGER, *Holzwege. Sentieri erranti nella selva*, a cura di Vincenzo Cicero, Milano, Bompiani, 2002, quotation at p. 3.

[71] *Pd.* XXXIII, vv. 58-63.

[72] «una selva di voci moderne, testamentarie, vetero testamentarie e altre squisitamente letterarie», SIMONA MORANDO, FRANCO VAZZOLER*, La trilogia dantesca di Federico Tiezzi*, cit., p. 134.

In order to account for this «alto volo»[73] chiselled by Giudici's poetic wisdom, Tiezzi resorts to a direction centred first of all on a strong training of the actors in the reading of the poetic word, and thus on their immersion in a bath of light, in a dazzling scenography that also transpires in their movement and in their most intimate expressiveness. To do this, he turns to the technique of Eurythmy and the teachings of Steiner through his collaboration with the artist Heike Cantori. A quick comparison between a vintage print of the set design of a performance offered at the Goetheanum and the stock images of *Paradiso*'s show, one can immediately perceive the importance of the principles of eurythmy in the conception of this particular show (*Figures 49-50-51-52-53-54*).

The epic box built on this abstract, meditative, geometric idea is the tangible vision of equilibrium, reminiscent of the cosmic harmony sought in Brunelleschi's 15th century[74], the visual correlative that echoes the objective one in the words of Giudici's text, «is not only the place of pure ideas, the space of the invisible, but also the image of the imagination at work, the theatre of the mind»[75] dematerialised where the pure Word resounds.

Tiezzi-Lombardi's artistic research on Dante's word does not stop with the trilogy, but continues a few years later in the show that sees Sandro Lombardi as the protagonist on stage with David Riondino, in a rereading of selected cantos of the *Comedy*: *Dante Inferno* (2002)[76]. This simple *lectura* takes on the most characteristic features of the company, later flowing into the show *Inferno Novecento. Dante e il grande giornalismo del Secolo Breve* (2016) thanks to the collaboration with Fabrizio Sinisi, who wrote the dramaturgy and debuted at the Cortile del Museo del Bargello on 28 May 2016 in Florence[77] (*Figures 55-56*).

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[73] *Pd*. XV, v. 54.

[74] As in the case of the other canticles, here too Tiezzi's previous artistic studies and his predilection for an orchestration of the scene that takes ample inspiration from pictorial suggestions and artistic works are reflected. Moreover, he himself states that it was fundamental for Paradiso to meditate on colours and Indian art, see TERESA MEGALE, FEDERICO TIEZZI, *Per visitatori notturni e diurni dell'immaginario. Conversazione sulla trilogia dantesca*, cit., pp. 181-183.

[75] «non è solo il luogo delle pure idee, lo spazio dell'invisibile, ma anche immagine della fantasia al lavoro, teatro della mente», LORENZO MANGO, *Teatro di poesia. Saggi su Federico Tiezzi*, cit., p. 45.

[76] *Dante Inferno* staged in Rosignano Solvay, Spiagge bianche, on 29 July 2000, is a Compagnia Lombardi-Tiezzi project, with Sandro Lombardi and David Riondino, directed by Federico Tiezzi. This project then converged in the recording and publication of the book: SANDRO LOMBARDI, DAVID RIONDINO, *Dante Inferno*, testo con commento e note a cura di Emilio Pasquini e Antonio Quaglio, Milano, Garzanti, 2002 accompanied by the audio CD, with original music by Giorgio Albiani, with the following anthology of excerpts and selected episodes: 1. Nel Mezzo Del Cammin..., 2. L'Incontro Con Virgilio, 3. Gli Ignavi, 4. Caronte, 5. Paolo e Francesca, 6. Cerberus and Ciacco, 7. Avars and Prodigals, 8. Filippo Argenti, 9. Pier Delle Vigne, 10. Il Veglio Di Creta, 11. Brunetto Latini, 12. Gerione, 13. Alessio Interminelli, 14. The March with the Devils, 15. Vanni Fucci and the transformation of thieves into snakes, 16. Bertran De Born, Gianni Schicchi and Bocca Degli Abati, 17. Ulysses, 18. Guido Da Montefeltro, 19. Friar Alberigo, 20. Il Conte Ugolino, 21. ...e quindi uscimmo a riveder le stelle.

[77] *Inferno Novecento. Dante e il grande giornalismo del Secolo Breve* (2016): Production Compagnia Lombardi-Tiezzi, in collaboration with Accademia Filarmonica Romana, Conservatorio di Musica Luigi Cherubini; Soprintendenza Speciale P.S.A.E. e per il Polo Museale della città di Firenze, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Associazione "Amici del Bargello", Firenze Musei, Fondazione Teatro della Pergola, Ente Cassa di Risparmio. Progetto *Divina Commedia 1*, from a dramaturgical idea by Fabrizio Sinisi, a performance curated by Federico Tiezzi, lights Gianni Pollini, sound engineer Alessio Lotti, Omar Cecchi, percussion; Luka Boškovic, clarinet, Dušan Mamula, clarinet. On stage: Sandro Lombardi

In this further artist's proof, which brings together Dante's cantos, read by Sandro Lombardi, and a selection of articles by famous names in Italian journalism, read instead by David Riondino, an unusual but highly opportune correspondence is created between episodes and characters from Dante's 'chronicle' and real events in contemporary news: a particularly amusing example, contrasted with others of a more tragic nature, is that offered by the theme of the sin of gluttony, condensed by Dante in the character of Ciacco, contrasted with the contemporary panorama that sees starred chefs and their elaborate techniques in the kitchen being the focus of spasmodic attention, especially in the world of new media and socials, proposing here in juxtaposition the reading of Chef Carlo Cracco's explanation of his recipe with kidney[78].

Sandro Lombardi's acting mastery[79], which also evolves independently of the company, in an entire career always linked to poetry, returns punctually to the reading of Dante's verses, becoming an indisputable repository of a way of "saying Dante" that is full of character and awareness, testimony to an attendance that recalls in terms of longevity only that of the great actors at the transition between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries[80].

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and David Riondino. More information on the company website: https://www.lombarditiezzi.it/inferno-novecento/ (last accessed 25/05/2025). The performance was seen by the author of this thesis in Turin, at the Cortile Combo, on 20 September 2020.

[78] The scansion of the show's correspondences includes: 1. *If*. III - Per me si va ne la città dolente vs. David Riondino, from *Il poema dei morti,* Il castello fantasma, Rovigo 2004; 2. *If*. V - Paolo and Francesca vs. Aldo Cazzullo*, Lady D, anguish in the tunnel*, La Stampa, 1 September 1997; 3. *If*. VI - I golosi vs. Carlo Cracco*, Rognone in salsa molecolare*; 4. *If*. XII - The tyrants vs. Matteo Durante, *Execution carried out: Saddam hanged*, Panorama, 30 December 2006; 5. *If*. XIII - La selva dei suicidi vs. Rossana Rossanda*, Anche per me (Haydée Santamaria)*, Il Manifesto, 29 July 1980; and Giovanni Grazzini, *Marilyn è tornata donna*, Corriere della Sera, 6 August 1962; 6. *If*. XV - Brunetto Latini vs. Fernanda Pivano, *Lou Reed and Andy Warhol*, Corriere della Sera, 18 December 2004; 7. *If*. XXIV - The Thieves and Vanni Fucci; 8. *If*. XXVI - Ulysses vs. Enzo Siciliano, *L'idroscalo di Ostia*, Il Manifesto, 5 November 1975; 9. *If*. XXVII - Guido da Montefeltro vs. Oriana Fallaci, *Interview with Giulio Andreotti*, L'Europeo, March 1974; 10. *If*. XXXIII - Count Ugolino and Archbishop Ruggieri vs. Renzo Guolo*, La nuova regia dell'orrore*, la Repubblica, 18 February 2015.

[79] See SANDRO LOMBARDI, *Dialogo sull'attore e sul personaggio. Intervista e nota introduttiva di Lorenzo Mango*, in «Acting Archives», a. I, n. 2 Novembre, 2011, pp. 187-243; SANDRO LOMBARDI, *Gli anni felici. Realtà e memoria nel lavoro dell'attore*, Milano, Garzanti, 2004; OLIVIERO PONTE DI PINO, *L'attore nell'epoca della sua riproducibilità tecnica*, in «Il Patalogo», n. 18, 1995, pp. 147-163, riferimento alle pp. 151-152; SANDRO LOMBARDI, *Verso e dialetto. Antidoti all'artificio della lingua*, in LEONARDO MELLO (a cura di), *Teatro Laboratorio della Toscana diretto da Federico Tiezzi*, Corazzano, Titivillus, 2013, pp. 55-58.

[80] As Tiezzi himself reports, in 2019, Giovanna Frosini and the Teatro Manzoni of Pistoia proposed to the company to prepare a new production of Dante's trilogy, and the project was accepted. Studies on the feasibility of the work and on the new way of looking at the performance that are now thirty years old (all three playwright poets are dead) are put into the field, but to date the only cantica brought to the stage is that of Purgatorio. In an initial idea for a revisitation of Inferno, Tiezzi envisages the initial clowns giving way to astronauts who come to explore the Commedia's luminous territory. All this remains pure preparatory material for a future that Tiezzi himself says is quite improbable (when personally interviewed on several occasions, he states that the funds have run out and therefore the possibility of continuing is nil). In this regard, we refer to the interview available in its entirety on the company's website (https://www.lombarditiezzi.it/progetto-commedia-divina/), made on the occasion of the Dante conference *Dante nella poesia del Novecento e dei primi anni del nuovo millennio* (Turin, 21-25 September 2021) organised by the University of Turin and subsequently published in the proceedings of the same, see CLARA ALLASIA, *Clara Allasia a colloquio con Federico Tiezzi, «Esploratori della terra luminosa che è la Divina Commedia»*, in «Rivista di Letteratura italiana», a. XL, n. 1 (*Dante nella poesia del Novecento e dei primi anni del nuovo millennio II*, a cura di Donato Pirovano, Clara Allasia), 2022, pp. 53-70.

With the important centenary of 2021 approaching, a new version of Dante's Trilogy was requested from the Lombardi-Tiezzi company. What was at least initially a proposal for a complete re-mounting was confronted with the reality of the pandemic, which allowed the re-edition of only one performance (also for a mere question of allocated funds and costs). At the Teatro Grande in Pompeii, *Purgatorio*[81] will, in fact, make its debut again on 1 July 2021.

In this new version, thirty years after the titanic feat of the three canticles in one night at the MittelFest, Tiezzi chooses the first (and therefore only) canticle of humanity in the face of the contingent situation, wanting to give himself and others the opportunity to meditate, to be there without fear, and perhaps declaring how theatre is and must be the place of contact, of dialogue. Teresa Megale emphasises this aspect, saying:

La *dulcedo* atmosferica e psicologica diventa la chiave di volta della regia tiezziana, a cui si àncora uno spettacolo capitale, in cui nulla è scontato, semmai tutto è legato a un clima di sospensione indagatrice e rassegnata, a tratti tenera e a tratti raggelata, per le sorti umane, per le quali solo la notte, invocata dal sottotitolo luziano, insieme alla ricchezza affettiva e all'arte possono lenire il dolore dell'esistere[82].

The atmospheric and psychological *dulcedo* becomes the keystone of Tiezzi's direction, to which a capital performance is anchored, in which nothing is taken for granted, if anything, everything is linked to an atmosphere of enquiring and resigned suspension, at times tender and at times chilled, for human fates, for which only the night, invoked by Luzi's subtitle, together with affective wealth and art can soothe the pain of existence.

The mountain in *Purgatory* takes on the features of Thomas Mann's *Zauberberg*, the Swiss Berghof in Davos, which is expressed first and foremost in the choice of white, aseptic lights, and thus in the costumes of the crucifixions and in the peculiar military outfit of the one-winged Angel, and in the *decor*, which presents *Purgatory* as a sanatorium[83]: a place where souls are re-educated to the new identity they are to assume, still strongly tied to their past lives. It is precisely through the costumes, the anonymous ones of the souls in grey tracksuits, as opposed to the long blue velvet cape that unites Dante, Virgil and the Poem that mirror the different functions of the characters: the episodic explanatory line of Dante's souls intersects with the personal psychoanalytical research plan of Dante's split man-poet (*Figures 57-58-59-60-61*).

In the autumn of 2021, in the evocative spaces of the Rucellai Chapel of the Marini Museum in Florence, Sandro Lombardi is the protagonist of a small review entitled: *Frammenti poetici: 3 incontri con la Commedia dantesca accostata a grandi autori del Novecento*, curated by Roberto Incerti, in which readings from *Inferno* are juxtaposed to the poems of Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Purgatorio* alongside the poems of Mario Luzi and fragments from *Paradiso* connected to works by Giovanni Raboni.

[81] See TERESA MEGALE, *«A li occhi miei ricominciò diletto». Il Purgatorio di Dante nella regia di Federico Tiezzi (2021)*, in «Dante e l'arte», n. 9, 2022, pp. 75-86. Add to this also the interview by TERESA MEGALE, *La Divina Commedia in scena*, video-interview with Federico Tiezzi, conducted for the Department of History, Archaeology, Geography, Art, Performing Arts of the University of Florence, 12 November 2020, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3-OS6oaWvEI ; TERESA MEGALE, *Palcoscenici danteschi. Dialogo con Federico Tiezzi sulla Commedia a teatro (1989-1991)*, in «Dante e l'arte», n. 9, 2022, pp. 171-188.

[82] Ivi, p. 77.

[83] See FEDERICO TIEZZI, *Sanatorium. Il Purgatorio come montagna incantata*, in SANDRO LOMBARDI (a cura di), *Il Purgatorio. La notte lava la mente*, Brescia, L'Obliquo, 2021. See the photos published in Megale's essay 2022, open access.

Again, especially in the moment of Antipurgatory, where the souls arrive and look like castaways, refugees, waiting for relocation, wrapped in the isothermal blankets used to shelter them, one can hear the jarring note of connection with everyday reality, with the inhuman condition in which all migrants find themselves, by land and sea, representing in reality a call to welfarism, to care for others, to humanity, intrinsic in everyone. As the director emphasises, this second opportunity to reread *Purgatorio* allows even more emphasis to be placed on the character of introspection and self-analysis necessary to embrace a further reality, that of reunion, of reconciliation with the archetypal feminine, who ideally, algid and loving at the same time, awaits Dante in the Terrestrial Paradise.

Once again, the great structure of the mountain with its sloping planes remains central in this production, helping to constitute a visual attraction for the audience and a 'sound' one, as the sloping planes open up glimpses but also close roads now left in the past[84]. A sanatorium of theatre through the languages of theatre, full of music, idealised actions (such as certain reiterated gestures or through a particularly punctuated rhythm, from the gaits to the recited verses) that becomes in the last installation a real psychologist's studio where Dante lies on the couch and tells his dreams to the Women, Metalda first, Beatrice later.

From the milky, almost clinical light of the first part, we move on to the increasingly gloomy textural cuts of light that isolate the various conversations with the purging souls until the kaleidoscopic apotheosis of lush floral images projected onto the backdrop to prepare for Beatrice's triumphant arrival.

This new production declares all the wisdom acquired over years of theatre and all the strength of a thoughtful work that, thirty years later, continues to set the standard in the way Dante is conceived on stage.

4.3. The Trilogy of the Socìetas Raffaello Sanzio: the Cruelty of the Scene

Together with his sister Chiara and their friends, the brothers Chiara and Paolo Guidi, Romeo Castellucci founded the Socìetas Raffello Sanzio in Cesena in 1981. Following in the wake of the ventures initiated by the Nuovo Teatro, and by companies that make the image on stage their signature, such as the American Robert Wilson, the Magazzini Criminali, and not least by investigating the violent component such as the Flemish Jan Fabre, Socìetas was characterised from

[84] In this case, but in the whole play, present and sought after is the mirroring with the reality that the audience, as well as the performers, live and have lived in the constant and unpredictable restrictions given by the pandemic. *Purgatorio* somehow recalls them and accentuates them, delving into the psychology concerning the expectation and desire to be present as individuals and as a whole.

the outset by a strong visual component (again, its members came from a background in the visual arts) and marked experimentalism, by the desire to free theatre from its adherence or subservience to the text. It is no coincidence that the company's line is defined as iconoclastic: as Claudia Castellucci states, the term is not negative but is taken in its positive sense, a breaking of the icon to offer the multitude a point from which to start anew[85].

For the scholar Oliviero Ponte di Pino, the Socìetas aesthetic is also imbued with great postmodernity, as well as iconoclasm[86]. The rejection of mimetic representation and the creation of an anti-narrative theatre proposed in the works of Socìetas, as understood and theorised by Hans-Thies Lehmann[87], pass through a systematic and inevitable rewriting of the classics of the Western canon, as seen in *Amleto. La veemente esteriorità della morte di un mollusco* (1992), *Giulio Cesare* (1997), or in the oratorical production that stages the exemplary descent into the hell of language: *Lucifero. Quanto più una parola è vecchia, tanto più va a fondo* (1993).

With the transition to the 21st century, one can observe how the company increased its productions and enriched its collaborations with artists and scholars, such as Plastikart Studio (Zimmermann & Amoroso), the electroacoustic music composer Scott Gibbons, and the support of the *dramaturg* Piersandra di Matteo. However, with the monumental staging of *Tragedia Endogonidia*[88], which ideally precedes the *Commedia*, we witness the decision of the founding members of the Socìetas to pursue individual artistic paths.

The production directly preceding Dante's trilogy offers an insight into Castellucci's imagination in preparation for the *Commedia*. At the Vie Festival in Modena in 2007, he arrived with a performance for paintings and scenes entitled *Vexilla regis prodeunt inferni*, a manifestly Dantean

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[85] CLAUDIA CASTELLUCCI, *La sindrome di Platone nel teatro delle operazioni*, in ROMEO CASTELLUCCI, CHIARA GUIDI, CLAUDIA CASTELLUCCI, *Epopea della polvere. Il teatro della Socìetas Raffaello Sanzio 1992-1999. Amleto, Masoch, Orestea, Giulio Cesare, Genesi*, postfazione di Franco Quadri, Milano, Socìetas e Ubulibri, 2001, pp. 288-293, reference pp. 288-289. See also CLAUDIA CASTELLUCCI, ROMEO CASTELLUCCI, *Il teatro della Socìetas Raffaello Sanzio. Dal teatro iconoclasta alla super-icona*, Milano, Ubulibri, 1992.

[86] OLIVIERO PONTE DI PINO, *Per farla finita con il nome del padre. Alcuni appunti per scalare la Socìetas Raffaello Sanzio dopo vent'anni di spettacoli*, in OLIVIERO PONTE DI PINO, ANNA MARIA MONTEVERDI (a cura di), *il meglio di ateatro 2001-2003*, Pozzuolo del Friuli, Il principe costante, 2004, pp. 143-155.

[87] See HANS-THIES LEHMANN, *Postdramatisches Theater*, Frankfurt am Main, Verlag der Autoren, 1999 [trad. engl. *Postdramatic Theatre*, translated and with an introduction by Karen Jürs-Munby, New York, Routledge, 2006].

[88] Reference is made to the series of eleven performances staged in as many different European cities between 2001 and 2004, called episodes of a single great architecture that investigates tragic in the extreme sense of the end, of no possibility of return, of solution, and the oxymoronic infinite generative possibility of ideas and creation, given by the co-presence of the male and female gonads. In these performances, the Societas company seals its worldwide success and influence on the contemporary art scene. For more on this work, see: CLAUDIACASTELLUCCI, ROMEO CASTELLUCCI, CHIARA GUIDI, JOE KELLEHER, NICHOLAS RIDOUT, *The Theatre of the Socìetas Raffaello Sanzio*, London/New York, Routledge, 2007; VALENTINA VALENTINI, BONNIE MARRANCA, *Universale, il più semplice posto possibile. Intervista a Romeo Castellucci*, in «Biblioteca teatrale», n. 74-76 aprile-dicembre, 2005, pp. 243-253; ENRICO PITOZZI, ANNALISA SACCHI, *Itinera. Trajectoires de la forme Tragedia Endogonidia*, Arles, Actes Sud, 2008; MARIA CRISTINA REGGIO, *Ipotesi di un ascolto tragico. La Tragedia Endogonidia della Socìetas Raffaello Sanzio*, in VALENTINA VALENTINI (a cura di), *Drammaturgie sonore. Teatri del secondo Novecento*, cit.; SOCÌETAS RAFFAELLO SANZIO, ROMEO CASTELLUCCI, *Epitaph*, con interventi di Franco Quadri, Frie Leysen, Alan Read, Cristina Ventrucci, Milano, Ubulibri e Les Solitaires Intempestifs, 2003.

revival in that it corresponds to the negative vocative used by Virgil in the thirty-fourth canto of *Inferno* to describe the vision of the destroyer, the evil one, Lucifer[89].

«Je suis Romeo Castellucci»[90]. It opens like this, at the Avignon Festival, *Inferno*, one of the most influential shows in the panorama of Dantean reception in the Second Millennium, the first element of the spectacular trilogy signed by Castellucci, which interprets the *Comedy* in the most violent and visual key, drawing great traction from the Italian Dantean trilogy of the Magazzini. In 2008, Romeo Castellucci was invited as an associate artist to the 62nd Festival d'Avignon (4-26 July 2008), together with actress Valérie Dréville. Despite the intrinsic differences between the two, Hortense Archambault and Vincent Baudriller, directors of the Festival[91], support the particular choice of these two artists by publishing their conversations online and stating that:

[89] «Incipit di un inno di Venanzio Fortunato, che lo compose a Poitiers quando arrivò nel monastero, fondato da Radegonda moglie di Clodoveo, una reliquia della Croce regalatale da Giustino II. Nella liturgia romana l'inno è cantato a vespro nella domenica di Passione (quinta di Quaresima) e nelle feste della Croce di maggio e di settembre. Dante riprende l'incipit, adattandolo con l'aggiunta inferni alla particolare situazione dell'ultimo canto dell'Inferno. Dopo la visita ai traditori Dante e Virgilio sono giunti all'ultima delle quattro zone di Cocito, dove si profilano le sei grandi ali di Lucifero che Virgilio annunzia a Dante: *Vexilla regis prodeunt inferni* (*If*. XXXIV, v. 1). Al vessillo della Croce viene contrapposto quello di Dite, principio di ogni male, negatore tanto della Croce simbolo di pietà che dell'aquila simbolo di giustizia, ambedue imitati, ma contraffatti»/«Incipit of a hymn by Venanzio Fortunato, composed when at the monastery arrived a relic of the Cross donated by Justin II to Radegonda, founder of the monastery and wife of Clovis. In the Roman liturgy, the hymn is sung at Vespers on Passion Sunday (fifth of Lent) and on the feasts of the Cross in May and September. Dante takes the incipit, adapting it with the addition of inferni to the particular situation of the last canto of the Inferno. After the visit to the traitors, Dante and Virgil have reached the last of the four areas of Cocytus, where the six great wings of Lucifer loom, which Virgil announces to Dante: *Vexilla regis prodeunt inferni* (*If*. XXXIV, v. 1). The banner of the Cross is contrasted with that of Dis, the principle of all evil, negator of both the Cross symbol of piety and the eagle symbol of justice, both imitated but counterfeited», *Vexilla regis prodeunt*, a cura di Dante Balboni, in ED. See also: ZYGMUNT G. BARANSKI, *Lettura e interpretazione del canto XXXIV*, in ZYGMUNT G. BARANSKI, MARIA ANTONIETTA TERZOLI (a cura di), *Voci sull'"Inferno" di Dante*, Roma, Carocci, 2021, pp. 823-850; ENRICO FENZI, *Lucifero*, in «Chroniques Italiennes», série web, vol. 40, n. 1, 2021, pp. 4-24; SAMUELE PINNA, "*Lo 'mperador del doloroso regno". L'incontro di Dante con Lucifero nel XXXIV canto dell'"Inferno"*, in SAMUELE PINNA, *Il desiderio di vedere Dio. Amore e misericordia in Dante*, prefazione di Franco Nembrini, Roma, Ateneo Pontificio Regina Apostolorum - IF Press, 2020, pp. 115-141; ANNA PEGORETTI, *Un centro di gravità permanente: "Inferno" XXXIV e la struttura dell'universo*, in «Chroniques Italiennes», série web, vol. 39, n. 2, 2020, pp. 98-127; FILIPPO FABBRICATORE, *Lucifero e la retorica del silenzio in Inferno XXXIV: una rappresentazione necessaria*, in «L'Alighieri», n. 55, 2020, pp. 61-73; LUISA FERRETTI CUOMO, *Saggio di commento di «Inferno» XXXIV*, Padova, libreriauniversitaria.it, 2016; MARCO LAZZERINI, *Dalla parola al silenzio. La lingua dei diavoli nell'«Inferno» di Dante*, Roma, Fermenti, 2010; DOMENICO COFANO, *La retorica del silenzio nella «Divina Commedia»*, Bari, Palomar, 2003; GIUSEPPE LEDDA, *"Visio diaboli mystica": ineffabilità e parodia*, in GIUSEPPE LEDDA, *La guerra della lingua: ineffabilità, retorica e narrativa nella «Commedia» di Dante*, Ravenna, Longo, 2002, pp. 159-173; JOHN FRECCERO, *Il segno di Satana*, in JOHN FRECCERO, *La poetica della conversione*, traduzione italiana di Corrado Calenda, Il Mulino, Bologna 1989, pp. 227-244; DINO CERVIGNI, *Dante's Lucifer: the Denial of the Word*, in «Lectura Dantis», vil. III, 1988, pp. 51-62; ALDO VALLONE, *Il "silenzio" in Dante*, in «Dante Studies», n. 110 with the Annual Report of the Dante Society, 1992, pp. 45-56.

[90] All materials related to this production of the *Comedy*, especially the photographic and video ones, are available online at the Festival of Avignon's website, in the 2008 edition. In addition, some considerations on his art and videos taken from the three performances of the Trilogy can be found in the documentary GIULIO BOATO, *Theatron. Romeo Castellucci*, La Compagnie des Indes prodution et editions, 2018, available online at RaiPlay. The three cantiche are produced and collected in a DVD: ROMEO CASTELLUCCI, *Inferno, Purgatorio, Paradiso* [2 DVDs], librement inspiré de La Divine Comédie de Dante; mise en scène, Romeo Castellucci; musique originale, Scott Gibbons; chorégraphies, Romeo Castellucci et Cindy Van Acker, Éditeur [Issy-les-Moulineaux]: ARTE Éditions, 2009. See the Societas company website and the official website of the 2008 Avignon Festival for video and photographic material.

[91] As stated in the archive section of the site, the two were co-directors of the Festival from 2004 to 2013.

Before creating this 62nd Festival, we spent a great deal of time talking with the actress Valérie Dréville and the Italian artist Romeo Castellucci, whom we asked to be associate artists together. They are in very different creation spaces. Valérie Dréville, an actress, built an artist's career with directors such as Antoine Vitez, Claude Régy, Alain Françon and Anatoli Vassiliev. Romeo Castellucci, the creator of his own shows, has invented a sensitive and visual form of theatre that is extraordinarily powerful. Their art forms always offer the spectators an opportunity to have a strong and singular experience and often lead them to unexpected territories, to hear beyond words, to see beyond images[92].

In the materials related to the 62nd edition, Dréville and Castellucci discuss the artistic assumptions that led them to choose the *Divine Comedy* as the pivot around which to revolve the entire edition of the Festival: they wish to find a common, universal ground, where different artistic paths can meet, or towards which they can strive. The Festival is a privileged European context, not unfamiliar even to the form of conflict between the different parties involved, but it occupies a singular common ground, where to reflect, in this case on the principles on which the classical Western cultural canon is based, in which the performative and visual component is also implicated, to find new expressions, to give new space to artistic, social and political dialogue. From the shared search for a classical text on which to "lean" in order to offer a common starting point, comes the decision to use the *Divine Comedy*, a work that allows for an in-depth investigation of the common imagination of European artistic thought, staging and giving voice to universal examples, allowing both of them, for the occasion, to approach Dante's subject with two performances (in Castellucci's case a trilogy)[93].

Il rapporto con i classici esiste in quanto rapporto con una tensione spirituale che attraverso di essi è possibile ricondurre all'individuo e quindi all'universalità dell'individuo, di modo che attraverso i classici è possibile trovare un'intimità e una sostanziale solitudine. Essa è una scelta di controcampo in quanto i classici impongono un confronto con la tradizione,

[92] See the documentary material on the site, from the complete programme with guide, to the four-way conversation between Valérie Dréville, Romeo Castellucci, Hortense Archambault and Vincent Baudriller (Conversation pour le Festival d'Avignon 2008), all available online in the rich database of the Avignon Festival, referring to the 62nd edition in 2008: https://festival-avignon.com/en/edition-2008 (last accessed 25/05/2025). In this specific case, reference is made to the ENGL Programme.

[93] Dreville, who had never yet tackled or traversed Dante, does so on the strength of the cue and support offered by Castellucci, and here is a passage from his reasoning on the bilingual *Lectura Dantis*, using Jacqueline Risset's translation, staging The Divine Comedy. Reading with France Culture by Dante at the Cour d'Honneur du Palais des Papes at 10pm on 21 July 2008, live on the French radio programme France Culture: «Après une relecture intégrale des trois livres, j'ai choisi des chants où les références historiques n'étaient pas trop nombreuses en essayant de rétablir la trajectoire de Dante au milieu de cette forêt obscure, avec son guide Virgile et ses rencontres successives. Pour faire entendre ces voix qui accompagnent le poète, j ai choisi des acteurs qui correspondaient aux sonorités que j'imaginais à la lecture, Michaël Lonsdale, Serge Maggiani, Serge Merlin, Redjep Mitrovitsa, Dominique Valadié. Nous serons toujours deux, ou trois, sur scène pour des dialogues autour de la figure centrale de Béatrice, la femme aimée, la femme sublimée, qui arrive dans le trajet de Dante au milieu du Purgatoire. Nous ferons entendre systématiquement les derniers mots des derniers chants de chaque voyage puisqu'il y a systématiquement un retour aux étoiles, comme une sorte de rime entre les trois livres. C'est la perspective générale de toute l'œuvre. À la fin, Dante qui a traversé ces trois mondes avec son enveloppe charnelle revient sur la Terre pour écrire ce voyage. On peut lire La Divine Comédie comme une œuvre sur la place de l'artiste à l'intérieur de sa propre œuvre puisqu'il la traverse vraiment, personnellement. C'est un vrai questionnement sur l'écriture, sur la poésie dramatique, sur un monument de la littérature européenne. Pour faire entendre ce grand poème, nous avons choisi la traduction de Jacqueline Risset car elle réunit la transparence du sens et la musique, le rythme, les assonances, les consonances. Il y aura aussi des passages lus en italien par Serge Maggiani qui seront aussi projetés sur le mur du Palais des papes pour que le livre soit en quelque sorte matérialisé aux yeux des spectateurs», see *France Culture et le Festival d'Avignon présentent LA DIVINE COMÉDIE (extraits) de Dante*, dossier present on Valérie Dréville's performance available on the Avignon Festival website.

ma proprio per questo è possibile lavorare scavalcando la tradizione stessa, ma mai in un modo letterario. Questi testi non vengono affrontati con la superstizione di chi si affida alla sicurezza del classico, al contrario, vi è un tentativo di metterli a fuoco per poter meglio individuare la struttura che li sorregge e per poi scoprire, puntualmente, che questa struttura appartiene a tutti: alla fragilità e all'intimità di ogni individuo. E il libro, come oggetto, è svanito[94].

The relationship with the classics exists as a relationship with a spiritual tension that through them can be brought back to the individual and thus to the universality of the individual, so that through the classics it is possible to find intimacy and substantial solitude. It is a choice of counter-field insofar as the classics impose a confrontation with tradition, but precisely because of this it is possible to work bypassing tradition itself, but never in a literary way. These texts are not approached with the superstition of those who rely on the security of the classic, on the contrary, there is an attempt to focus on them in order to better identify the structure that underpins them and to then discover, punctually, that this structure belongs to everyone: to the fragility and intimacy of each individual. And the book, as an object, has disappeared.

Castellucci, together with Socìetas, has already participated on several occasions in the Avignon Festival, but it is with the Dante trilogy that the company is given the opportunity to confront itself for the first time with the historic and prestigious stage located in the Cour d'honneur du Palais des Papes. As Antonio Audino points out, this choice brings with it at least two central elements for the development of the show firstly, the fact that one cannot support or build stage sets by affecting the architectural conformation of the square and its buildings and, consequently, particular attention must be paid to the environment. Secondly, but not in any way related, that the past represented by that square, the very conformation of the historical city of Avignon and the fact that it is intrinsically linked to the Popes who inhabited it implies a decisive revival of the *Comedy*, in which the Popes, Avignon and the events related to them are the object of particular invective and criticism by Alighieri. Avignon is a Dantean place, evocative, imbued with a particularly political subtext, which therefore finds space in Castellucci's adaptation[95].

Inferno opens on a bare stage, letting the audience's gaze run along the centuries-old architecture of the Palazzo dei Papi. Suddenly, Castellucci himself enters. After declaring «Je suis Romeo Castellucci», the director dons a padded suit and, immediately afterwards unleashes a pack of dogs, which pounce on him and begin to bite him furiously, intending to tear him to pieces (*Figures 66-67*). This brutal premise, so indicative of the *focus* the author wishes to place on adaptation, re-proposes in an unprecedented key the *sparagmos*, the dismemberment of the Bacchae, which sees the artist/author totally defenceless in the act of creation, demanding total sacrifice. *Inferno* is violence, it is confusion, it is a presence and a stance towards art and its meaning in the world. The director presents himself with his own name and surname, as Dante himself does in his work; now the dark forest is the theatre[96]:

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[94] BONNIE MARRANCA, VALENTINA VALENTINI, *L'universale: il più semplice posto possibile. Intervista a Romeo Castellucci*, in «Biblioteca Teatrale», n. 72/74, aprile-dicembre 2005, pp. 243-245, quotation at p. 243.

[95] ANTONIO AUDINO, *La Divina Commedia della Socìetas Raffaello Sanzio*, in «Dante e l'arte», n. 9, 2022, pp. 189-198, reference to pp. 189-190.

[96] See DANIELA PALMERI, *La Divina Commedia della Socìetas Raffaello Sanzio: un viaggio labirintico nell'"inferno" della contemporaneità*, in «Dante e l'arte», n. 1, 2014, pp. 157-176, reference on p. 164. See also the director's own statements in the interview *Romeo Castellucci & La Divina Commedia* (Part I), available online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=alxo8ynoIrg&ab_channel=klararedactie (last accessed 25/05/2025).

Per la prima volta nella storia dell'Occidente, un artista è capace di inventare un universo immaginario a partire dalla sua stessa vita. Dante crea questa struttura molto moderna che è quella dell'immaginazione. Egli espande dunque il potere dell'artista salvaguardandone il suo lato fragile, impotente, perduto nell'immensità del mondo, e sotto l'autorità di Dio. Dante è allo stesso tempo potente e sopraffatto[97].

For the first time in Western history, an artist is able to invent an imaginary universe from his own life. Dante creates this very modern structure of the imagination. He thus expands the power of the artist by safeguarding his fragile, powerless side, lost in the immensity of the world, and under the authority of God. Dante is at once powerful and overwhelmed.

Castellucci describes the *Commedia* as a book of terror[98], where God's judgement looms above all unquestionable over the masses of the damned. The director re-proposes the multitudes of sorrowful individuals who inhabit Dante's *Inferno*, using the bodily masses first on the stage, and then the audience stalls. As the performance begins, in fact, a large white cloth covers the entire *cavea* starting from the last rows of the stands and, after the initial astonishment, for the people comes the sensation of suffocation and imprisonment that the condition entails, ideally transporting, for the short time it lasts, everyone to a different state: they have all become the same, a mass of solitudes. They find themselves subjected to the same condition and unable to have an alternative, like the souls of the damned, recalling Jean-Paul Sartre's famous quote, «l'enfer, c'est les Autres»[99] (*Figure 68*).

Returning to the mass of the extras (Castellucci also envisages a consistent presence of inexperienced volunteers for the show, to be trained in a few rehearsals and let them act on stage), the choice of dressing them in simple but brightly coloured clothes, illuminated by the powerful neon lights of the stage, places them in stark contrast with the darkness that dwells beyond the perimeter of the stage, from which the austere profile of the harsh spires of the buildings emerges. The spectator's gaze is even more astonished to see the incessant motion of the bodies on stage, determined by a precise affective urge, which is, however, always disregarded. The embraces or caresses with which the extras are supposed to 'find each other' are associated with contrasting sounds of loud crashes[100] (*Figures 69-70*). Then, with French phrases declaring love and closeness in the background, the extras split into pairs and begin an endless succession of mock slaughters, creating a colourful lake of bloodless bodies.

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[97] ANTONIO AUDINO*, La Divina Commedia della Socìetas Raffaello Sanzio*, cit., p. 191.

[98] «La *Divina Commedia* è un'opera impressionante. Per me a scuola rappresentava il libro del terrore. Mi ha sempre terrorizzato il giudizio di Dio, un giudizio di ferro di un Dio che gode per i condannati, condannati per colpe umane»/«The *Divine Comedy* is an shocking work. For me at school it was the book of terror. I was always terrified of God's judgement, an iron judgement of a God who rejoices in the condemned, condemned for human faults», quote from an interview with Castellucci taken from DANIELA PALMERI, *La Divina Commedia della Socìetas Raffaello Sanzio: un viaggio labirintico nell'"inferno" della contemporaneità*, cit.

[99] JEAN-PAUL SARTRE*, Huis clos*. Pièce en un acte, Saint-Amand, Gallimard, 1947, p. 93.

[100] For more on the use of music in this trilogy, see: MAURO PETRUZZIELLO, *Rifare l'immaginario con il suono: Commedia dell'Inferno dei Magazzini e Inferno di Romeo Castellucci*, in «Sciami», 2021, disponibile online DOI: 10.47109/0102 ; MAURO PETRUZZIELLO, *Toi (ir)rappresentabilità, immagine e sguardo nell'Inferno di Romeo Castellucci*, in FILIPPO GRAZZINI, STEFANO PIFFERI, GIOVANNA SANTINI (a cura di), *Dante per tutti. Tempi, luoghi, culture*, Atti del colloquio all'Università della Tuscia (Viterbo, 6-7 maggio 2021), Pisa, ETS, 2022, pp. 159-168.

Forming links and connections, in this multitude of many lonely characters and fractured sequences, there is first the fur coat, which, from the shoulders of the rediscovered Castellucci post-dismemberment, is taken by a free climber who begins to climb the impervious facade of the building with his bare hands (*Figure 71*). When he reaches the top, he drops a basketball-dense orange onto the stage, which in the various scenes returns and is passed from hand to hand between people (first a child playing, then an old woman, and so on).

Recognisable and equally mysterious is the estranged and alienating presence of an Andy Warhol, understood by some as a masked and mute Virgil, but not unlike a Lucifer who, emerging from the carcass of a car crashing onto the stage, points his finger at the audience and begins to climb up a black walkway to 'commit serial suicide'. Castellucci states in an interview: «Inferno is our abyss between superficial images»[101]. The juxtaposition of strong images and the revival of such an important artist for pop-culture, revealed above all in the choice of the colour orange and the re-proposition of the suicide in sequence a specific citation at of Warhol's 1963 work, Orange *Car Crash*, in which the artist questions his own role and experiments with new ways of re-proposing the superficiality of common living, detached, to which the public's view has become accustomed[102] (*Figure 72*):

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[101] «l'Inferno è il nostro abisso tra immagini superficiali», *verbatim* from the interview at the Salone Internazionale del Libro of Turin.

[102] «Alla fine degli anni Cinquanta Andy Warhol, da qualche anno dedito alla pittura parallelamente alla sua attività di disegnatore pubblicitario, rimane folgorato dal New Dada di Jasper Johns, di Robert Rauschenberg e dai primi vagiti Pop. Ad attirarlo è il procedimento scelto da questi artisti, consistente nel prelievo brutale della più banale e ordinaria realtà, operazione ideologicamente opposta rispetto all'esuberanza gestuale dell'Action Painting. Ne viene fuori una pittura fredda, calibrata sulle immagini trasmesse dalla pubblicità, che presuppone necessariamente il ripensamento del ruolo dell'artista, il quale non interpreta più la realtà, ma la ripete meccanicamente come in un processo industriale perpetuo, una spersonalizzazione che riflette quella individuale nelle moderne società di massa. […] L'idea fondante l'operazione artistica - l'estrapolazione di un frammento di realtà percepito all'interno di un perimetro di valori diverso, quello estetico - sostiene *Orange Car Crash*: riprende un brano di vita - sebbene di secondo passaggio - attraverso l'ennesima fotografia di un incidente stradale del 1959, pubblicata da United Press International Corporation. Replicando più volte un'immagine sulla tela, dai fondi generalmente vivacissimi come le cromie del linguaggio pubblicitario, Warhol ingenera una sorta di assuefazione visiva e conseguentemente di svuotamento drammatico della sequenza, quasi un antidoto alle emozioni forti dell'esistenza»/«At the end of the 1950s, Andy Warhol, who had been devoting himself to painting for a few years in parallel with his activity as an advertising designer, was thunderstruck by the New Dada of Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg and the first Pop vaguities. What attracted him was the procedure chosen by these artists, consisting in the brutal sampling of the most banal and ordinary reality, an operation ideologically opposed to the gestural exuberance of Action Painting. The result is a cold painting, calibrated to the images transmitted by advertising, which necessarily presupposes a rethinking of the role of the artist, who no longer interprets reality, but mechanically repeats it as in a perpetual industrial process, a depersonalisation that mirrors the individual in modern mass societies. [...] The founding idea of the artistic operation - the extrapolation of a fragment of perceived reality within a different perimeter of values, the aesthetic one - sustains *Orange Car Crash*: it takes up a piece of life - albeit a second pass - through yet another photograph of a car accident in 1959, published by United Press International Corporation. By repeatedly replicating an image on canvas, with backgrounds generally as vivid as the colours of advertising language, Warhol induces a sort of visual addiction and consequently a dramatic emptying of the sequence, almost an antidote to the strong emotions of existence», See the description of the work housed at the GAM (Galleria civica di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea) in Turin: ANDY WARHOL, *Orange Car Crash (5 Deaths 11 Times in Orange) (Orange Disaster)*, silkscreen print on acrylic on canvas, 1963, available at: https://www.gamtorino.it/it/archivio-catalogo/orange-car-crash-5-deaths-11-times-in-orange-orange-disaster/ (last accessed 25/05/2025).

Warloh è la mescolanza delle contraddizioni della vita con quelle dell'arte e viceversa; è la scelta di serializzare le immagini e di utilizzare la forza d'urto emotiva ed intellettuale provocata dalla ripetizione. Warloh è la coscienza dell'importanza della tecnica dei media nel procedimento artistico; è la camera fissa; è la cura del corpo; è l'immagine morbida; è l'uso del colore che sottolinea la malattia e l'alienazione dell'oggetto; è la star[103].

Warloh is the mixing of the contradictions of life with those of art and vice versa; it is the choice to serialise images and to use the emotional and intellectual shock force caused by repetition. Warloh is the awareness of the importance of media technique in the artistic process; it is the fixed camera; it is the treatment of the body; it is the soft image; it is the use of colour that emphasises the illness and alienation of the object; it is the star.

Particularly incisive, along with *decor* and sound elements, is the role of light. From the use of spotlights and LEDs to the projections on the walls of the building, Castellucci shapes the *silhouette* of the scene and reveals objects (remember that the performance began at 10 p.m., to make sure that the atmospheric darkness was ideal for an open-air performance). One of the most iconic moments is found in the finale when, from the open windows of the building's *façade*, analogue televisions light up, in which several letters appear from which the word E-T-O-I-L-E-S ('stars') is formed. Then some screens begin to fall with thunderous crashes, leaving the last message still and fixed: T-O-I ('you'). Castellucci never takes this evolving relationship with the audience for granted: he avoids any easy and appealing solution, preferring instead a more visceral, violent and sincere approach[104].

A further decisive moment in which light plays a major role is in discovering, among the throng of extras, a luminous box, inside which children are intent on playing, completely unaware of the context that surrounds and observes them. The declared reference is to Dante's Limbo, where the magic spirits are to be found, as well as all those children who died before being baptised[105] (*Figure 73*).

The decision to include children and animals on stage (in addition to the initial dogs, a magnificent white horse is placed in contrast to the multitude of flamboyant extras) reinforces the principle whereby, paraphrasing Giorgio Agamben's theory, in the infant and in the animal dwells

[103] ROSSELLA BONFIGLIOLI (a cura di), *Frequenze barbare. Teatro Ambiente/Cinema/Mass Media/Metropoli/Musica/Pornografia nel Carrozzone Magazzini criminali Prod.*, cit., p. 70.
[104] On this particular "violent" poetics investigated by Castellucci with his art, within the company and then personally, see: CARLO FANELLI, *The Sound and Visual Dramaturgy of Romeo Castellucci*, in «Mimesis Journal», vol. 13, n. 1, 2024, pp. 127-149; JEAN-LOUIS PERRIER, *La disciplina dell'errore. Il teatro di Romeo Castellucci. Saggi e interviste*, Napoli, Cronopio, 2022; CARLO FANELLI, *Le metamorfosi registiche di Romeo Castellucci*, in LUCA BANDIRALI, DANIELA CASTALDO, FRANCESCO CERAOLO (a cura di), *Re-directing. La regia nello spettacolo del XXI secolo*, Università del Salento, 2020, pp. 187-195; SALVATORE TEDESCO (a cura di), *Romeo Castellucci: Estetica. Esperienza teatrale, tragedia, dramma musicale*, Milano, Meltemi, 2018; DOROTA SEMENOWICZ, *The Theatre of Romeo Castellucci and Socìetas Raffaello Sanzio. From Icon to Iconoclasm, From Word to Image, From Symbol to Allegory*, London, Pallgrave Macmillan, 2018; PIERSANDRA DI MATTEO (a cura di), *Toccare il reale*, Napoli, Cronopio, 2015; OLIVIERO PONTE DI PINO, *Romeo Castellucci & Socìetas Raffaello Sanzio*, Milano, Doppiozero, 2013; CARLO FANELLI, *Il rito ibrido della violenza*, in «Fata Morgana», a. VI, n. 17 maggio-agosto, 2012, pp. 75-92; ANNALISA SACCHI, *Il posto del re. Estetiche della regia teatrale nel modernismo contemporaneo*, Roma, Bulzoni, 2012; ANNALISA SACCHI, *«L'estetica è tutto». Conversazione con Romeo Castellucci*, in «Biblioteca teatrale», n. 91-92, 2009, pp. 123-34; TIMMY DE LAET, EDITH CASSIERS, *The Regenerative Ruination of Romeo Castellucci*, in «Performance Research», vol. 20, n. 3, 2015, pp. 18-28.
[105] See *If.* IV.

that condition outside the *logos* that allows a deeper and more sincere perception of reality[106]. Asked about this particular choice, especially for the contrast created with the strong and violent setting of *Inferno* described so far, Castellucci replied as follows:

R. CASTELLUCCI: Plusieurs états regardent vers l'enfance: être spectateur, être acteur, mais aussi la folie, la vieillesse, ce qu'on pourrait appeler l'"idiotie". Il ne s'agit pas de "faire l'enfant", ce qui est une pose, un mime dégradant. Mais plutôt, tout simplement, d'"être un enfant" de nouveau, qu'on soit acteur, vieillard ou fou. L'enfant peut pleurer à tout moment, il est la victime désignée, et cela est impressionnant en termes de tension sur le plateau. Un enfant sur le plateau, c'est une ombre revenue des premiers temps, une bouche d'origine. C'est très beau.

H. ARCHAMBAULT: Du coup, les spectateurs réagissent parfois fortement à cette présence de l'enfant. La tension est palpable quand il est sur scène: que va-t-il faire? Et chacun s'identifie à sa fragilité.

R. CASTELLUCCI: Je comprends ces réactions de spectateurs. Mais ils voient souvent de la fragilité là où l'enfant est en général le véritable maître du plateau. C'est lui qui, la plupart du temps, maîtrise ce qui se déroule sur la scène. Un enfant fait ce qu'il veut sur un plateau: il provoque une éclipse totale de la représentation théâtrale tout en la révélant, car il est ce qu'il est, sans artifice, sans manipulation[107].

R. CASTELLUCCI: Several states look back to childhood: being a spectator, being an actor, but also madness, old age, what we might call 'idiocy'. It's not a question of 'acting like a child', which is a pose, a degrading mime. But rather, quite simply, to 'be a child' again, whether you are an actor, an old man or a madman. The child can cry at any moment, he/she's the designated victim, and that's impressive in terms of the tension on stage. A child on the stage is a shadow from the early days, an original mouth. It's very beautiful.

H. ARCHAMBAULT: As a result, the audience sometimes reacts strongly to the presence of the child. The tension is palpable when he/she's on stage: what's he/she going to do? And everyone identifies with his/her fragility.

R. CASTELLUCCI: I understand the audience's reactions. But they often see fragility where the child is usually the real master of the stage. It is the child who, most of the time, controls what happens on stage. A child does what he/she wants on a stage: he/she provokes a total eclipse of the theatrical representation while revealing it, because he/she is what he/she is, without artifice, without manipulation.

As Valentini points out: «In the performances of the Socìetas Raffaello Sanzio, the actor is a plastic component together with the animals and the stage machinery, and the voice also assimilated to a plastic body, so that the sound ensemble is a component within the dramatic rhythm of the performance in its organicity»[108].

The next performance, *Purgatorio*, differs in form from the previous one. First of all, it is staged inside the Châteaublanc of Parc des Expositions, at 6 p.m. The scenic setting of the show reflects in every way the sets of the 19th-century bourgeois theatre, hyper-realistic, opening the curtain on a minimalist contemporary living room with a grand piano (the same one set on fire in *Inferno*). In what appears to be a cosy family setting, supertitles are immediately inserted, anticipating for the viewer the action that is about to unfold on stage and portraying the three performers as Stars, First, Second and Third. The natural flow of the performance is constantly urged on and cut off,

[106] See GIORGIO AGAMBEN, *Infanzia e storia*, Einaudi, Torino, 1978; GIORGIO AGAMBEN, *L'aperto. L'uomo e l'animale*, Milano, Bollati Boringhieri, 2002; GIORGIO AGAMBEN, *Il linguaggio e la morte. Un seminario sul luogo della negatività*, Torino, Einaudi, 2008.

[107] VALÉRIE DRÉVILLE, ROMEO CASTELLUCCI, HORTENSE ARCHAMBAULT, VINCENT BAUDRILLER, *Conversation pour le Festival d'Avignon*, cit., pp. 68-69.

[108] «Negli spettacoli della Socìetas Raffaello Sanzio l'attore è componente plastica insieme agli animali e alle macchine sceniche e anche la voce è assimilata a un corpo plastico, per cui l'insieme sonoro è componente all'interno del ritmo drammatico dello spettacolo nella sua organicità», VALENTINA VALENTINI, *Teatro contemporaneo 1989-2019*, cit., p. 138. See also FELICE CIMATTI, *La bestia teatrale. L'animalità del teatro di Romeo Castellucci*, in SALVATORE TEDESCO (a cura di), *Romeo Castellucci: Estetica. Esperienza teatrale, tragedia, dramma musicale*, cit., pp. 135-57.

constituting an alienating element of Brechtian memory, requiring the audience's constant attention and opinion on what is presented. The story of *Purgatorio* takes on the dark connotations of the tragedy, presenting a story of violence and abuse by the father on the younger son, in the total and dissociated silence of the mother. The apparent simplicity of the scenic conception reveals all the tragic subtext present in the second *cantica*: what for Dante is expiation and awareness of the divine plan in one's own and others' lives, for Castellucci becomes a very personal reflection on the tragic device, which tends towards catharsis and offers the audience the real decision of whether or not to be able to "dissolve" the cruelty of human actions, feeling pity for the son and forgiveness towards the father (a monster of himself, himself a victim of his own human limitation).

As in classical tragedy[109], there are only three actors on stage, the violence (in this case sexual, against the child) is never shown on stage, but hovers with cries and exhaustive sounds like an adversary Τύχη ready to upset the apparent balance, declared through the objective correlative of the cowboy hat, visual sign and symbol of the act[110] (*Figures 74-75-76*). The play, divided into three acts, is strongly marked by oneirism during the second act, offering the audience a moment of reflection on the events that occurred in the first through video clips projected onto the backdrop of the stage that has now become a giant screen. If Dante offers in various episodes of *Purgatory* moments of reflection on the arts and of dialogue between different arts (see the plasticity of the images of the psalms described in the Cantos of the Superb or the dialogues with musicians, painters, illuminators, writers), Castellucci directly interrogates the *medium* to make a crossing of the field between theatre and cinema, splitting the naturalistic realism of the first and third acts by resorting to surrealist-psychedelic visual juxtapositions, full of references to nature and flowers, as if to suggest, through colour, the vein of madness and toxicity of unresolved relationships.

The third act is set in the son's adulthood. In this new phase of his life, the father, sick and old, is the object of the son's compassionate care, and thus, a new affective and relational dimension is staged between the two men, capable of shaking the opinion of the room. *Purgatorio* is the only *cantica* in which Dante savours the temporal dimension typical of mortal life, therefore in the adaptation staged by Castellucci a mimetic reality is proposed, an «intervalle», as the dramaturg Piersandra Di Matteo defines it. In this final détente of relations, or supposedly so, the audience is

[109] See MARGHERITA LAERA, *Comedy, Tragedy, and "Universal Structures": Socìetas Raffaello Sanzio's Inferno, Purgatorio, Paradiso*, in «TheatreForum», 2010, pp. 3-15.

[110] In this regard, it should not be overlooked that only a few years earlier, the Oscar-winning film by director Ang Lee, *Brokeback Mountain* [*The Secrets of Brokeback Mountain*], based on the novel by Annie Proulx, starring actors Heath Ledger and Jake Gyllenhaal, had been produced and released to the general public. The fact that Castellucci resorts precisely to the depiction and definition of his father's homosexuality through the symbol of the cowboy hat strongly recalls the film's adult imagery, centred on the lives of these two men working on American ranches, and clashes with the pure, fairy-tale imagery of the 1995 cartoon *Toy Story* [*Toy Story- The World of Toys*], directed by John Lasseter and produced by Pixar Animation Studios, in which one of the protagonists is the cowboy toy Woody.

called upon to come to terms with its own personal yardstick of judgement, finally wondering why: «La confusion entre réalité et imagination devient l'ultime frontière de la vérité»[111].

The last cantica, as in Dante's *Commedia*, involves an *excessus*, a *trasumanar*. In fact, we pass from the very bodily condition of Dante's physical effort in climbing the mountain to the more liberating and abstract sensation of flying through the heavens, finally arriving at the white rose of Empyrean. Castellucci, for this last performance of the trilogy, decides to resort to installation art, setting his *Paradise* in the Église des Célestins, a 14th-century church. In this evocative setting, there are no animals or bodies on stage, only music, lights and scenery (*Figures 77-78-79*).

At the centre of the scene stands the piano, an incendiary element in *Inferno* and then a symbolic instrument of the bourgeoisie in the bright, violent drawing room of *Purgatorio*, now repurposed as a symbol of the artistic work *Commedia*. The public can enter the church where the artistic installation is set up one at a time, between 1 and 3.30 p.m., and from 4.30 p.m. to 7 p.m. The choice of time is not casual, as these are the times when the light of the sun, the star so present in *Paradise* and astronomical metaphor par excellence of divine power, reaches a specific inclination together with the architecture of the church and the dislocation of the objects, creating with the water that floods the entire floor of the nave particular refractive games. At the centre of this installation of light and water is the piano, immersed in Gibbons' electroacoustic music.

If in the thirty-third canto Dante uses various images that are particularly effective for the medieval world to describe the incredible vision of God, such as that of the volume, composed of single fascicles, divided and folded (*folii*) then sewn together, an object capable of being both one and multiple, Castellucci decides to create a fleeting experience, but one of high intensity: he builds a *Wunderkammer*, in which he encloses his own vision of immensity, representing the artistic operation, leaving each spectator the possibility of personally experiencing his own unique and unrepeatable eternity[112].

The protagonist, together with the ascetic light coming from the large windows and water, a presence harbinger of life and renewal, is music, recalled by the piano, always the same but differently declined, here immersed in water, giving new voice to its intrinsic resonance. Castellucci, like Dante, interprets with his own artistic means the personal confrontation with the ineffable, which manifests

[111] See PIERSANDRA DI MATTEO, *Devant le chef-d'œuvre* (extraits), in ROMEO CASTELLUCCI/SOCÌETAS RAFFAELLO SANZIO, *Inferno, Purgatorio, Paradiso*. Trilogie librement inspirée de La Divine Comédie de Dante, libretto di sala realizzato per lo spettacolo al Festival di Avignone, available online on the Festival website, pp. 9-10, quotation at p. 9.

[112] In a later version of *Paradise* (*Paradise II*), the presence of a character is also added, his face completely covered, suspended a few metres above the ground in an unsuccessful attempt to free himself from the edge of the wall that holds him back. Contorting himself in a painful agony to free himself from the edge of the wall that holds him back, moving amidst a downpour of water falling to the ground, this new possible version of the site-specific installation Paradiso confirms once again the impossibility of articulating the *visio Dei* in expressive terms.

itself in all its power by entering into a relationship with man, a haptic contemplation that evokes the verses of *Paradise*:

> Così la mente mia, tutta sospesa,
> mirava fissa, immobile e attenta,
> e sempre di mirar faceasi accesa[113].

The first performance, *Inferno*, incorporates postmodern theatre's strong, chaotic and dynamic participation (*Figure 80*). *Purgatorio*, with its three actors, is a contemporary tragedy that, through theatre direction, erodes the unrealistic assumptions of bourgeois happiness through a powerful visual device full of twentieth-century oneirism (*Figure 81*). The third performance is a journey of the senses, synaesthetic, in which the director's body and the spectator's body finally merge in the mutual contemplation of the work produced by the summation of these two perspectives, both insufficient and lacking in grace (*Figure 82*). The piano of the three canticles, with its painful, violated and now silent chords, remains the emblematic object of artistic metaphysical research, the artist's mad checkmate to his own creative operation.

The focal point, which returns in all episodes, is always that of the gaze. For Castellucci, it is the spectator who controls and decides the scene:

> L'écriture de la scène passe à travers des mots, bien sûr, mais aussi par les images, les sons, tout ce qui peut toucher le corps et le coeur du spectateur. Sans aucune forme de hiérarchie, de refus ni de fétichisme. La palette est totalement ouverte. C'est pourquoi, selon moi, le spectateur et ses sensations occupent la place fondamentale. Tout est possible, par la grâce insoupçonnée du plateau. Le spectateur n'est pas un horizon, mais plutôt un destin. Si je provoque le public et considère la salle comme un espace à investir, à conquérir, la communication devient univoque, et toute ambiguïté, toute poésie, deviennent impossibles. Ce qui m'intéresse est davantage cette énergie tournante qui lie de manière équivoque le plateau et la salle. S'il y a manipulation du spectateur, cela ne fonctionne plus, car il devient passif, et n'a plus la force d'adresser ses vibrations au plateau. Le spectateur et le spectacle ont besoin d'un espace de liberté, sinon la représentation devient de la pure communication, et le message revient en force, politique, social ou publicitaire, c'est à peu près la même chose[114].

> Writing for the stage involves words, of course, but also images, sounds, anything that can touch the body and the heart. Without any form of hierarchy, refusal or fetishism. The palette is totally open. That's why, in my opinion, the spectator and his sensations occupy the fundamental place. Everything is possible, thanks to the unsuspected grace of the stage. The spectator is not a horizon, but rather a destiny. If I provoke the audience and consider the auditorium as a space to be taken over, to be conquered, communication becomes univocal, and any ambiguity, any poetry, becomes impossible. I'm more interested in this revolving energy that equivocally links the stage and the audience. the stage and the auditorium. If the spectator is manipulated, it no longer works, because he becomes passive and no longer has the strength to send his vibrations to the stage. The spectator and the show need a space of freedom. Otherwise, the performance becomes pure communication, and the message comes back with a vengeance - political, social or advertising, it's all pretty much the same thing.

Obscured by a veil waiting to be lifted, the spectator's gaze follows Castellucci's artistic parable in his dialogue with Dante and his *Commedia*, in a constant hand-to-hand, even when silent haptic touch. When the veil is lifted, all art vanishes and remains only in the memory of those who participated, those who recorded it in their souls.

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[113] *Pd*. XXXIII, vv. 97-99.
[114] VALÉRIE DRÉVILLE, ROMEO CASTELLUCCI, HORTENSE ARCHAMBAULT, VINCENT BAUDRILLER, *Conversation pour le Festival d'Avignon*, cit., p. 47.

4.4. Babilonia Teatri: Theatre and inclusion for a participatory life experience

Contrary to previous findings, with respect to the solidity of artistic operations and the duration of paths (starting with the very components of the companies and the inflexible poetics professed), scholars have found a watershed moment in the early 2000s, in which new companies are formed that do not want to trigger a rupture with the past (as had happened with the Nuovo Teatro), but offer a clear continuation of it. The years, which not by chance saw Castellucci's last major production in 2008, were the same ones in which a global financial crisis hit Europe, and in Italy, funds for the performing arts became increasingly scarce, with objective consequences in the field of research and lively experimentation. The companies that find themselves living with these problems make exogenous factors and their spurious artistic preparation a force to be reckoned with in order to renew the dramaturgical medium through its own coefficients. In addition to that, the 'project-based' approach, determined by the scarcity of resources, now becomes an inescapable part of poetic action[115]. Within this not entirely idyllic framework, new companies are appearing on the horizon of Dante's adaptation, proposing new forms of staging the *Comedy*, especially as the first centenary of the New Millennium, 2015, approaches.

Babilonia Teatri is a theatre company founded in 2005 by Enrico Castellani (1977) and Valeria Raimondi (1979) (*Figure 83*). Coming from similar backgrounds, they created their reality after collaborating with the same theatre company in the province of Verona, which was involved in organising theatre workshops and activities for children, young adults, people with disabilities, and disadvantaged and marginalised communities, such as prison inmates[116]. With these people and the company Babilonia Teatri created its own vision and artistic language: a vision that is more than a practice or a style, which aims to give voice to certain historical and cultural events and above all to offer those who have no voice in contemporary society the opportunity to participate as part of the cast on stage.

During their formative years, Raimondi and Castellani had the opportunity to establish future collaborations with figures who would later become an integral part of their team, such as theatre technician Luca Scotton and organiser Alice Castellani. As Valeria Screpis suggests:

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[115] See SILVIA MEI, *Gli anni Dieci della nuova scena italiana. Un tracciato in dieci punti*, in «Annali Online di Ferrara - Lettere», vol. VII, n. 2, 2012, pp. 232-245; MAURO PETRUZZIELLO, *Attore, performer, recitazione nel nuovo teatro italiano degli anni Zero*, in «Acting Archives», a. IV, n. 8 Novembre, 2014, pp. 61-86; VALERIA SCREPIS, *I teatri degli anni Duemila. Rinnovamento estetico e nuove esigenze economico-organizzative in Babilonia Teatri, Fibre Parallele, Menoventi, TeatrInGestAzione*, in «Mimesis Journal», vol. 7, n. 2, 2018, pp. 103-122 (open access).

[116] See STEFANO CASI, *Per un teatro pop. La lingua di Babilonia Teatri*, Corazzano, Titivillus, 2013, pp. 26-27.

Quelle degli anni Zero sono, in genere, formazioni composte da pochi membri, spesso coincidenti con i fondatori, a cui si aggiungono a volte elementi subentrati in seguito, che ne costituiscono il nucleo forte e stabile, mentre i collaboratori esterni si alternano a seconda dei progetti. All'interno di questa particolare configurazione il modello di funzionamento tipico delle compagnie del teatro di regia non sussiste, così come non ne sono riprodotte la gerarchia o la struttura organizzativa: spesso è rifiutato il concetto stesso di regia, sostituito da quello di ideazione[117].

Those of the noughties are generally formations with only a few members, often coinciding with the founders, who are sometimes joined by later elements, forming the strong and stable core, while external collaborators alternate depending on the projects. Within this particular configuration, the typical operating model of directing theatre companies does not exist, just as their hierarchy or organisational structure is not reproduced: the very concept of directing is often rejected, replaced by that of devising.

This reflection fits well with the work of Babilonia, which, from the very beginning, will involve collaborations rather than annexations to its own company. Starting with the 2006 show *Panopticon Frankenstein*, the company cultivates a specific theatrical approach, later described as *punk*, *pop*, *rock* or, simply, alternative. From the very first performances, they present in the dramaturgy and in the writing of their texts their vision of the world with a theatre accessible to all, «a theatre as pure enunciation and presence»[118] where the word is at the centre of a new reflection. Dramaturgy is the centre of their scenic action, but without inflexion, without expressiveness, with an inordinate use of repetition, becoming a word-thing, quickly enunciated without a break, bringing to the surface the superficiality of the surrounding reality:

I testi di Babilonia Teatri si insinuano dunque in questa tradizione, recando con sé un'originalità dovuta a diversi fattori: *metricamente*, l'uso di un verso quasi sempre brevissimo, talvolta composto anche solo di una parola; *foneticamente*, l'uso di vocali e consonanti disposte secondo una precisa esigenza enunciativa; *teatralmente*, l'uso di un ritmo che agevola una recitazione fortemente cadenzata; *lessicalmente*, l'uso di un italiano elementare, talvolta sporcato da una koinè veneta. Ma soprattutto, *concettualmente*, l'uso di una *parola* intensamente connessa con la *cosa* e, quindi, l'aderenza del verso alla realtà. I versi di Babilonia Teatri sembrano presentarsi come fotocopia della realtà, sia pure adulterata da una tecnica complessa: una pseudo-oggettività che si pone come specchio (deformante) in cui la realtà stessa rimbalza, anche grazie alla sottrazione dell'individualità autorale[119].

Babilonia Teatri's texts are thus insinuated into this tradition, bringing with them an originality due to various factors: *metrically*, the use of an almost always very short verse, sometimes composed of just one word; *phonetically*, the use of vowels and consonants arranged according to a precise enunciative need; theatrically, *the* use of a rhythm that facilitates a strongly cadenced recitation at; *lexically*, the use of elementary Italian, sometimes contaminated by a Veneto koine. But above all, *conceptually*, the use of a *word* intensely connected with the *thing* and, therefore, the adherence of the verse to reality. The verses of Babilonia Teatri seem to present themselves as a photocopy of reality, albeit adulterated by a complex technique: a pseudo-objectivity that acts as a (deforming) mirror in which reality itself bounces back, also thanks to the subtraction of authorial individuality.

In little more than fifteen years, the company has collected a series of prestigious awards, such as the Scenario prize with Made in Italy in 2007 or the Silver Lion for theatrical innovation at the Venice Biennale in 2016. *Pop*, *rock* and *punk* are the primary stylistic genres (especially in reference to the world of music and advertising to which they refer) through which Babilonia Teatri build their

[117] VALERIA SCREPIS, *I teatri degli anni Duemila. Rinnovamento estetico e nuove esigenze economici-organizzative in Babilonia Teatri, Fibre Parallele, Menoventi, TeatrInGestAzione*, cit.
[118] «un teatro come pura enunciazione e presenza», STEFANO CASI, *Per un teatro pop. La lingua di Babilonia Teatri*, cit., p. 67.
[119] Ivi, pp. 55-56.

own form of theatre. Their workshops are enriched by a plurality of individuals and communities working to bring each scene to life, thus managing not only to be credible but also true to life. Even the definition of the company's stage name derives from this chaotic, magmatic, tendentially negative connotation that the term Babylon has, as actress Raimondi recalls in an interview, as a biblical city emblematic of the corruption of the world, with teeming vitality, associated with the self-determination of recognising oneself in theatre, but plural: «The idea of not having an edifying name amuses us... In our parts some old lady still uses the expression "L'è tuta 'na babilonia" to say, precisely, that everything is going to hell»[120].

Babilonia Teatri's approach to Dante and his works is one of the most unconventional. They decided to start from the text, from a careful study of the *Commedia*, articulating this moment of study together with people who do not usually have the opportunity to study the poet's works. The result, as director Castellani says, is:

> un furto, a tutti gli effetti. È un'appropriazione indebita, ma non ingiustificata. Abbiamo rubato immagini, umori, emozioni e abbiamo provato a restituirli seguendo la nostra sensibilità, senza timore né di tradire, né di distrcere o falsare l'essenza della *Commedia*. *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* e *Paradiso* sono parole che contengono al loro interno veri e propri mondi; parole che da sole sono in grado di evocare scenari infiniti, che hanno allo stesso tempo declinazioni concrete e concettuali. *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* e *Paradiso* sono parte integrante della nostra cultura e del nostro immaginario. È sufficiente accostare a queste parole un'azione, un tema, un'idea perché tutto assuma una luce diversa. Sono parole che contengono in sé, per la storia che hanno, la capacità di mutare il nostro sguardo, di generare una prospettiva attraverso cui filtrare ciò che abbiamo di fronte[121].

> theft, for all intents and purposes. It is an embezzlement, but not unjustified. We have stolen images, moods, emotions and have tried to restore them according to our sensitivity, without fear of betraying, distorting or distorting the essence of the *Comedy*. *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* are words that contain real worlds within them; words that alone are capable of evoking infinite scenarios, which have both concrete and conceptual meanings. *Inferno*, *Purgatory* and *Paradise* are an integral part of our culture and imagination. It is enough to approach these words with an action, a theme, an idea for everything to take on a different light. They are words that contain within themselves, because of the history they have, the capacity to change our gaze, to generate a perspective through which to filter what we have in front of us.

According to them, the *Comedy* offers the opportunity for characters, situations and even the titles of the cantica themselves to become the subject of a theatrical representation that enhances their meaning in contemporary terms. For their project, as on many other occasions, Babilonia Teatri decided start from the material datum, from wanting to collaborate and give voice to marginal realities, asking themselves what *Hell* is today, who lives in it and how they live in it. They therefore declare the following founding and communicative instances at the basis of their Dante trilogy:

> chi abita i margini oggi attraversa un inferno personale e sociale?
> O sono i nostri occhi che non sanno dare valore a esistenze che continuiamo a classificare sulla base di continui e arbitrari stigmi sociali?

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[120] «L'idea di non avere un nome edificante ci diverte… Dalle nostre parti qualche signora anziana usa ancora l'espressione "L'è tuta 'na babilonia" per dire, appunto, che va tutto a catafascio», VALERIA RAIMONDI in JACOPO LANTIERI (ed.), *Iperscene 2: Teatro Sotterraneo, Sonia Brunelli, Ambra Senatore, Muta Imago, Pathosformel, Babilonia Teatri, Dewey Dell*, Riano, Editoria & Spettacolo, 2009, p. 103.

[121] LAURA BEVIONE, ROBERTO RIZZENTE, FRANCESCO TEI (a cura di), *S'i'fossi Dante, arderei 'l mondo. Otto registi in cerca d'autore*, in «Hystrio», 2021, pp. 56-61, quotation at p. 56.

È possibile riconquistarsi un angolo di paradiso, un pezzo d'olimpo, quando fin dall'infanzia ti è stata negata la possibilità di essere bambino?
Purgare è una condizione intrinseca dell'essere umano?
O forse proprio le persone che il senso comune confina in un limbo hanno la possibilità di vivere senza preoccuparsi della propria condizione?[122]

who inhabits the margins today goes through personal and social hell?
Or is it our eyes that cannot give value to existences that we continue to classify on the basis of continuous and arbitrary social stigmas?
Is it possible to regain a corner paradise, a piece of Olympus, when since childhood you have been denied the chance to be a child?
Is purging an intrinsic condition of being human?
Or perhaps the very people whom common sense confines to limbo are allowed to live without worrying about their condition?

The first steps of their journey to the *Comedy* can be traced back to 2012, when they were invited by Cristina Valenti to take part in a workshop at the Casa dei Risvegli in Bologna, a facility where patients who have been in a coma are received and rehabilitated. What was supposed to be a moment of dialogue and sharing within the facility and for its guests, turned instead into a performance, *Pinocchio*, in which the company Gli amici di Luca, whose members are all coma survivors, participated. The structure of this show and the instructive *modus operandi* adopted to produce it were indispensable in preparing the work on the *Comedy*.

The stage setting in *Pinocchio* is classical and frontal. Once again it is the text written by several hands that is the protagonist, an ancient fable interconnected with personal stories of a return to life, told with purity and without filters on a bare stage, to draw attention to a reality so distant from everyday life but so effective that it succeeds in making one reflect on one's own world:

È da un po' di tempo che abbiamo voglia di fare uno spettacolo a partire da una suggestione letteraria, ma non volevamo un testo teatrale che ci avrebbe costretti dentro briglie troppo strette. Cercavamo un'opera e un autore in cui poter navigare, da cui poter rubare e soprattutto che sentissimo vicino, affine. Quando è tornato tra le nsotre mani Pinocchio di Collodi abbiamo immediatamente realizzato che era ciò che cercavamo. Per noi mettere in scena *Pinocchio* è proseguire un percorso e una ricerca che da sempre consideriamo volta a creare un teatro che sia in grado di essere popolare. Intendendo con popolare un teatro che sia leggibile, magari a livelli diversi, da tutti i pubblici. Che con i pubblici sia in grado e voglia dialogare[123].

For some time now, we have wanted to do a show based on a literary suggestion, but we did not want a theatrical text that would force us into too tight a reins. We were looking for a work and an author that we could navigate, that we could steal from and above all that we felt was close, akin. When Collodi's Pinocchio came back into our hands, we immediately realised that this was what we were looking for. For us, to stage *Pinocchio* is to continue a path and research that we have always considered aimed at creating a theatre that is able to be popular. By popular we mean theatre that can be read, perhaps at different levels, by all audiences. That is able and willing to dialogue with audiences.

The typical accumulation dramaturgy written by Castellani is acted out by the actors-actants and the author himself, who is present on stage and external to it at the same time. Often Castellani interacts with the actors from the stalls, thus in direct continuity with the audience, as a sort of

[122] See the material available on the company's official website regarding the show *Inferno*.
[123] This statement by Babilonia Teatri, taken from the material published for *Pinocchio*, now no longer online, has many of the assumptions that will lead to the choice of Dante as the next author to deal with, and offers a vertical glimpse of the working method that will be used in both spectacle-projects, with various collaborations; See STEFANO CASI, *Per un teatro pop. La lingua di Babilonia Teatri*, cit., p. 146.

coryphaeus. The effect is an alienating and challenging dialogue/confrontation for the audience, which gives space to each of the actors and not so much to the narration of the story, continually unveils the scenic installations and machinery, uses written signs and forces the audience to be completely aware of themselves, their thoughts and desires during the performance[124].

Building on this collaborative experience, in 2014 Babilonia Teatri began a new collaboration with the company Zero Favole APS of Reggio Emilia[125] (*Figures 84-85-86-87*). This special project still travels in the orbit of the minority, of the margins of society, of the unseen, building a three-year journey with children and young adults with different abilities. The premiere took place on December the third, 2014, at the Cavallerizza Theatre in Reggio Emilia, as part of the Sixth International Day of People with Disabilities, and then it went on an Italian tour.

The first performance realised as part of this project, *Inferno*, had a strong impact. In presenting the show, the company Babilonia Teatri published the following statements:

> *Inferno* è un paradosso.
> È pensabile ragionare live intorno all'*Inferno* di Dante con una compagnia composta da persone disabili che non hanno mai letto la *Divina Commedia*?
> La risposta è sì. È possibile.
> L'*Inferno* di Dante è un cammino iniziatico, è una discesa agli inferi, è il racconto della complessità umana e della nostra paura di incontrarla e di conoscerla.
> Il nostro *Inferno* è l'incontro con persone e con mondi che generalmente non conosciamo e con cui non veniamo in contatto, mondi sotterranei che hanno diritto di venire alla luce per mostrare la loro bellezza e le loro bruttezze: per manifestare ed esprimere la loro ricchezza.
> *Inferno* è la determinazione a far salire sul palco chi sembra non averne le qualità e le caratteristiche per provare a fare un salto oltre lo stigma e incontrare l'umanità e la persona.
> *Inferno* è un teatro che interroga. Interroga su quale sia il teatro che ha senso fare. Interroga sul ruolo del teatro. Interroga su quale sia il limite oltre il quale si smette di fare teatro per muoversi in territori ignoti.
> *Inferno* è il desiderio di non piangersi addosso e di non farsi compiangere dagli altri, ma di raccontare attraverso un equilibrato mix di empatia e di ironia come sia troppo semplice nascondersi dietro la maschera del diverso. Come sia troppo comodo cercare approvazione perché si è costretti a vivere il proprio inferno quotidiano.
>
> Affermare che Daniele è down è corretto, ma Daniele è molto altro.
> Affermare che Selika è in sedia a rotelle è corretto, ma Selika è molto altro.
> Lamin è nero, è alto e non parla l'italiano, ma Lamin prima di tutto è Lamin.
>
> *Inferno* è la voglia, il desiderio e il sogno di continuare a fare del teatro un luogo vivo.
>
> Di fare del teatro un polo capace di trasformare le cose e le persone.
>
> *Inferno* è la convinzione che il teatro oggi deve occuparsi prima delle persone che di se stesso.
>
> *Inferno* è il bisogno e la scelta di fare un teatro necessario.
>
> *Inferno* è fare teatro con chi non risponde alle logiche del teatro, ma inconsapevolmente le sovverte, le ribalta e mandandole all'aria le rinnova.

[124] Ivi, pp. 146-162.
[125] "ZeroFavole wants to encourage people with disabilities to develop and realise their creative, artistic and intellectual potential, not only for their own benefit, but also for the enrichment of society". See the history of the company since its foundation in 2010 on its website, the result of a project of creative inclusion between different abilities: http://www.zerofavole.it/associazione/ (last accessed 25/05/2025).

Inferno rivendica al teatro il suo ruolo di iniettore dialettico, capace di aprire squarci sul presente. Di metterci in crisi.

Inferno è un'oasi, un miraggio, una meta oltre l'orizzonte.

Inferno è un non luogo. Inferno va oltre lo stigma.

Inferno è una doccia di varechina per scrostare etichette veritiere, ma a tal punto univoche da falsare la realtà.

Inferno è magma incandescente per la nostra estetica. È nutrimento per la nostra etica[126].

Inferno is a paradox.
Is it conceivable to reason live around Dante's *Inferno* with a company composed of disabled people who have never read the *Divine Comedy*?
The answer is yes. It is possible.
Dante's *Inferno* is an initiatory journey, it is a descent into hell, it is a tale of human complexity and our fear of encountering and knowing it.
Our *hell* is the encounter with people and worlds that we generally do not know and do not come into contact with, underground worlds that have the right to come into the light to show their beauty and their ugliness: to manifest and express their richness.
Inferno is the determination to bring on stage those who seem to lack the qualities and characteristics to try to leap beyond the stigma and meet humanity and the person.
Inferno is a theatre that interrogates. It interrogates what kind of theatre makes sense. It questions the role of theatre. It questions what is the limit beyond which one stops doing theatre to move into unknown territories.
Inferno is the desire not to feel sorry for oneself and not to be pitied by others, but to tell through a balanced mix of empathy and irony how it is all too easy to hide behind the mask of being different. How it is too convenient to seek approval because one is forced to live one's own daily hell.

To say that Daniele is down is correct, but Daniele is much more.
To say that Selika is in a wheelchair is correct, but Selika is much more.
Lamin is black, he is tall and does not speak Italian, but Lamin is first and foremost Lamin.

Inferno is the will, the desire and the dream to continue to make theatre a living place.

To make theatre a pole capable of transforming things and people.

Inferno is the conviction that theatre today must deal first with people rather than with itself.

Inferno is the need and the choice to make necessary theatre.

Inferno is to make theatre with those who do not respond to the logic of theatre, but unconsciously subvert it, overturn it, and revive it.

Inferno claims for theatre its role as a dialectical injector, capable of opening glimpses of the present. To put us in crisis.

Inferno is an oasis, a mirage, a destination beyond the horizon.

Inferno is a non-place. Inferno goes beyond the stigma.

Inferno is a shower of bleach to peel off labels that are true, but so unambiguous as to distort reality.

Inferno is incandescent magma for our aesthetics. It is nourishment for our ethics.

From this simple sequence one perceives the irony inherent in Castellani's scripts, a salient element of Babilonia Teatri's art, which finds the strength to speak of the world's contradictions through a simple language, but which reveals a phonic and poetic refinement in the insistent use of

[126] Description of the performance *Inferno* in the company's archive section. Photographic materials and press reviews can also be found there.

anaphora, rhetorical figures, such as oxymora and climax, interspersed with slogans that have a strong debt to popular sayings, advertising messages particularly frequent in trashy television programmes and scandals[127]. In its actors' deliberate hyper-realistic and pressing acting lies the courage to break down every illusory wall between the stage and the audience, thus creating a collective imaginary, a shared everyday experience. The result breaks down every barrier, especially those of the heart[128].

The next stage, *Purgatorio*, was staged in 2016 in a production that once again brings together the friends of Zero Favole and sees its elaboration within an artistic residency at the Venice Theatre Biennale. The question underlying this *cantica* is the desire and the need to purify oneself. In *Purgatorio* there is nothing to see, only flesh. If *Inferno* proposed all the performers dressed in even playful and sporty elements, in this production the actors are all in their underwear, precisely to highlight an aspect of Dante that is sometimes overlooked, namely that *Purgatorio* is the *cantica* where the experience for souls comes closest to earthly life, including a strong melancholy and the dimension of remembrance, towards that body that could still be capable of performing actions in view of the afterlife.

Once again, the perimeter of the stage is used to create a strong contrast between the audience and the stage thanks to a seated jury, which is more reminiscent of the context of a press conference than that of the performance. These experts, with their different, non-standard and practically naked bodies, are emphasised by the stage box, empty, without wings, with all the mechanical elements on show (*Figure 88*). In this context, an emblematic and indispensable figure is the stage technician Luca Scotton who, as Stefano Casi explains, «is, paradoxically, the performer who comes closest to interpreting the character, albeit an anti-narrative and [...] iconic interpretation. [...] *stage servant* and *deus ex machina* of every epiphany»[129]; the very metaphor of the complex theatrical machine and the type of show that Babilonia offer: a pure and simple reflection on the reality that concerns us, all of us, that involves us all.

Stories being told on stage, in front of a jury of experts, are taken from the experiences of their own spokespeople. With the exclamation «I want!» this hallucinatory performance, which up to this point had remained particularly aloof, and formal, leaves aside the almost docile and interlocutory tones to once again launch into long moments of requisitioning towards the audience to the tune of

[127] On the poetics of Babilonia, read especially the chapter *Invenzione di una lingua*, in STEFANO CASI, *Per un teatro pop. La lingua di Babilonia Teatri*, cit., pp. 41-87.
[128] All the performances mentioned, except *Inferno*, were kindly made available as video recordings to the author of this thesis. Therefore, we sincerely thank the company Babilonia Teatri for their kindness and willingness to help.
[129] «è, paradossalmente, il performer che più si avvicina all'interpretazione del personaggio, sia pure un'interpretazione anti-narrativa e […] iconica. […] *servo di scena* e *deus ex machina* di ogni epifania», STEFANO CASI, *Per un teatro pop. La lingua di Babilonia Teatri*, cit., p. 73.

Eye of the Tiger from the film *Rocky*, provoking the spectator to wonder what is really important. In *Purgatory*, as in life, one struggles, suffers and feels happy for different reasons.

In the energetic context evoked by the film's song of struggle and resilience, vermilion punching bags descend from the lighting bridge. Castellani wants to use these objects as a yardstick; with feigned goodness, he places a person suffering from dwarfism next to the punching bag, which is the same height as him, and asks the audience harshly whether the basis with which to measure the world on stage and thus also in real life, can be given by the height of the punching bag, which is the real height of a humble dwarf reading the *Divine Comedy*, presented to the audience as the world's most famous pop star. The metaphor of height is thus a measure of physical and intellectual prowess, in this case scaled down in the figure of the dwarf, who wants to remind the audience how a hasty judgement, given on the basis of external appearance and reflected in the inner, intellectual one, is a harbinger of misleading and limited ideas (*Figures 89-90-91*).

As in the case of this example, there are many suggestions taken from the contemporary *pop* context that are associated by contrast or analogy with Dante's imagery: Beatrice's apparition, a hieratic moment of great *pathos* in *Purgatorio*, is here lowered to a parade typical of the trash show *Ciao Darwin*, where subculture and kitsch find ample space. The question posed by Dante to the souls of the sacred mountain on how much and how it is necessary to purge is distorted into a culinary metaphor: if for Dante the souls to be purged on the way to salvation are important personalities of history and poets, in Babilonia Teatri's version there are chefs, the stars of contemporaneity, and the action of purging oneself through penance and the declamation of psalms is compared to clams and their purging in a pot.

Babilonia Teatri's desecrating and inquisitorial *Purgatorio* disorients the audience, leaving them completely dazed amidst strobe lights and songs skilfully selected to appeal to the common imagination. The music is a fundamental element of their dramaturgy: words too true and universal to be enunciated in the form of dialogue are instead entrusted to the music, allowing each person in the audience to associate their own experience, their own memories linked to that song with the performance[130]:

Purgatorio ci spoglia per consegnarci mezzi busti nudi dietro a un tavolo da conferenze. Ci seppellisce e ci rianima. Ci chiude gli occhi con cambre di ferro come tocca agli invidiosi. Per non vedere e per non essere visti. Ci fa chinare la testa per rialzarla sempre ogni volta. Carichi di orgoglio e di dignità.
Purgatorio non mette in scena Dante ma ne sposa l'epica. Ci ricorda l'unicità di ogni vita e la sua grandezza. Di ogni vita che abita il palco mostra l'essenza per godere della sua necessaria irripetibilità.

[130] One thinks of the more pop David Bowie with *Cat People*, Chris Isaack with *Wicked Game* juxtaposed with Pino Donaggio with *Io che non vivo più di un'ora senza te* and Caterina Bueno with *E cinquecento catenelle d'oro*, not to mention the theme song of Rocky by Survivor. The music is deputed the role of stage action precisely because of the lyrics they carry and the collective imagination associated with them.

Purgatorio è un insieme di corpi diversi e lontani fra loro che si incontrano sul palco per diventare metafora di un'umanità più larga. Un'umanità che soffre e che ride. Che gioca con Dante e con la sua Commedia in un continuo scivolare dalla verità alla finzione senza mai svelare fino in fondo se quello a cui stiamo assistendo è stato deciso o sfugge a qualsiasi controllo. Senza mettere un limite netto tra noi e Dante, ma immaginando che veleggiare dal quotidiano alla commedia e viceversa sia una possibilità reale e tangibile[131].

Purgatory undresses us to hand us half-naked busts behind a conference table. He buries us and revives us. It shuts our eyes with iron shrouds as it does the envious. So as not to see and not to be seen. He makes us bow our heads to raise them again and again. Loaded with pride and dignity.
Purgatorio does not enact Dante but espouses his epic. It reminds us of the uniqueness of every life and its greatness. Of every life that inhabits the stage it shows the essence to enjoy its necessary unrepeatability.
Purgatorio is a collection of different and distant bodies that meet on stage to become a metaphor for a wider humanity. A humanity that suffers and that laughs. That plays with Dante and his Comedy in a continuous slide from truth to fiction without ever fully revealing whether what we are witnessing has been decided or is beyond our control. Without putting a clear boundary between us and Dante, but imagining that sailing from the everyday to comedy and vice versa is a real and tangible possibility.

The last stage, *Paradise*, was realised in 2017 and brings to completion the parable of study and reflection on the suffering of the least, of the uninterested in society. Unlike the previous canticles, here we find Amer Ben Henia, Joice Dogbe and Josephine Ogechi Eiddhom as protagonists, and Daniele Balocchi (a boy with Down's syndrome already present in the other shows) as the angel/facilitator of the show together with Castellani, both acting as *alter egos* of Saint Bernard, the last guide[132] (*Figures 92-93-94*).

The decision to present a smaller *cast* than in previous productions and to focus on these four young people responds to a direct decision to offer a space for these young people to artistically investigate the life condition of three adolescents (at that time), who grew up in a community for minors in foster care. For Babilonia Teatri, their lives embody the idea of a *Paradise* denied, of a childhood deprived of the opportunity to be children naturally, of the possibility of being innocent, and of the emotional toll this condition takes on their growth.

The broken condition experienced by these adolescents stems from disillusionment, from the disappearance of the family that is so much vaunted and seen as a shelter from all evil, nourishing within itself the seed of guilt, of the original sin that constitutes abandonment, of destiny tainted by others.

In the last canticle, the poet addresses the theme of salvation, of the ultimate meaning of living, combined also with the sense for an artist such as himself to conceive his work with a universally valid meaning. The Babylonians subvert this ascending direction between the heavens of *Paradise* by creating a *katabasis*, starting by staging a birth, the most delicate moment that determines life: in this opposition, they retrace the stages of Christ's life, who becomes a man, who allows himself to be annihilated for love, up to his crucifixion. In this theatrical parable, the individual stories of the boys

[131] See *Purgatorio* on the Babilonia Teatri site.
[132] Again, photos and materials concerning the performance are available on the company page. Also published from this collaboration is the book PIERANGELO BORDIGNON, GLORIA BURBELLO, STEFANO MASOTTI, CARLO PRESOTTO (a cura di), *Paradiso. Diario di una ricerca teatrale e umana in Babilonia Teatri*, Padova, libreriauniversitaria.it, 2019.

are presented as contemporaneous *vitae Christi*, comparing the miserable life of the orphans to that of the saviour, reminding the audience that even in the ugliness of life, faith can be found.

The canon of salvation, of beauty, of heaven, is subverted in a long negative metaphor. On stage, the Babylonians present with candid cruelty and traits of frivolity the importance of free will, of choosing one's own *Paradise*, subverting the imposed principle of authorship and claiming an unconventional, inclusive, unedifying and problematic acting and art.

To give greater depth to the rewriting operation carried out together with the three adolescent protagonists, the show is enriched by the performance of pieces composed by the Allegro Moderato Orchestra of Milan, who also become actors in the show. The proclaimed and professed randomness at the basis of the show's conception thus reveals itself to be the negative counterpart of the principle of authorship and truth proposed by Dante in his *Paradise*: the difficult and liminal reality of the three minors, the subject of the performance, once again draws attention to the artistic operation, which is carried out chorally between Babilonia Teatri and the adolescents, reflecting on the idea of the author and above all on the importance of the choice of the material on which to poet.

Babilonia's Dantesque trilogy is an intentionally backward-looking journey, aimed at breathing new life into the entire theatrical experience. Their «trasumanar per verba» is based on a script that evokes our contemporary reality, thanks to its numerous *pop* references, and at the same time made complex by scenic elements that constantly remind the audience of the need to take an ethical stance in their lives. The theatre embodies a new secular conscience that obliges the spectator, the actor and the director to create a new shared reality in which to recognise themselves beyond the role played by each, where art can prove to be a means of salvation:

Il teatro è sempre incontro. Non può essere solitudine, onanismo, assenza. Si fa con le persone presenti, qui, lì, ora. È fatto di partecipazione reale, solida, fuori dallo smartphone. È "modernariato vintage", socialità partecipata, reale, allargata, alla "vecchia maniera", che troppo spesso, attualmente, è sostituita dalla socialità tecnologica e virtuale. Il teatro è "biologicamente sociale" [133].

Theatre is always an encounter. It cannot be solitude, onanism, absence. It is done with people present, here, there, now. It is made of real, solid participation, outside the smartphone. It is 'vintage modernity', participatory sociality, real, enlarged, the 'old-fashioned way', which is too often, at present, replaced by technological and virtual sociality. Theatre is 'biologically social'.

[133] STEFANO MASOTTI, *Il progetto "Paradiso" e i soggetti coinvolti*, in PIERANGELO BORDIGNON, GLORIA BURBELLO, STEFANO MASOTTI, CARLO PRESOTTO (a cura di), *Paradiso. Diario di una ricerca teatrale e umana in Babilonia Teatri*, cit., pp. 33-38, quotation at p. 33.

4.5. Bringing the *Commedia* to Life: Teatro delle Albe

The survey conducted so far has shown how Dante becomes a subject of adaptation and a source of inspiration not only because of the universal message he proposes and the particular structure of his most famous work but also in conjunction with particularly significant anniversaries.

2015 is the first watershed date for Dante's spectacular adaptations, which, after the now classic transposition by Lombardi-Tiezzi and the violent transcodification by Castellucci's Socìetas, become a moment of social aggregation and inclusive reworking with Babilonia Teatri[134]. The last company we selected to pick up the baton of Dante's trilogies in the theatrical sphere is among the most important on the Italian scene. The Teatro delle Albe made its relationship with the *Comedy* manifest immediately after 2015, with the celebrations marking Dante's anniversary, outlining a long-term programme aimed at the following centenary, that of 2021. It is also useful in this case to provide some background on the history of the Teatro delle Albe in order to better understand the scope of this artistic operation in the sign of Dante.

The artistic experience of the theatre company began in 1977, at the Liceo Alighieri in Ravenna, where Marco Martinelli (1956) and Ermanna Montanari (1956) met and started a first attempt at theatrical activity with their lifelong companions and colleagues, Luigi Dadina (1958) and Marcella Nonni (1958). In 1983 they founded the Teatro delle Albe in Ravenna, based in the Teatro Rasi. Later, in 1991, from the union with the company Drammatico Vegetale, they created a theatre production centre called Ravenna Teatro[135]. In the city of Ravenna, they began to experiment and build their own way of doing theatre, sometimes together with these and other companies, other times independently, planning a rich programme for the city. Soon the group became famous and in demand throughout Romagna, then throughout Italy and finally abroad, thus defining its own fortune and building a path that was in some ways different from that of the other companies of the same years: «a company that from its very beginnings was configured as a sort of other pole in the singular tussle of the 1980s between the third theatre artists imbued with the East, poor theatre and ritual theatre, and the metropolitan, computerised and transgressive post-avant-garde artists: sandals against Nike»[136].

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[134] Deliberately no mention will be made in this writing of the performance *Divine Comedy. Performance in three parts* (Vilnius, 26 April 2012) by Lithuanian director Eimuntas Nekrošius, as it would have been beyond the scope of this research. This production, and the subsequent ones by the company he founded, and the many theatrical ventures of Dante linked to social theatre projects, e.g. in prisons or city contexts, will be addressed in essays dedicated to them.

[135] Useful to contextualise the various phases and the complexity of the evolution not so much artistic as connected to political militancy and adherence to certain ways being part of an artistic collective and acting collectively, read LAURA MARIANI, *Ermanna Montanari. Fare-disfare-rifare nel Teatro delle Albe*, cit. See also the official website of Ravenna Teatro: https://ravennateatro.com/chi-siamo/storia/ (last accessed 25/05/2025). See also SILVIA BOTTOROLI, *"Un passaggio di barbari divini". L'utopia concreta del Teatro delle Albe*, in «Ariel», a. XX, n. 1, 2006, pp. 99-110.

[136] «una compagnia configuratasi fin dai suoi esordi come una sorta di polo altro nella singolar tenzone degli anni ottanta fra i terzoteatristi imbevuti di Oriente, teatro povero e rituale e i postavanguardisti metropolitani, informatizzati e trasgressivi: sandali contro Nike», VALENTINA VALENTINI, *Le ideologie: un vizio di cui liberarsi. La linea dei Novanta 1989-1999*, in VALENTINA VALENTINI, *Nuovo Teatro Made in Italy*, cit., pp. 105-124, quotation at p. 113.

Teatro delle Albe bases its poetics and identity on certain fundamental pillars: first and foremost, the need to do and act as political theatre, claiming a strong active dimension in the topics and methods of its action, implemented first and foremost in the civic character of its way of "constituting theatre", as stated in one of their first manifestos[137]. Indeed, since its foundation, the company has flanked its main activity on stage with open theatre workshops for citizens, mainly in the form of children's theatre. Albe conceive their theatre as a meeting place, a laboratory of democracy, where all the realities with which the group comes into contact converge and are given voice. Very important in this sense is the migrant component, mainly African, as the territory of Romagna from the 1980s onwards saw the creation of numerous immigration centres, with the attendant social problems. The response offered by Albe is in the theatre, not only in dramaturgies that question the contradictions and difficulties of the contemporary, but in finding on and off stage a dialogue with the other, the different, and in conquering in this confusion a new identity, mixed, inclusive[138].

As a second aspect, it is thought-provoking how, over the years, Albe has become an increasingly numerous group, leaving room for continuous hybridisation and aggregation throughout their history and deliberately seeking out experiences of contamination that enrich the company with new elements. In fact, it is no coincidence that they proclaim themselves the 'tribe of the Albe', as, in the various places where the company operates (in different Italian cities, in the suburbs, in Europe and around the world), a community is quickly formed, understood as a family that welcomes everyone and that becomes once again a place of theatrical contagion, according to Artaud's teachings, sustained by a strong common ethic, based on cherishing, respecting and including diversity.

As a third, their working method, with its strong workshop and group imprint, is supported by research that can be articulated on two main, sometimes opposing, poles: dramaturgical-directorial research, in the hands of Marco Martinelli, and vocal research, as part of a broader excavation in acting practice, in the hands of Ermanna Montanari. If we have already written about the actress's specific mode of research previously, it is worth dwelling here on the specificities of Martinelli's production, always bearing in mind how the artistic production of this artistic couple sees a constant osmosis between them, indissolubly involved and always co-present in the conception of their own and common art.

Martinelli could be defined as the «poeta di compagnia» of Teatro delle Albe, as from the very beginning, he took on the role of playwright for the group from Ravenna, and later of the director. He is the author of Albe's texts with a strong political character which urges the spectator to reflect on current

[137] See MARCO MARTINELLI, ERMANNA MONTANARI, *Teatro Polittttttico*, in MARCO MARTINELLI, ERMANNA MONTANARI, *Primavera eretica. Scritti e interviste: 1983-2013*, cit., pp. 14-15.

[138] On the Albe's strong statements, together with other companies from Romagna, to support dialogue and the inclusion of foreigners within the social fabric through the language of art, as well as on the subsequent performances realised together with the newly acquired members and the trips to Africa and the productions produced there, see MARCO MARTINELLI, ERMANNA MONTANARI, *Primavera eretica. Scritti e interviste: 1983-2013*, cit., pp. 35-75; LAURA MARIANI, *Ermanna Montanari. Fare-disfare-rifare nel Teatro delle Albe*, cit., pp. 98-113. Also, MARIA DOLORES PESCE, *Marco Martinelli. Un drammaturgo Corsaro*, Spoleto, Editoria&Spettacolo, 2018, pp. 81-91.

events and the events of contemporary history in association with the classics of literature and international theatre. Maria Dolores Pesce highlights the cutting-edge element in Martinelli's dramaturgy that, in a certain sense, reverses the course that leads from writing to the stage. He conceives his dramaturgy from the stage, from his relationship with actors, set designers, musicians and technicians; the resulting text is the product of this confrontation, and any pre-existing literary material becomes a stimulus and an opportunity[139]. Valentina Valentini, on the other hand, proposes the title of «ethnographic writer» for Martinelli, echoing Hal Foster's definition[140], as:

I testi per il teatro di Martinelli raccontano storie in cui il soggetto si confronta e si scontra con il mondo, in cui la cronaca va a comporre un racconto che agisce come controinformazione militante, perché la sua pratica scritturale si basa sul metodo dell'inchiesta, della ricerca sul campo, dell'intreccio di voci e fonti differenti […]. Tale procedimento permette di coniugare il dato collettivo, storico, sociale, in noi, con il dato soggettivo, l'io intimo, psichico. Nei testi teatrali di Martinelli il rapporto necessario e al tempo stesso conflittuale io/noi, individuo e società, psiche e mondo, è la fonte prima di scavo ed elaborazione, distante la sua drammaturgia da un mondo in cui l'alterità è assente, come pure i conflitti. Il dispositivo costruttivo del testo è insieme drammatico e narrativo: ciascuna voce alimenta il filo del racconto in cui *io* e *noi* si armonizzano, come in un quadro lo sfondo con la figura[141].

Martinelli's texts for the theatre tell stories in which the subject confronts and clashes with the world, in which the chronicle goes to compose a tale that acts as militant counter-information, because his writing practice is based on the method of enquiry, of field research, of the interweaving of different voices and sources [...]. This procedure makes it possible to combine the collective, historical, social datum, within us, with the subjective datum, the intimate, psychic self. In Martinelli's theatrical texts, the necessary and at the same time conflicting relationship I/we, individual and society, psyche and world, is the primary source of excavation and elaboration, distancing his dramaturgy from a world in which otherness is absent, as are conflicts. The constructive device of the text is both dramatic and narrative: each voice feeds the thread of the story in which *I* and *we* are in harmony, as in a painting the background with the figure.

Martinelli often uses new stories and exemplary personalities as starting points for a broader and more contemporary treatment of society's idiosyncrasies and contradictions, such as in *Ruh. Romagna più Africa uguale* (1988), on the condition of coexistence and inclusion; *Rumore di acque* (2010), as a reflection on the phenomenon of immigration in the Mediterranean; *Pantani* (2012), to redeem the life stolen from the great cyclist; *Vita agli arresti di Aung San Suu Kyi* (2014), to reflect on freedom and revolution, without neglecting its own work of adapting the classics of literature and theatre, to cultivate and elaborate the political, civil and committed roots always at the basis of the company's artistic work[142].

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[139] See MARIA DOLORES PESCE, *Marco Martinelli. Un drammaturgo corsaro*, cit., p. 35.

[140] «scrittore etnografo»; «[L']artista etnografo è interessato a forme culturali marginali in una registrazione sincronica di un lavoro condotto sul campo, HAL FOSTER, *Bad New Days. Arte, critica, emergenza*, Milano, Postmedia Books, 2019, p. 43 e HAL FOSTER, *Il ritorno del reale*, Milano, Postmedia Books, 2006, p. 177»/«[The] ethnographic artist is interested in marginal cultural forms in a synchronic recording of work conducted in the field, HAL FOSTER, *Bad New Days. Art, Criticism, Emergence*, Milan, Postmedia Books, 2019, p. 43 and HAL FOSTER, *The Return of the Real*, Milan, Postmedia Books, 2006, p. 177», note taken from VALENTINA VALENTINI, *Il pozzo, la calla, l'asino. Intorno alla drammaturgia di Marco Martinelli (Teatro delle Albe). Parte prima*, in MARCO MARTINELLI, *Teatro 1988-2010*, a cura di Valentina Valentini, Venezia, Marsilio, 2024, pp. 7-17, quotation at p. 15, footnote 23.

[141] VALENTINA VALENTINI, *Il pozzo, la calla, l'asino. Intorno alla drammaturgia di Marco Martinelli (Teatro delle Albe). Parte prima*, in MARCO MARTINELLI*, Teatro 1988-2010*, cit., quotation at pp. 16-17.

[142] See also what Stefania Chinzari and Paolo Ruffini write on this subject: «a formalizzare un'autonomia di radici e di visioni rispetto alle esperienze artistiche coeve, di sguardo che abbraccia l'eredità della tradizione e la ricerca del nuovo, contribuisce senz'altro anche la conformazione alchemica del gruppo. Le Albe sono, da subito, una compagnia "antica", con regista-attore, Martinelli, capocomico che scrive storie sui corpi, le facce, le maschere, i dialetti dei suoi attori, a loro volta coautori dello spettacolo»/«the group's alchemic conformation also undoubtedly contributes to formalising an

Martinelli's writing is strongly linked to his company, in that he works on the bodies and voices of his female and male actors, sketching out a sort of outline to start discussing and elaborating the actual dramaturgy together on stage, which will only later be fixed in the script, keeping alive the throb of artistic elaboration as it unfolds, in a constant tension between *intus* and *foris*, between the fixity of the text and the magmatic nature of acting:

Non scrivo da solo. A scrivere siamo in tre. Il primo che scrive è una figura della realtà. […] Il secondo che scrive è una figura del teatro: sono gli attori che lavorano con me. […] Il terzo che scrive sono io: sono io che metto in relazione i primi e i secondi a me stesso. E così relazionando nascono personaggi che hanno anche una loro vita[143].

I do not write alone. There are three of us writing. The first who writes is a figure from reality. [...] The second who writes is a figure of theatre: it is the actors who work with me. [...] The third who writes is me: it is I who relate the first and the second to myself. And so, relating gives rise to characters who also have a life of their own.

His writing catalyses, therefore, all these individualities and different languages, assembling them to make something "other than itself", which continues, however, to keep its roots firmly in the resumption of literary passages, in the names of individuals, in the stories told and bartered for new shared art. With the technique of "reuse", he leaves a trace of this process, to always find what has been accomplished on an artistic level, while demonstrating a grotesque and picturesque way of assembling, which has now become his signature[144]. In his texts, juxtaposed like mosaic tiles, one finds verses of poets close to peoples' stories, or footage from his own childhood, popular sayings of his grandparents associated with great speeches of international politicians. Everything is material and everything is used by Martinelli on stage, weaving a colourful tapestry with the voices of his performers.

Delving into Martinelli's dramaturgies, Marco Sciotto emphasises how there is a large number of references to the sound and visual components present in the explicit and implicit captions of his texts, which highlight, behind the characters and the events narrated, the space granted on the page to the performer who inspired them, generating an indissoluble link between the dimension of the stage and the creative process typical of Albe[145]. This is all the more evident in the texts that privilege a poetic score in

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autonomy of roots and visions with respect to contemporary artistic experiences, of a gaze that embraces the legacy of tradition and the search for the new. Le Albe are, from the outset, an 'ancient' company, with director-actor, Martinelli, who writes stories on the bodies, faces, masks, and dialects of his actors, who are in turn co-authors of the show», STEFANIA CHINZARI, PAOLO RUFFINI, *Nuova scena italiana. Il teatro di fine millennio*, Spoleto, Editoria&Spettacolo, 2016, p. 58. In this sense, we must not forget what has already been said above and how Martinelli was the son of an employee of the Secretariat of the Democrazia Cristiana party, with a strong Catholic faith and a deep family history of active militancy for the social and public cause, as we read in MARCO MARTINELLI, *Nel nome di Dante. Diventare grandi con la Divina Commedia*, cit., pp. 24-33.

[143] «M. Martinelli, Genesi di Incantati, in "Società di pensieri", marzo 1994, p. 25»/«M. Martinelli, Genesi di Incantati, in "Società di pensieri", March 1994, p. 25», quote by Marco Martinelli present in GERARDO GUCCINI (a cura di), *Una tragedia per l'Italia d'oggi: scrittura, realtà e destino nel teatro di Marco Martinelli*, in «Culture Teatrali», n. 22 (*DOSSIER PANTANI*, a cura di Gerardo Guccini), 2013, pp. 106-130, quotation at p. 124, footnote 34 and DANIELA SACCO, *Drammaturgia del Rovesciamento. La "messa in vita" di Marco Martinelli*, in MARCO MARTINELLI, *Teatro 2010-2020*, a cura di Valentina Valentini, Venezia, Marsilio, 2024, pp. 309-333, quotation at pp. 310-311.

[144] See CRISTINA GRAZIOLI, *Le profondità del Grottesco: da Rabelais alle Albe*, in MARCO MARTINELLI*, Scherzo, satira, ironia e significato profondo*, Roma, Editoria & Spettacolo, 2007, pp. 5-26.

[145] See MARCO SCIOTTO*, In ascolto del mondo. La dimensione sonora nella drammaturgia di Marco Martinelli*, in MARCO MARTINELLI*, Teatro 2010-2020*, cit., pp. 335-360.

verses, less dialogic than those in prose, and often see as the sole protagonist on stage the muse and companion Montanari, who offers body-voice to different *dramatis personae* that are the clear manifestation of the combined work that the two put into action in the alchemic workshop that is Teatro delle Albe:

[queste specifiche opere] sembrano estromettere ogni riferimento diretto a modalità vocali, interventi musicali e intromissioni di suoni, estromettendo apparentemente dalla pagina le annotazioni registiche che tutti gli altri testi presentano, a ben guardare esse si muovono piuttosto nella direzione opposta: è come se, […] attraverso il verso libero, assumessero già nel linguaggio stesso - e dunque in maniera più profonda e radicale – l'intera dimensione sonora e musicale, come vera e propria partitura affidata poi al corpo-voce dell'attore. […] Spartiti che hanno quale comun denominatore il fatto che l'attore si trova a essere il *medium* attraversato da una pluralità di voci che paiono "parlarlo", più che essere da esso gestite e governate. Come se la molteplicità di voci delle altre drammaturgie si confondessero in un unico corpo-voce, nel caleidoscopio delle sue possibilità. […] Un flusso linguistico e poetico che, smarcandosi dal dialogo e dalla narrazione e destinato a un'unica voce abitata dalle pluralità attraverso cui si manifesta, permette di generare, sulla scena, quelle stesse visioni attraverso l'ascolto[146].

[these specific works] seem to omit any direct reference to vocal modes, musical interventions and intromissions of sounds, seemingly removing from the page the directorial annotations that all the other texts present, on closer inspection they move rather in the opposite direction: it is as if, [...] through free verse, they already assume in the language itself - and thus in a more profound and radical manner - the entire sound and musical dimension, as a true score entrusted to the actor's body-voice. [...] Scores that have as their common denominator the fact that the actor finds him/herself the *medium* traversed by a plurality of voices that seem to "speak" to him, rather than being managed and governed by him. As if the multiplicity of voices of the other dramaturgies were merging into a single body-voice, in the kaleidoscope of its possibilities. [...] A linguistic and poetic flow that, by breaking away from dialogue and narration and destined for a single voice inhabited by the pluralities through which it manifests itself, allows those same visions to be generated on stage through listening.

Martinelli's theatre and dramaturgy stand as a mirror of the world, as a life to be explored, recounted, and remembered; a theatre and a dramaturgy that follow the route already taken by many other companies that, from the end of the 20th century to the early 2000s, have decided to take the lead in conceiving a new type of political theatre. Insofar as it is capable of questioning people, this theatre is capable of changing the world, as in the experience of their friend and director Milo Rau (founder of NTGent), with whom Albe have close contacts and discussions. In a manifesto on the meaning of theatre today, they state[147]:

for us, theatre would be a place to scrutinise the swamps of the soul, the mud of our underground, the microcosm where we could sift the planet's wrongs, and at the same time a place to give voice to the irrepressible desire for happiness and love, which made us tremble in '77 as it does today. A place to rebel against the Powers of this World. To become a place: that's what we've done and continue to do, bringing in comrades who think of theatre not as a trade like any other but as an 'experimentum mundi': a mode of representation that goes beyond representation, that excavates fragments of truth and beauty with 'obstinate rigor', scraping its hands on the naked rock. [...] Being 'technicians' of Dionysus meant and still means staring straight in the face this world-baby turned to pieces, learning how to change from dismemberment to remembering, a memory technique, putting the pieces back together, listening to the victim who whispers "Remember me!" in our ear. It's a technique that makes all other techniques authentic, a technique that spans the centuries and all the myriad conceptions of the stage, from Aeschylus to Piscator to Brecht to Carmelo Bene and up to our own day. Theatre is born revealing the violent foundation of society, the sacrifice of all history's Iphigenias. No matter how much it limps

[146] MARCO SCIOTTO, *In ascolto del mondo. La dimensione sonora nella drammaturgia di Marco Martinelli*, in MARCO MARTINELLI*, Teatro 2010-2020*, cit., quotation at pp. 357-358.

[147] See ERMANNA MONTANARI, MARCO MARTINELLI (Teatro delle Albe), *054. Technicians of Dionysus*, in KAATJE DE GEEST, CARMEN HORNBOSTEL, MILO RAU (edited by), *Why Theatre*, golden book V, Berlin, NTGENT, Verbrecher Verlag, 2020, pp. 184-187. See also the Ghent Manifesto, published in 2018 by MILO RAU, in MILO RAU, *Globaler Realismus-Global realism*, golden book I, Berlin, NTGENT, Verbrecher Verlag, 2018, p. 279.

and stumbles in confusion, this remains its pole star: theatre is an art of revelation, of unmasking through masking, using artifice to point to the truth[148].

The Albe tribe, under Martinelli's direction, works on the body and vocality, promoting a new contact with the self, with companions and with places, reappropriating space and time. To do so, Albe resort to the ancient device of the chorus, the foundation of ancient drama, whether condensed in the expressive and vocal plurality of a single performer or understood in the physical plurality of bodies on stage. The primordial, sacred, collective and cathartic nature of the tragic chorus is reworked by Albe, who make it a pivotal element for their theatre. In this practice of constituting the theatrical *communitas*, of training, of toiling together, and constantly working on the boundary between reality and fiction, a necessary passage of transmutation from the individual to the plural is envisaged. Valentina Valentini assimilates this process to what is stated in Victor Turner's and Richard Schechner's studies on the approach of theatre to the initiatory rite to arrive at the creation of a new self:

Richard Schechner concepisce il processo di produzione dello spettacolo come azione di destrutturazione e reintegrazione. Secondo lo schema del processo rituale di Victor Turner – che a sua volta risulta mediato dall'analisi dei riti di passaggio di Van Gennep (1981) -, le esperienze che avvengono a livello individuale e di gruppo durante il processo produttivo dello spettacolo (in cui rito e gioco appaiono intimamente connessi) attraversano una sequenza ternaria: la fase *preliminale* di disgregazione, cioè distruzione di stereotipi e resistenze; la fase *liminale* di sottomissione all'autorità dei "majores rituali" e di trasmissione di conoscenze, di passaggio da sé all'altro; la fase *postliminale* o della reintegrazione in cui si ricostruisce e si manifesta il nuovo sé[149].

Richard Schechner conceives the process of producing the spectacle as an action of deconstruction and reintegration. According to Victor Turner's scheme of the ritual process - which in turn is mediated by Van Gennep's (1981) analysis of rites of passage -, the experiences that occur at the individual and group level during the production process of the spectacle (in which ritual and play appear intimately connected) go through a ternary sequence: the *preliminary* phase of disintegration, i.e. the destruction of stereotypes and resistance; the *liminal* phase of submission to the authority of the "ritual majores" and the transmission of knowledge, of passing from self to other; the *postliminal* or reintegration phase in which the new self is reconstructed and manifested.

In its dramaturgies, the Teatro delle Albe proposes the chorus along two lines: either as an element made up of the company's actors or as an element made up of volunteers and amateurs. A first example of the latter modality can be found in *I Polacchi* of 1998, defining a representative variable very much to their liking. As Daniela Sacco points out, the chorus for Albe is not a simple accompaniment, a simple plural character, but rather «a sound element [... that] produces scenic visions through the presence of actors, singers and musicians»[150], «the counterbalance of mass society where with individualism reigns the undifferentiated, its care»[151] and «the multiplier of the identity of the figure and external gaze»[152].

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[148] ERMANNA MONTANARI, MARCO MARTINELLI (Teatro delle Albe), *054. Technicians of Dionysus*, in KAATJE DE GEEST, CARMEN HORNBOSTEL, MILO RAU (edited by), *Why Theatre*, cit., pp. 184-186.
[149] VALENTINA VALENTINI*, Teatro contemporaneo 1989-2019*, cit., p. 101. The quotation refers to VICTOR TURNER, *Dal rito al teatro*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1986 and RICHARD SCHECHNER, *Restoration of Behaviour*, in VALENTINA VALENTINI (a cura di), *La teoria della performance, 1970-1983*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1984 [1977[1]], pp. 213-230.
[150] «un elemento sonoro [… che] produce visioni sceniche attraverso la presenza attoriale, cantante e musicante», DANIELA SACCO, *Drammaturgia del Rovesciamento. La "messa in vita" di Marco Martinelli*, in MARCO MARTINELLI, *Teatro 2010-2020*, cit., quotation at p. 322.
[151] «il contraltare della società di massa dove con l'individualismo regna l'indifferenziato, la sua cura», *ivi*, p. 326.
[152] «il moltiplicatore dell'identità della figura e sguardo esterno», *ivi*, p. 329.

Offering a constant basis for analysing and developing the choral component within the dramaturgies of Teatro delle Albe is the practice of the *non-school*[153]. By *non-school*, Albe initially meant the theatre workshop for school students in Ravenna started in 1991, but later also the creative process in which theatre operators and amateur participants are on the same level. The practice of *non-school* goes from the school to different contexts of theatrical creation, becoming over time a way of doing theatre that transcends place and context, presenting itself as one of the cornerstones of Albe's work on the territory and allowing them to constantly renew themselves.

The possibility of working with young people and adolescents, conceiving together a scene that could respond to their demands, was initially implemented in the city and province of Ravenna, but soon became a way of working that radiated out into various side projects, landing as far as the United States and the African continent.

Defining themselves as "technicians of the god Dionysus", Albe envisage the choral component within the drama, on the one hand as a dynamic between an artistically strong component (the coryphaeus) and an amateur and/or mixed community of professionals (the chorus), and on the other hand as a dialogical dynamic necessary for the concrete development of the dramaturgy, the identification of a nucleus of topics on which they wish to outline an artistic path, but above all to create the conditions for expanding the surface of the performance and extending the principle of «I am us» to the spectator:

Qual è il segreto del coro? Mi trovo in mezzo a un gruppo di persone, adolescenti o cittadini di tutte le età. Attenzione: non sono attori o musicisti o danzatori. Sono persone che non hanno alcuna esperienza scenica: qual è il segreto per cui quel gruppo *indifferenziato* si trasforma in coro, portatore di armonia, di vitalità, di energia? Questa domanda ne genera immediatamente un'altra, strettamente connessa: qual è il segreto della miccia, qual è la miccia che accende il coro? La miccia è la guida, la miccia sono io, in mezzo a quell'indifferenziato: come faccio a *instradarlo* per diventare coro? Quale la via? È semplice, lo dico con un proverbio africano: *io sono noi*. Tutto da lì discende[154].

What is the secret of the chorus? I am in the middle of a group of people, teenagers or citizens of all ages. Mind you, they are not actors or musicians or dancers. They are people with no stage experience: what is the secret whereby that *undifferentiated* group turns into a chorus, a bearer of harmony, vitality, and energy? This question immediately generates another closely related one: what is the secret of the fuse, and what is the fuse that ignites the chorus? The fuse is the guide, the fuse is me, in the midst of the undifferentiated: how do I *route it* to become a chorus? Which way? It is simple, I say it with an African proverb: *I am us*. Everything descends from there.

The chorus leaders are actors and actresses of Albe if not Martinelli himself. To be able to lift up the chorus with whom they interact, they must be ready to listen, to be the first to let themselves be crossed by the group's questions and frailties, becoming the first-person interpreters and advocates of a new «civic conscience»[155]. In this relationship of reciprocal exchange and dialogue, an opening is concretely created,

[153] See the page dedicated to the *non-school* on the Teatro delle Albe website: https://www.teatrodellealbe.com/ita/non-scuola (last accessed 25/05/2025). See also MARCO MARTINELLI, ERMANNA MONTANARI, *Primavera eretica. Scritti e interviste: 1983-2013*, cit., pp. 109-133; FRANCESCA SATURNINO, *La non-scuola di Marco Martinelli. Tracce e voci intorno ad Aristofane a Pompei*, Roma, Luca Sossella, 2024.
[154] MARCO MARTINELLI, *Coro*, Genova, AkropolisLibri, 2023, p. 3.
[155] «coscienza civica», DANIELA SACCO, *Drammaturgia del Rovesciamento. La "messa in vita" di Marco Martinelli*, in MARCO MARTINELLI, *Teatro 2010-2020*, cit., quotation at p. 329.

a breach that allows the crossing of the self into the new dimension of the *I-us*, of leader-chorus[156]. After many years of activity, just as it happens with dramaturgies and Manifestos and declarations of poetics, Martinelli and Montanari decide to define the practice of the *non-school* for Teatro delle Albe by writing a *noboalphabet*[157], which by crossing every vowel and consonant codifies a way of being together, an inclusive and open way of working, a further legacy to remain anchored to the origins of their theatrical practice. In the child they identify an interlocutor capable of unhinging the dynamics of adult composure:

> Non andavamo a insegnare. Il teatro non si insegna. Andavamo a giocare, a sudare insieme. Come giocano i bambini su un campetto da calcio, senza schemi né divise, per il puro piacere del gioco, come capita ormai di vederli solamente in Africa, a piedi nudi sulla sabbia, o nel sud d'Italia: al nord è raro, i più sono irregimentati a copiare il calcio dei "grandi", soldi e televisione. In quel piacere ci sono una purezza e un sentimento del mondo che nessun campionato miliardario può dare. La felicità del corpo vivo, la corsa, le cadute, la terra sotto i piedi, il sole, i corpi accaldati dei compagni, l'essere insieme, orda, squadra, coro, comunità, la sfera-mondo che volteggia e per magia finisce dentro la rete[158].
>
> We were not going to teach. Theatre is not taught. We were going to play, to sweat together. The way children play on a football pitch, without patterns or uniforms, for the pure pleasure of the game, the way you only see them now in Africa, barefoot on the sand, or in the south of Italy: in the north it is rare, most are regimented into copying the football of the 'big boys', money and television. In that pleasure, there is a purity and a feeling of the world that no billionaire championship can give. The happiness of the living body, the running, the falls, the earth under your feet, the sun, the hot bodies of your teammates, being together, horde, team, chorus, community, the sphere-world that whirls and by magic ends up inside the net.

All these assumptions on group building, on the ways of working in the theatre and outside the theatre, on the topics and themes Martinelli uses to write Albe dramaturgies, form the basis of experiences that lead to the encounter with Dante Alighieri. The *Cantiere Dante*, launched after the 2015 centenary, presents in itself the maturation of all these assumptions. At first analysis, it would appear to be a particularly successful example of an adaptation of a literary classic, after a long series of adaptations from theatre classics and innovative dramaturgies. On the other hand, it is precisely in Martinelli's early texts that one can trace clues that led to the maturation and decision to stage Dante's *Commedia*. Some

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[156] See MARCO MARTINELLI, *Coro*, cit.; ROBERTO MAGNANI, *Pensieri sparsi sul fare la guida della non-scuola*, in DEBORA PIETROBONO, RODOLFO SACCHETTINI (a cura di), *Il teatro salvato dai ragazzini*, Firenze, Edizioni dell'Asino, 2011, pp. 87-93; MARCO MARTINELLI, *Fare gli italiani*, in DEBORA PIETROBONO, RODOLFO SACCHETTINI (a cura di), *Il teatro salvato dai ragazzini*, cit., pp. 15-24.

[157] «La non-scuola non si chiamava così, ma esisteva già dal '91, quando alle Albe venne assegnata la direzione del Rasi. Marco e Maurizio Lupinelli cominciarono a tenere dei laboratori teatrali nei licei. All'inizio vi parteciparono solo quaranta studenti, che poi per contagio, anno dopo anno, divennero dieci volte tanti, coinvolgendo tutte le scuole della città»/«The non-school was not called that, but had already existed since '91, when the Albe were assigned the direction of Rasi. Marco and Maurizio Lupinelli began holding theatre workshops in high schools. At the beginning, only forty students took part, but then, by contagion, year after year, they became ten times as many, involving all the schools in the city», see the page on the project on Albe website, where clicking on each letter of the alphabet opens the corresponding definition: https://www.teatrodellealbe.com/ita/contenuto.php?id=4 (last accessed 25/05/2025). See also ANTONIA MELE SCORCIA, *Teatro e scuola italiana: la rivoluzione della non-scuola del Teatro delle Albe*, in «Quaderns d'Italià», n. 29, 2024, pp. 195-212; MARCO MARTINELLI, ERMANNA MONTANARI, *Noboalfabeto*, in FRANCESCA SATURNINO, *La non-scuola di Marco Martinelli. Tracce e voci intorno ad Aristofane a Pompei*, cit., pp. 115-130; MARTINA TREU, 'NON SCUOLA', *Playing classical drama: 'young' theatre festivals and the 'non-school' of Ravenna*, in JULIETTE HARRISON, MARTIN LINDNER, LUIS UNCETA GÓMEZ (edited by), *Playful Classics. Classical Reception as a creative process*, London/New York/Oxford/New Delhi/Sydney, Bloomsbury Academic, 2025, pp. 141-153.

[158] Quotation taken from the *non-School* page on Teatro delle Albe website.

specific performances, in fact constituted the first experiments in directorial, dramaturgical, scenographic and acting choices that would later find fulfilment in the Dante trilogy.

The first performance to mention in this sense is *All'Inferno - affresco da Aristofane*, staged in 1996 in an old suburban building (the sulphur warehouses along the Ravenna docks redeveloped into the Almagià multifunctional space), a performance in which several companies collaborated together with Albe under the direction of Martinelli[159]. This reworking, based on the *Frogs* by Aristophanes, aims to question the concept of theatre and its role in contemporary society. The Greek play proposes a descent to the underworld by the god Dionysus, since in the Athens of the time there was no longer a tragedian able to compete with the three most important authors of antiquity (Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides), and therefore proposes a tragic contest between Aeschylus and Euripides to determine who is the champion of the tragic genre, worthy of returning to the world of the living and bringing his texts back to the stage. Behind the farce of the surreal scene set in Hades with the god of theatre, Dionysus, as judge, it is hidden a fierce and violent reprimand of the customs of the Athens of the time, prostrated by the Peloponnesian wars, and also an attack on contemporary artists, incapable of carrying out a true dialectic for peace and culture in opposition to the imperialist policies of the Greek *poleis*[160].

For his show, Martinelli elaborates a powerful fresco that starts from the *Frogs*, but also deals with other themes taken from further comedies by Aristophanes, whom he considers a «totem ancestor»[161], innervating the classical instances with the African component of his company: the passages from the *Frogs* that question the injustices of the rich towards the poor, the necessity of an unjust war, the search for morality in a corrupt political context, are interwoven with certain African legends that see in Pluto, god of wealth, an overlap with the god of the underworld, and locate 'under the earth' the place to seek this lost wealth with which to escape from a destiny of hunger and misery.

It is precisely in the conception of this first classical hell (which is also found in Dante's toponymy of the infernal realm) that Martinelli adds some elements of Dante's *Inferno* to the Aristophanesque Greek model: presented as a non-place[162], a service station on the Adriatic state road SS16, the *IN-FER-NORD* is proposed as a chaotic place, with incessant noise and clamour, in which the different tongues of the

[159] «Lo spettacolo, nato dall'unione di Ravenna Teatro, il teatro Kismet (Opera di Bari) e Tam Teatro Musica (di Padova) (cooproduzione Ravenna Festival), nella forse eccessiva lunghezza (due ore e trenta senza intervallo) è sicuramente un lavoro che definisce una nuova maturità nel percorso creativo di Martinelli»/«The show, born from the union of Ravenna Teatro, the Kismet theatre (Opera of Bari) and Tam Teatro Musica (of Padua) (co-produced by Ravenna Festival), in its perhaps excessive length (two and a half hours without intermission) is certainly a work that defines a new maturity in Martinelli's creative path», ELENA ZAULI, *Ravenna Festival/ Gli Inferi profondi di Martinelli*, in «Corriere di Ravenna», 30 giugno 1996, available online in the digitised archive on the site of the Teatro delle Albe company. Henceforth reference will be made to it for articles and scene photos.

[160] See GUIDO PADUANO, *La missione del poeta*, in ARISTOFANE, *Le Rane*, introduzione e traduzione di Guido Paduano, note di Alessandro Grilli, Milano, Bur, 1998 [2012[15]], pp. 5-29.

[161] «antenato totem», see Martinelli's statements accompanying the performance on the page dedicated to the performance *All'inferno-1996. affresco da Aristofane* in the Archive on Albe's official website: https://www.teatrodellealbe.com/ita/spettacolo/all-inferno (last accessed 25/05/2025).

[162] See MARC AUGÉ, *Non-lieux: introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1992.

sinners there break into constant laments. In point twenty-eight of his statement on the performance, Martinelli thus reflects on the aural component of the performance, superimposing the classical conception of Hades proposed by Hesiod on the *Inferno* described by Dante:

23. L'Ade è "casa sonora", racconta Esiodo. L'entrata agli inferi è l'entrata in un edificio di suoni, una lunga discesa in cui si è accompagnati dai tamburi e dalle bacchette di legno. Al centro Has, unico visibile in mezzo alle ombre, una ghirlanda di edera in capo, a torso nudo, il tama sotto l'ascella, Dioniso nero che ruggendo ci sposta altrove. Dioniso è lì, in quel corpo ruggente, abitato. La musica è il basamento invisibile. E allo stesso modo c'è anche una musica delle lingue che forma questa casa, una musica delle "diverse lingue" (Dante, *Inferno*, III, 25), dei dialetti che ogni attore porta in dote, musica della nuova polis che è diventato il mondo: lavorare sui dialetti per esprimerne la carica vitale, sensuale, dionisiaca. Lingue di terra. Il corpo dell'attore è un corpo-lingua, esprime la sua diversa, specifica carica erotica: la scena è un luogo che resiste all'appiattimento, che salva la varietà delle specie, che esalta l'infinita, torbida varietà del mondo[163].

23. Hades is a 'house of sound', says Hesiod. The entrance to the underworld is an entrance into a building of sound, a long descent in which one is accompanied by drums and wooden sticks. In the centre Has, the only one visible amidst the shadows, a garland of ivy on his head, bare-chested, with a talking drum under his armpit, black Dionysus roaring to move us elsewhere. Dionysus is there, in that roaring, inhabited body. Music is the invisible foundation. And in the same way there is also a music of the languages that form this house, a music of the 'different languages' (Dante, *Inferno*, III, 25), of the dialects that each actor brings as a dowry, music of the new polis that has become the world: working on dialects to express their vital, sensual, Dionysian charge. Tongues of earth. The actor's body is a body-language, it expresses its different, specific erotic charge: the stage is a place that resists flattening, that saves the variety of species, that exalts the infinite, murky variety of the world.

The protagonists of this play are two poor African peasants accompanied by a magic donkey, played by Montanari. In this singular intercultural Aristophanesque *katabasis*, different conceptions of Inferno from different cultural matrices are juxtaposed, in which the classical and the Christian are only two of the many, but for the Italian audience perhaps the easiest to discern. In the ample space offered by the Almagià, on a scenographic level, great attention is paid to references to classical and more contemporary art, creating games of juxtaposition and cross-references. In this first dramaturgical and directorial re-elaboration of an inferno, conceived by Martinelli, of particular interest are: the choice of having the audience enter the dark space divided in small groups, coming into direct contact with the performers' hands; the plurality of languages and sounds coming from different countries, which enriches the dramaturgy with meanings; the mixing of different poetic subtexts in the dramaturgy; the overlap between the classical imagery of the underworld and Dante's toponymy.

Another significant experience, which represents a cornerstone on which the *Cantiere Dante* was later to be built, can be found in *Arrevuoto* [which in Neapolitan dialect means *Sottosopra / Upside down*], an adaptation in three movements taken from *Acarnesi*, *Donne a parlamento* and *Pluto* by Aristophanes (2006-2008)[164]. In this performance, for the first time, Martinelli exported and tested the *non-school* model

[163] Statement no. 28 by Martinelli within the page dedicated to the performance *All'inferno-1996. affresco da Aristofane* in the Archive on the official website of Albe, cit.

[164] See MARCO MARTINELLI, *Arrevuoto. Scampia Napoli*, a cura di Maurizio Bracci e Roberta Carlotto, Napoli, L'ancora del mediterraneo, 2009; MARCO MARTINELLI, *Aristofane a Scampia. Come far amare i classici agli adolescenti con la non-scuola*, Firenze, Ponte alle grazie, 2016. The first staging took place at the Scampia Auditorium on 21 April 2006, called *Primo movimento- Pace!* It was followed by the *Secondo movimento - Ubu sotto tiro* in 2007 and the *Terzo movimento - L'Immaginario malato* in 2008. See also MARCO MARTINELLI, ERMANNA MONTANARI, *Primavera eretica. Scritti e interviste: 1983-2013*, cit., pp. 211-217; PIERGIORGIO GIACCHÈ, *"Arrevuoto": quando il teatro sospende la*

outside Ravenna. The opportunity to work with young people and adolescents, conceiving with them a scene that responds to their needs, was realised in Scampia, a district on the outskirts of Naples famous for its underworld and disadvantaged contexts. In this difficult area, Martinelli brought the experience of the *non-school* as a proposal of openness to dialogue, of cultural redemption for the young people who live there and who know not only the evil of that environment, but also the possibilities it offers. In Scampia, from 2006 to 2008, a three-year theatre workshop was organised in collaboration with the Mercadante Theatre in Naples. For the first performance, they took their cue from the theme of Aristophanes' *Peace*, i.e. the need for a shared determination of what peace is and how to build it together, constructing a dramaturgical path to stage this "arrevuoto", the ability to manifest and be the change.

Just as in the reality of the Ravenna schools, Martinelli did not present the students with a text, a script to refer to, but asked everyone to be present, to open up to others and offer a piece of themselves, to create that trust and responsibility towards the group necessary to move on to doing, to deciding what the performance would be:

Ricordo che nei primi due mesi di *Arrevuoto* non riuscivo a lavorare cinque minuti di seguito […]. Stavo per cedere, confesso… poi *qualcosa* è accaduto. Hanno compreso che non si trattava del copione: si trattava di loro. E quando questo avviene, nasce *qualcosa* che dopo trent'anni continua a emozionarmi. È una strana magia quella di cui stiamo parlando, e ogni volta può avvenire in modi diversi, attraverso un gioco, un canto corale, una sfida. Ma avviene. Accade. E da quel momento si è tutti presi nel laccio dello spettacolo, nel piacere di costruirlo insieme. Di *essere* insieme[165].

I remember that in the first two months of *Arrevuoto* I couldn't work five minutes straight [...]. I was about to give in, I confess... then *something* happened. They realised it wasn't about the script: it was about them. And when that happens, *something* is born that, after thirty years, continues to excite me. It is a strange magic that we are talking about, and each time, it can happen in different ways, through a game, a choral song, or a challenge. But it happens. It happens. And from that moment on, you are all caught up in the lace of the show, in the pleasure of building it together. Of *being* together.

Martinelli's work on stage is flanked by that, behind the scenes, of Montanari, who during these three years in Naples deepened her study of the voice, helping girls in particular to find their own. As she herself recounts, the violence of the Neapolitan vocality, in all its myriad facets, put her artistic skills to the test. She only apparently took a step back from being in the limelight on stage while deeply sharing with young people what she had learnt in different parts of the world and in years of training: what it means to discover one's own voice and give it space. This practice is flanked by his primal predilection for stage design and costumes, cultivated together with the Neapolitan stage craftsmen[166].

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dittatura del mondo, in TEATRO DELLE ALBE, MARCO MARTINELLI, ERMANNA MONTANARI (a cura di), *Suburbia. Molti Ubu in giro per il pianeta. 1998-2008*, Milano, Ubulibri, 2008, pp. 99-109; PIERGIORGIO GIACCHÈ, *La parabola dell'animazione teatrale*, in DEBORA PIETROBONO, RODOLFO SACCHETTINI (a cura di), *Il teatro salvato dai ragazzini*, cit., pp. 32-45; FRANCESCA SATURNINO, *La non-scuola di Marco Martinelli. Tracce e voci intorno ad Aristofane a Pompei*, cit.

[165] MARCO MARTINELLI, *Il teatro, un rito di iniziazione*, in FRANCESCA SATURNINO, *La non-scuola di Marco Martinelli. Tracce e voci intorno ad Aristofane a Pompei*, cit., pp. 133-146, quotation at at pp. 141-142.

[166] ERMANNA MONTANARI, *«La scoperta di una voce spudorata, inaddomesticabile»: la non-scuola come capovolgimento di vite*, in FRANCESCA SATURNINO, *La non-scuola di Marco Martinelli. Tracce e voci intorno ad Aristofane a Pompei*, cit., pp. 147-164.

In addition to providing an unprecedented test case with respect to the practice of *non-school*, aimed at creating a new dramaturgy and codifying the work through the chorus in an unknown and challenging reality, this work of adaptation of the classics carried out in Scampia, especially in the 2006 end-of-term performance, produced some scenographic choices that will be taken up later in *Inferno.* On the stage of *Arrevuoto*, the journey proposed in the dramaturgy of *Acarnesi* to find peace is emphasised with two signs placed on the scenic arch, indicating the opposite directions to be taken, «*n'terra*»[«*on Earth*»] and «*n'cielo*»[«*in the sky*»], once again soliciting a Dantean subtext (*Figures 95-96*). In terms of costuming, the contrast between the two choirs of young boys from Scampia, dressed in camouflage military fatigues, and the girls from Naples, in school uniforms with white shirts and black skirts, is also very significant: a collision between culture/education and violence.

On closer inspection, however, it emerges how the figure of the soldier, and its visual reference through the military uniform, is very present in Albe's imagery, especially when associated with the concept of the "journey to the underworld" and the "Otherworld". The metaphor of the soldier within several of Albe's productions is clarified by Martinelli and Montanari themselves: for them, the Platonic myth of Er, present in the last book of the dialogue *The Republic*[167], is particularly significant.

This figure of a soldier who is given the possibility of transcending death, of seeing the Hereafter and the way souls are judged and finally return to earth as a result of Platonic metempsychosis, is a recurring example for Albe. Er is a character who goes beyond death and becomes a witness to another world for a future world to be built for the living. Indicated by Albe as an example to return to, he seems particularly in tune with the Dante figure, also an emblem of salvation offering a message of hope to the world. Appearing in several of Albe's works, between theatre and film[168], in each one he deepens the main meaning of doing theatre for Albe: to be messengers of the beauty of the world by traversing the baseness of the human soul; to try and offer the audience a vision that may help them in making a decision; to tell their own story, as Er did, «Go, see and tell it to the living!»[169].

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[167] See PLATONE, *La Repubblica*, introduzione, traduzione e note di Mario Vegetti, testo greco a fronte, Milano, BUR, 2006, pp. 1092-1183. The edition follows the textual vulgate proposed by SIMON R. SLINGS (edited by), *Platonis Rempublicam recognovit brevique adnotatione critica instruxit*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2003.

[168] In this case, particular reference is made to the performances *I Polacchi* (1998), *UBU BUUR* (2007) and the film *ER*, in which Er's journey to the Hereafter and his encounters described by Plato in the *Republic*, especially the seven encounters with the seven sirens guarding the seven celestial stars of the Pythagorean system, are juxtaposed with actress Ermanna Montanari's artistic journey in confronting seven iconic characters constructed together with Martinelli for the dramaturgies of the Albe. See *ER*, a film by Marco Martinelli, dedicated to Ermanna's art-in-life, with Ermanna Montanari, made by Marco Martinelli and Francesco Tedde from a montage of archive materials, produced by Ravenna Teatro/Teatro delle Albe in collaboration with Antropotopia, 2020; LAURA MARIANI, *Er, 2020*, in LAURA MARIANI, *Il teatro nel cinema. Tre film di Marco Martinelli e Ermanna Montanari*, Roma, Luca Sossella, 2021, pp. 125-167; LAURA MARIANI, *Il lavoro sulla figura: intervista a Ermanna Montanari*, in LAURA MARIANI, *Il teatro nel cinema. Tre film di Marco Martinelli e Ermanna Montanari*, cit., pp. 183-200.

[169] «Vai, vedi e raccontalo ai viventi!», these words are taken from the answers to several questions posed by the author of this thesis to Marco Martinelli and Ermanna Montanari during the days of the theatrical workshop *Purgatorio dei poeti*, realised by the University of Turin (11-15 February 2025) within the PRIN 2022 project PRIN 2022 *Dante nella contemporaneità. Le riscritture teatrali*, supervised by Leonardo Mancini (*Figures 159-160*).

The last artistic experience of the Albe that we wish to cite as the basis for the constitution of *Cantiere Dante* corresponds to a new approach in the company's history. During the 2011 edition of the Santarcangelo Festival, in which Montanari was artistic director (8-17 July), Montanari and Martinelli decided to transport the experience gained in Ravenna to the Festival, applying the working methodology on the chorus to three fundamental elements: the definition of a specific terminology to describe their artistic activities; the definition of a space; the definition of a time.

If, in general, Teatro delle Albe was invited to work with a specific audience by institutions or artistic associations, during this edition of the Santarcangelo Festival, it activated its own "*chiamata pubblica/*public call". As director, the actress proposed an action open to the participation of all Italian theatres, as a form of protest against the cuts made at that time to the performing arts sector by the Berlusconi government. Montanari asked each theatre to send to the Festival an element of its theatre used to seat the audience (such as an armchair, a stool, a chair, etc.). To give substance to this political-aesthetic protest, Montanari set up a new stall in the Ganganelli square in Santarcantelo, where instead of the artists and companies, instead of the audience, there were only empty seats, all different, bearers and witnesses of dissent and the will to be there, despite the impossibility, despite the physical distance[170].

As a company, on the other hand, Albe proposed a "public call" to participate in a choral action called *Eresia della felicità - creazione a cielo aperto per Vladimir Majakovskij* (*Figures 97-98-99*). The chorus, created according to the *non-school* approach, in this case, opened up to all those, adolescents and young people, who wished to voluntarily participate in the workshop-theatre project and create, together Martinelli and guided by the Albe actors, a dialogue path on the poems of Vladimir Majakovsky[171]:

Un plotone di duecento adolescenti, provenienti da tante città e paesi del mondo: Italia, Belgio, Senegal, Brasile, Stati Uniti. Un laboratorio esplosivo a cielo aperto, ogni sera nello stadio dello Sferisterio di Santarcangelo, questo è Eresia della felicità, una creazione quotidiana sotto l'insegna della non-scuola del Teatro delle Albe. Gli adolescenti in maglietta gialla imbracceranno i versi crepitanti di Vladimir Majakovskij, scritti quando lui pure era un giovane ribelle, e sentiva la tempesta nell'aria[172].

A platoon of two hundred teenagers from many cities and countries around the world: Italy, Belgium, Senegal, Brazil, and the United States. An explosive open-air workshop, every evening in the Sferisterio stadium in Santarcangelo, this is Heresy of Happiness, a daily creation under the banner of the non-school of Teatro delle Albe. Teenagers in yellow shirts will harness the crackling verses of Vladimir Majakovsky, written when he himself was a young rebel, and felt the storm in the air.

Every evening at dusk, the village of Santarcangelo is invaded by a multitude of teenagers wearing bright yellow T-shirts, in honour of Majakovsky's poem (*Figure 100*):

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[170] See ERMANNA MONTANARI, *«La scoperta di una voce spudorata, inaddomesticabile»: la non-scuola come capovolgimento di vite*, in FRANCESCA SATURNINO, *La non-scuola di Marco Martinelli. Tracce e voci intorno ad Aristofane a Pompei*, cit., references at pp. 158-159.

[171] See MARCO MARTINELLI, ERMANNA MONTANARI, *Primavera eretica. Scritti e interviste: 1983-2013*, cit., pp. 218-226.

[172] Description of *Eresia della felicità - creazione a cielo aperto per Vladimir Majakovskij* on the company website. See also MADDALENA GIOVANNELLI, FRANCESCA SERRAZANETTI, *Santarcangelo 2011: "chiamata pubblica"*, in «Stratagemmi Prospettive Teatrali», 13 luglio 2011, available at: https://www.stratagemmi.it/santarcangelo-2011-chiamata-pubblica/ (last accessed 25/05/2025).

I will sew black trousers
with the velvet of my voice.
And a yellow blouse
with three metres of sunset[173].

The Albe tribe works first and foremost on the body, on vocality, creating a new contact, with the self, with their companions and therefore with places, re-appropriating open space as happened in classical theatre and once again creating the entity of the collective chorus-actor, «which calls into question the spectator, without whom there is no theatre»[174]. Albe's claim is for a collective theatre, which breaks out of the narrow spaces in which culture is relegated, bridled in bourgeois dogmatisms and glass palaces, to return to being a community, active democracy, choral and creative art. The public call, in this sense, is a stance towards place and time, asking the entire community to be a determining element and decision-maker, not a passive receptor of a pre-packaged idea.

At the moment of the final performance, Martinelli presents himself as the first guide of the choral action: he manages the dramaturgical component that supports the undertaking, offering the audience the essential elements for understanding the work carried out up to that moment, and then announces the poem that will be recited, together with the name of the coryphaeus, adding technical indications for its execution, for example «Angelica*, I will sew black trousers*, jumping on one foot». In the different phases of the work, each boy and girl takes turns as coryphaeus of his/her companions, choosing poetic verses to learn by heart that he/she will then pronounce and have pronounced, according to Martinelli's random instructions:

la guida deve saper condurre lasciandosi a propria volta guidare da quella *potenza*: è un "va e vieni" in cui coro e corifeo tendono a con-fondersi, a cantare insieme, e il tutto prende la forma della vita-in-movimento, vita-incanto. Incantamento collettivo, in cui l'io accende il noi e il noi trasforma l'io, l'io trasformato reagisce e reinventa, e rilancia, e il coro incamera e rilancia a sua volta, in un poker dionisiaco in cui armonie e dissonanze si spiazzano a vicenda, le carte sono scoperte e tutti ne escono vincitori. E l'unico azzardo è il moltiplicarsi della gioia vitale. Nell'in-canto si *tocca* l'animo altrui e si è *toccati*, si sperimenta la grazia del non controllo, della non manipolazione, del non dominio, del non giudizio, della non mortificazione, del non disprezzo, della non derisione. A questo punto, anche se nei limiti di un gioco, di un esercizio, il *dato* sfuma, sfumano le separatezze, i muri. Io? Noi? La vita-in-canto contraddice il *dato* perché come continua creazione essa è il superamento del dato[175].

the guide must know how to lead by allowing him/herself to be guided by that *power*: it is a 'coming and going' in which chorus and coryphaeus tend to con-fuse, to sing together, and the whole takes the form of life-in-movement, life-enchantment. Collective enchantment, in which the 'I' ignites the 'we' and the 'we' transforms the 'I', the transformed 'I' reacts and reinvents, and relaunches, and the chorus in turn captures and relaunches, in a Dionysian poker game in which harmonies and dissonances displace each other, the cards are revealed and everyone comes out the winner. And the only gamble is the multiplication of vital joy. In the en-chanting, one *touches* the soul of others and is *touched*, one experiences the grace of non-control, of non-manipulation, of non-domination, of non-judgement, of non-mortification, of non-scorn,

[173] The version provided to participants and used for the performance by Teatro delle Albe of Majakovsky's poem *La casacca del fatuo* (1914) is reproduced here, See VLADIMIR MAJAKOVSKIJ, *Poesie d'amore. 1913-1930*, a cura di Paola Ferretti, testo russo a fronte, Torino, Einaudi, 2023, pp. 10-11. The English translation comes from VLADIMIR MAJAKOVSKY*, The Fop's Smock*, in VLADIMIR MAJAKOVSKY*, Maximum Access: Selected Poems*, translated by Jenny Wade, Mill Valley, Sensitive Skin, 2018, pp. 38-39.
[174] «che chiama in causa lo spettatore, senza il quale non si dà il teatro», ERMANNA MONTANARI, *Santarcangelo41,* in MARCO MARTINELLI, ERMANNA MONTANARI, *Primavera eretica. Scritti e interviste: 1983-2013*, cit., pp. 218-219, quotation at at p. 218.
[175] MARCO MARTINELLI*, Coro*, cit., quotation at p. 35.

of non-derision. At this point, even if within the limits of a game, of an exercise, the *data* fades, the separatenesses, the walls fade away. Me? Us? En-chanting life contradicts the data because, as continuous creation, it is the overcoming of the data.

This experience of poetic choral action, which is embodied in the bodies of the young people during the two weeks of the festival, builds a community that works together, day after day, on the basis of Majakovsky's poetry, which passes through the village and takes possession of it. In the choir's singing, the poetry is a new form of *secular medieval procession*, in which the litanies and responsorial psalms between the officiant and the faithful are supplanted by more secular and universal verses of the poets who represent the canon of Albe[176].

This choral action transported *en plein air* with *Eresia della felicità*, a performance that will subsequently be repeated in many other cities and with different declinations, is decisive in theorising the other two theoretical pillars that underpin Dante's operation. In addition to the aforementioned "public call" we now have the concepts of: "*farsi luogo/*making place" and "*messa in vita*/bringing to life".

For Martinelli and Montanari, "making a place" means the ability to appropriate a space and, at the same time, give concrete meaning to the community of bodies, to that undifferentiated *us* of the chorus, which is all and one at the same time. Martinelli recalls that the invasion of spaces different from the usual theatrical perimeter found an antecedent in some of their youthful performances from 1977-78, during which they created theatrical actions in the streets of Ravenna reworking some of Beckett's texts. Their desire then started from "taking over the city". Dressed as businessmen, briefcases in hand and faces painted with white wax, they would stand in front of some symbolic buildings of the bourgeois establishment and from an initial standing position, they would slowly fall to their knees, in a continuous loop of physical prostration[177]. The theme of "making place" soon became a veritable Manifesto (*Farsi luogo. Varco al teatro in 101 movimenti*[178]), which in the particular circumstance of the performance *Eresia della felicità*, immediately after the experience in Naples, further deepened the practice of the *non-school* in a dimension lowered the age limit for the participants to include the youngest children, and broadened the area of the choral action to the entire town.

"Bringing to life", on the other hand, is the formula used to describe not only a type of preparation work of the chorus, of the community representing the action, but also the type of adaptation of a text[179]. For Albe, in fact, under the sign of the constant experience of the *non-school*, each individual is different and indispensable because his or her life adds colour, a new dimension to the chorus, which is more widely synonymous with the performance itself. Therefore, in bringing their own contribution, even a minimal

[176] See LAURA MARIANI, *Ermanna Montanari. Fare-disfare-rifare nel Teatro delle Albe*, cit., pp. 174-175.
[177] These details were recounted by Martinelli to the author of this thesis in Turin during the days of the Dante theatre workshop, answering a question as to when the activities of "making place" began, in the sense of appropriating different places in the city outside the theatre, which then led to the choral actions throughout the city of Ravenna during the performances of *Cantiere Dante*.
[178] See MARCO MARTINELLI*, Farsi luogo. Varco al teatro in 101 movimenti*, Imola, Cue Press, 2015.
[179] *Ivi*, p. 10, n. 16.

one, each individual constitutes an enrichment for the whole community, for the enterprise, which cannot be limited to the mere performance, but constitutes a fusion of a given work with life, just as happens during the simplest choral action-play: «to describe the theatrical process itself not as a staging, but as a *bringing to life*, a very delicate but powerful process that allows us to tap into a degree of human relations, among the participants in the chorus, that is extremely intimate»[180].

For Martinelli, understanding theatre as a collective event, in which the audience is not only spectator, but co-actor together with the artists involved, finds its foundation in three exemplary moments in the history of theatre the sacred rituality of classical theatre, which derives from the dithyrambic procession in honour of Dionysus, the total adhesion of the medieval collectivity to performances outside the perimeter of the Church, and, finally, the mass theatre of the 20th century, conceived in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution by the director and theorist Vsevolod Ėmil'evič Mejerchol'd[181], in which an entire collectivity supports political and social ideals[182]. The intimate dimension created between body and life within a given space, resonating with the chosen works, determines a new approach of the company from Ravenna towards the codification of a "dramaturgy of relational space". The city, understood as citizenship and collectivity, becomes the subject to be reminded of the importance of the role of culture; while the city, as a place, becomes an artistic subject within the performance as a space, a theatre where past and present time that pulsates, acting not only as a set but also as an active actor, responsibly resuming its role towards the collectivity that inhabits it.

All these components, theoretical, dramaturgical and otherwise, find fulfilment within the long process of adapting and "bringing to life" Dante's *Comedy*, called *Cantiere Dante*, as undertaken by the Teatro delle Albe from 2017 to 2022. As Martinelli declares, the Florentine poet for Albe is a «waking companion», that is, a poetic influence that gradually emerges, at first underlying the dramaturgies written by Martinelli, to then become fully manifest in the definition of the *Cantiere Dante* project:

Dante ce lo portiamo dietro da una vita, eravamo due adolescenti innamorati tra noi e innamorati anche dell'opera del sommo. Come Cesare Garboli definisce Molière, per noi è un «compagno di veglia»: qualsiasi spettacolo facessimo, la *Commedia* era lì. Un libro sacro da aprire anche a caso, in cui cercare ispirazione. Il sogno di metterlo in scena non è di questi ultimi anni, chiaramente non è un testo per il teatro e 14.233 versi sono una grande sfida. Ad un certo punto è arrivato il momento di poterlo realizzare insieme a Ravenna Festival, nel 2017. Per noi Dante è una figura fondamentale perché è stato uno dei più grandi a non aver separato il destino dell'anima individuale da quello della polis, della collettività. C'è la teologia, ovvero gli angeli e i diavoli che ci abitano, e allo stesso tempo la politica. Riuscire a tenere

[180] «descrivere il processo teatrale stesso non come una messa in scena, bensì come una *messa in vita*, un processo delicatissimo ma potente che permette di attingere ad un grado di relazioni umane, tra i partecipanti al coro, estremamente intimo», CLEMENTE TAFURI, DAVIDE BERONIO, *Preface*, in MARCO MARTINELLI, *Coro*, cit., pp. IX-XXIV, quotation at at p. XIII.

[181] See VSEVOLOD ĖMIL'EVIČ MEJERCHOL'D, *L'ottobre teatrale 1918-1930*, edizione riveduta e ampliata, a cura di Fausto Malvocati, Imola, Cue Press, 2020; VSEVOLOD ĖMIL'EVIČ MEJERCHOL'D, *La rivoluzione teatrale*, a cura di Donatella Gavrilovich, Roma, Editori Riuniti, 2001 VSEVOLOD ĖMIL'EVIČ MEJERCHOL'D, *Sul Teatro. Scritti 1907-1912*, prefazione di Raissa Raskina, Roma, Dino Audino, 2015; PAUL BLANCHART, *Massa*, in *Enciclopedia dello spettacolo*, fondata da Silvio D'Amico, 10 voll., Roma, Le Maschere, 1960, vol. VII, coll. 257-260; MARIA RITA SIMONE, *Il Teatro di massa. Un'esperienza di spettacolo politico nell'Italia del secondo dopoguerra*, Mantova, Il Rio, 2021.

[182] See MARCO MARTINELLI*, Farsi luogo. Varco al teatro in 101 movimenti*, cit., reference at pp. 31-33.

insieme queste dimensioni ci porta a ciò che siamo in profondità, allo smarrimento nella selva oscura e alla cieca violenza che non ci abbandona, ma anche al desiderio di un'umanità nuova, della felicità dell'essere[183].

Dante has been with us all our lives, we were two teenagers in love with each other and also in love with the work of the Poet. As Cesare Garboli defines Molière, for us he is a 'waking companion': whatever play we did, the *Commedia* was there. A sacred book to be opened even at random, in which to seek inspiration. The dream of staging it is not one of the last few years; it is clearly not a text for the theatre, and 14,233 verses are a great challenge. At a certain point, the time came to realise it together with the Ravenna Festival in 2017. For us, Dante is a fundamental figure because he was one of the greatest who did not separate the destiny of the individual soul from that of the polis, of the collectivity. There is theology, the angels and devils that inhabit us, and, at the same time, politics. Holding these dimensions together brings us to what we are deep down, to the bewilderment in the dark forest and the blind violence that does not leave us, but also to the desire for a new humanity, for the happiness of being.

Recalling once again the indissoluble bond that exists between Aristophanes' comedy and Dante's in Martinelli's dramaturgy, in the aforementioned Manifesto of *Farsi luogo*, it is highlighted how the poet Dante has been an artistic example and a model of life to strive for in the company's more than forty years of activity, in order to conceive its own way of doing theatre in the contemporary world:

(n. 93) […] questi trent'anni sono stati, e lo saranno chissà ancora per quanto, oltre che il pantano della corruzione, l'epoca del narcisismo. Vietato illudersi che basti qualche slogan per uscirne, dall'uno come dall'altra. Nelle *Rane*, Dioniso scende agli inferi per cercare tra i morti un poeta per la città, che là, tra i vivi, nessuno più si prende il rischio di scrivere versi «spericolati». *Farsi luogo* significa*, ancora*, assumersi quella responsabilità, il coraggio di una narrazione intima e politica allo stesso tempo, di un arco che ci disegni, e nel disegnarci ci trapassi. Disegni e oltrepassi la nostra meschinità, il nostro vanitoso narciso, la nostra *insignificanza*, a cercare parole e pensieri in grado di *significare*. […] Narrazione come necessità di ritrovare *ragioni* che rendano conto della *speranza*, di fronte e nel bel mezzo dello sbriciolamento, del non senso come condizione collettiva che non riguarda solo l'Italia ma l'Europa intera dei burocrati e dell'egoismo istituzionalizzato, avido, arpagonico, tra terrorismi nuovi e vecchi, stragi di creature in mare, economie alla deriva.

(n. 94) e sempre citando la *Commedia* del più contemporaneo tra i nostri grandi poeti cristiani, la narrazione intesa come sguardo fisso alla "aiuola che ci fa tanto feroci"[184].

(n. 93) [...] these thirty years have been, and who knows how much longer they will be, not only the quagmire of corruption but also the age of narcissism. It is forbidden to delude oneself that a few slogans are enough to get out of it, from the former as from the latter. In the *Frogs*, Dionysus descends to the underworld to seek among the dead a poet for the city, as there, among the living, no one takes the risk of writing «reckless» verses any more. *To make oneself a place* means*, once again*, to take on that responsibility, the courage of a narrative that is both intimate and political, of an arch that draws us and, in drawing us, passes through us. Draw and go beyond our pettiness, our vain narcissism, and our insignificance to seek words and thoughts capable of *meaning*. [...] Narration as the need to find *reasons* that account for *hope*, in the face and in the midst of the crumbling, of non-sense as a collective condition that does not only concern Italy but the whole of Europe of bureaucrats and institutionalised, greedy, harpagonic selfishness, amid new and old terrorisms, massacres of creatures at sea, drifting economies.

(n. 94) and again quoting the *Comedy* of the most contemporary of our great Christian poets, the narrative is understood as a fixed gaze at "The little patch of earth that makes us here so fierce".

Following the successful 2015 edition of the Ravenna Festival, dedicated to the Supreme Poet and to music, a very keen city administration conceived together with Albe a long-term Dante project, to

[183] Statements by Marco Martinelli in LUCREZIA ERCOLANI, *Martinelli: «L'individuo e la polis uniti da un destino comune»*, in «Il Manifesto», 19 novembre 2021, available online at: https://ilmanifesto.it/martinelli-lindividuo-e-la-polis-uniti-da-un-destino-comune (last accessed 25/05/2025). CESARE GARBOLI's expression can be found in the volume CESARE GARBOLI, *Tartufo*, a cura di Carlo Cecchi, con un saggio di Carlo Ginzburg, Milano, Adelphi, 2014. See also MARCO MARTINELLI, *Nel nome di Dante. Diventare grandi con la Divina Commedia*, Milano, Ponte alle Grazie, 2019.
[184] MARCO MARTINELLI*, Farsi luogo. Varco al teatro in 101 movimenti*, cit., pp. 42-43. Dante's internal quotation in n. 94 is taken from *Pd.* XXII, v. 151 (Hollander/DOL).

actively involve the city (Ravenna, it should be remembered, hosts the remains of Alighieri) and distribute the staging of the three canticles of the *Comedy* until the next centenary in 2021.

Thanks to the happy previous experiences, Albe wished to construct the Trilogy's performances by including both the volunteer chorus component and the research component characteristic of their company. Therefore, they started preparing the *Cantiere Dante* by creating the first "public call" addressed exclusively to the citizens of Ravenna.

As Montanari and Martinelli recount, at first, they thought there would be no more than a hundred people, which they would have been very pleased with, and they had already set a calendar of meetings on the *Commedia* and other related topics to deepen their preparation[185]. Instead, almost a thousand people responded to this call, a number that increased further after the first performance, even including actors of friendly companies from other more or less distant territories (*Figures 101-102-103*).

Inferno premiered on 25 May 2017[186]. The performance opens in front of Dante's tomb, develops along a wandering route through the streets of the centre of Ravenna, and arrives at the Teatro Rasi, where most of the performance takes place. For almost three hours of performance, a duration that will also be maintained for the following canticles, the audience embodies Dante, following a Poundian dimension dear to Albe: Dante is Everyman. Therefore, the entire audience becomes, like him, pilgrims and travellers.

The solemn ritual of the opening of Dante's Tomb (the starting point for each performance of the Trilogy) involved the presence of Montanari and Martinelli, dressed in white, who welcome the audience and begin to declaim the first verses of the first canto. Following the pattern of the choral action of the *non-school*, the two performers, sometimes in unison, sometimes alone, declaim Dante's verses, tendentially one hendecasyllable at a time, and the audience, in which there are also members of the "public call", respond by repeating the same verses. If Montanari and Martinelli are the guide-leaders of the journey, embodying Virgil, the entire audience gradually becomes Dante, an *ensemble* that takes courage and begins to intone the verses, responding to their prompting (*Figure 104*)[187].

Following the two guides moving from the Tomb begins the procession through the streets of Ravenna. The route of *Inferno*, which ends at the Teatro Rasi, includes a significant stop in front of the Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo: here a young girl, Beatrice, greets the onlookers, recalling the female intercession of the blessed to save Dante's soul, and lets the audience proceed further[188]. The Teatro Rasi,

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[185] The meetings are all recorded and available on Albe website, under *Cantiere Dante*, and are attended by professors from the Alma Mater of Bologna but also from other universities and institutions.

[186] In addition to the official dates, the first performance saw a preview on 24 May, on the occasion of the International Dante Congress. The author of this thesis attended that very performance as a participant in the Congress organised by the Alma Mater Studiorum-University of Bologna: https://beniculturali.unibo.it/it/eventi/congresso-dantesco-internazionale (last accessed 25/05/2025). All information, as well as photos and materials, can be found both on the Ravenna Festival website and on the Albe website, as well as on their *social channels*.

[187] The photo appendix shows the three routes taken during the three Albe performances, selecting the key stations observed and recreating the idea of the route taken using Google Maps.

[188] See *If*. II.

the home of Teatro delle Albe, is revolutionised specifically to host within its walls the 'funnel' of *Inferno*. What was once the church of Santa Chiara, which Dante himself presumably frequented, is now a theatre re-organised specifically for the trilogy[189]: the stalls with the main stands have been removed, leaving only the gallery with the usual seats, to create a large, rectangular, open space in front of the structure's old apse. All the dressing rooms, rooms, corridors and spaces that usually pertain to performers and technicians have been emptied and now become home to the various circles of hell, to offer the audience a vision of a precise rewriting of the deadly sins in a contemporary key. The audience does not have the slightest idea of what awaits them once they have crossed the theatre walls, but the words of Dante, inscribed on the tympanum of the Resi façade, stand out, disturbing and peremptory (*Figure 105*):

PER
ME
SI
VA[190].

From this particularly eloquent set design it emerges how Albe's intention is to declare that *Hell* is theatre itself. As a theatre company, *Inferno* is the intimacy of their own workplace, where they can denounce the distortions of the contemporary world, starting with a reflection on themselves. This first cantica, unlike the following ones, is the only one to provide spaces inside, as it intends to demystify the useless superficialities of the present and the lies behind which everyone hides their skeletons in the cupboard. Thus, Albe bring the world, metaphorically, into their own home, seeking to offer in the wake of Dante a reflection on the present through the metaphor of theatrical art, to then project the audience towards the future, salvation, once they have left. Just like Dante, the audience too must pass through the infernal funnel as a form of rite of passage in order to aspire to ascend purified towards the stars.

Having crossed the threshold of the theatre door, complete darkness greets the visitors. From the indistinct, screams and voices begin to be heard. Excitement and chaos reign supreme. This is Albe's version of the *Antinferno*, where both the souls waiting to be transported across the river Acheron and the slothful, those who have not chosen a side in life and are therefore destined to remain eternally excluded from the real *Hell*. Charon, the ferryman of the damned souls, in Albe's performance, is identified as a Nazi hierarch, accompanied by a group of soldiers: all of them are dressed in camouflage military fatigues, shouting, jostling and shoving the audience-Dante, pronouncing some particularly violent passages from

[189] On the Ravenna Teatro website, it is possible to see the normal layout of Teatro Rasi, via the *virtual tour* present: https://ravennateatro.com/spazi/teatro-rasi/ (last accessed 25/05/2025).
[190] The reference is to the famous *incipit* triplet of *If*. III, vv. 1-3, «Per me si va ne la città dolente,| per me si va ne l'etterno dolore,| per me si va tra la perduta gente».

Simone Weil's *Venise sauvée*[191]. The direction they unceremoniously point him towards is the wide openness of the former stalls[192] (*Figure 106*).

From this first sequence, which takes shape in the dimension of the leader and chorus of soldiers, Albe suggest that contemporary reality, which has known and continues to enact new forms of discrimination, violence, genocide and programmed extermination, has succeeded in creating new forms of earthly damnation that overshadow the religious ones envisaged by the Christian reference system described by Dante in *Inferno* and that dramatically subvert the vision of righteous and sinners. Making use of earthly forms of damnation, in this case through the revival of Simone Weil's words and using the connotations of the German SS uniform for the costume that identifies Charon, thus omitting the religious theme that informs Dante's artistic operation, Albe use historical suggestions to lead the audience to imagine this kind of environment with no way out. Albe's secular performance aims at collective images, superimposing here the horror and aberration that Dante had described in *Inferno* to the terrible episodes of the *Shoah*, forms of sadism rather than damnation on earth by human hands, leaving no more room for Dante's religious frame of reference, but rather proposing a contemporaneity where tragedy no longer exists[193], as neither does the Afterlife, defining the whole world and humanity as *Hell*[194].

In the new dimension of the empty stalls of the Rasi theatre, the audience is arranged and made to sit along the perimeter of the seating area on chairs and steps. Behind them, leaning against the walls of the auditorium, are many ladders, alluding to the double dimension of the scene: the one that develops horizontally in front of them, and is the clear representation of *Hell* with its damned, and the one of hope, always present, vertical, reminding the audience of Dante's tension, the sense of that journey, that sooner or later a way out of that abyss of incessant evil will be found[195] (*Figure 107*).

In the midst of the audience, new choruses of the damned take turns, trained according to the *non-school* method: in this case, they are all made up of the different citizens who have responded to the "public call", sometimes in mixed groups (as in the case of the misers and prodigals), sometimes divided

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[191] See SIMONE WEIL, *Venise sauvée. Tragédie en trois actes*, Paris, Gallimard, 1955; SIMONE WEIL, *Venezia salva. Tragedia in tre atti*, traduzione e introduzione di Cristina Campo, Milano, Adelphi, 1987. This text was staged by Luca Ronconi at the Teatro Stabile di Torino in January 1994. It was probably this staging that related the tragedy about the foiled occupation of Venice to the story of the author Simone Weil, who witnessed the Nazi occupation of Paris in 1940.

[192] Among the many articles reviewing the performance *Inferno* in the corresponding section on Albe's website, we particularly refer to the article MASSIMO MARINO, *L'Inferno delle Albe*, in «Doppiozero», 1 giugno 2017.

[193] See GEORGE STEINER, *La morte della tragedia*, traduzione di Giuliana Scudder, Milano, Garzanti, 2005 [ed. or. GEORGE STEINER, *The death of tragedy*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1961].

[194] See MANUELE GRAGNOLATI, *Rewriting Dante after Freud and the Shoah: Giorgio Pressburger's Nel regno oscuro*, in MANUELE GRAGNOLATI, FABIO CAMILLETTI, FABIAN LAMPART (edited by), *Metamorphosing Dante: Appropriations, Manipulations, and Rewritings in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*, cit., pp. 235-250; ROSSEND ARQUÉS, *Dante nell'inferno moderno: la letteratura dopo Auschwitz*, cit.

[195] Dante too in *If*. I could have climbed the hill before him, but the three beasts threw him back into the forest, where he was rescued by Virgil and there began his journey into the abysses of Hell. Similarly, these stairs placed on either side by the Albe remind us of that possibility, but the audience falls prey to the theatrical game set up by the company in the theatre and only manages to exit after completing the entire route.

by gender (as in the case of the Erinyes), and of different ages[196] (*Figure 108*). To represent one of Dante's most famous episodes, that of the lustful in the fifth canto of *Inferno*, the canto of Paolo and Francesca, the Albe choose to use a poetic chorus of young people. In this case, the group is made up of eight couples of young people, as were Paolo and Francesca. The delicacy of the gestures they exchange recalls the depth of feelings of the protagonists of Dante's episode and the nobility of their lineage (*Figure 109*). The couples whisper to the audience, each in their own way, the famous anaphoric tercets that begin with the word *Amor* and describe the *escalation* of the burning in the heart of the sentiment that will lead them to commit the adulterous act and die for having been discovered in flagrante: «Amor, ch'al cor gentil ratto s'apprende», «Amor, ch'a nullo amato amar perdona,» e «Amor condusse noi ad una morte»[197]. Alongside this action, there is the work on the body that focuses on circular movement, to recall the infernal storm that is never silent described by Dante. The boys whirl ever more vortically, each clasped in the arms of their beloved, until they collapse to the ground, to offer the physical, violent and deadly dimension of sin committed through lust. At the end of this section of choruses, which corresponds to the first part of Inferno, the audience is invited to get up and start climbing the ladders leading to the gallery to meet the next circles of Hell.

Teatro Rasi, constantly crisscrossed by a mass of people, artists and audience, all together and mingled together, seems like a teeming anthill. The sequence dedicated to the heretics in the tenth *canto* offers moments of real beauty and interpretative strength. In this case, the two sinners with whom Dante dialogues are played by two actors of exceptional skill. Throughout *Cantiere Dante*, Albe constantly seek to alternate choral scenes, conceived according to the principles of the *non-school*, thanks to the effect of «emotion of multitude»[198] that they convey, and moments of acting virtuosity, in which the performers are members of the company, or colleagues called upon to participate in this Dantean enterprise. The Heretics, therefore, offer an example of this second type, in that the interpreter of Farinata degli Uberti is the rough and mighty Luigi Dadina, a founding member of the Albe, accompanied by the over-eighty-year-old Gianni Plazzi, a former actor of the Societas, specially chosen to play Cavalcante Cavalcanti, the father of the poet Dante's childhood friend[199].

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[196] See the description and analysis of Teatro delle Albe's performance *Inferno. La coralità che scrive il teatro* in LORENZO DONATI, V*erso lo spettatore. Contesti, poetiche, studi e spettacoli attorno al teatro che scrive con la realtà 2000/2019*, Relatori Proff. Daniele Benati, Marco De Marinis, Dottorato di ricerca in Arti visive, performative, mediali, Alma Mater Studiorum-Università di Bologna, Ciclo 33, A.A. 2020-21, pp. 218-229, DOI: 10.48676/unibo/amsdottorato/9968.

[197] *If.* V, vv. 100-108.

[198] «emozione di moltitudine», MARTINA TREU, *Coro per voce sola. La coralità antica sulla scena contemporanea*, in «Dioniso. Rivista di studi Sul Teatro Antico», vol. 6, 2007, pp. 286-311, quotation at at p. 288; LORENZO CARDILLI, STEFANO LOMBARDI VALLAURI (a cura di), *L'arte orale. Poesia, musica, performance*, Torino, Accademia University Press, 2020.

[199] Actor Gianni Plazzi has played in many productions of the Socìetas Raffaello Sanzio and collaborated for a long time with the Teatro delle Albe. In *Purgatorio* of 2019 he returns to the stage at the very beginning of the play to interpret Cato l'Uticense. A friend and colleague, he would also return for *Paradiso* but unfortunately died in 2021, at the age of eighty-five.

This intimate, concentrated scene is immediately contrasted by the frenzy and dynamism of the next section, which is organised within the old space reserved for performers and technicians. In the dressing rooms and corridors, circles are set for the three circles of the violent and the ten *bolge* of the fraudulent, the so-called infernal Malebolge (*Figure 110*). The setting of the scene in this section provides a fragmentation that is particularly reminiscent of the stations of medieval sacred theatre, proceeding by juxtaposition, simultaneity and metonymy. The rooms of the building produce innumerable correspondences with contemporary times: the loneliness of inner unease exacerbated by new technologies and social networks, capitalism and its offshoots in terms of the waste of resources, prevarication, conquest, the increasingly suffocating arrogance of technologies and their subliminal reins, along with old vices such as avarice, violence, and fraud[200].

Once again, a scene dense with figures and dynamism is contrasted with a quieter, more reflective scene. Making the audience sit in the gallery, Martinelli decides to pay homage to Dante's master, Brunetto Latini[201], by projecting on sheets a film by Pier Paolo Pasolini, whom he considers a master of beauty and vision, and an advocate of the role of the artist through directing[202]. Once the sheets of this vision have been removed, the audience is accompanied for the last time to the stalls, where they take their seats once again to listen to Montanari giving body and voice to the wretched cruelty of Count Ugolino.

Passing onto a prepared walkway above the apse, the negative counterpart of God is presented: Lucifer is represented by a music box, where two dummies in white suits (perfect alter-egos of the two guides Montanari and Martinelli) are placed, embracing each other. This is only a facade, beautiful as the beloved angel who fell: as soon as the carillon platform is turned, both figures are seen stabbing each other in the back. The walkway finally leads to the garden at the back of the theatre. Back outside, one observes a last ladder leaning against a tree. On it climbs Montanari and recites the last verses that lead everyone to see the stars again[203] (*Figure 111*).

Before continuing with the analysis of the performance *Purgatorio*, it is necessary to dwell on two other significant productions to interpret the multifaceted creative and evolutionary process of the Dante adaptation by *Cantiere Dante* of Albe.

The first, *The sky over Kibera*, is a docu-film immortalising Dante's "public call". Involved by the AVSI association[204], Martinelli goes to the slum of Kibera, Kenya, to carry out a *non-school* project, involving as many students and children as possible in the schools where the association operates with

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[200] We recommend viewing the photographic material presented on the company's Instagram page, which offers some video clips of the show and many pre-post-show photos. This applies to the following.
[201] See *If*. XV.
[202] «Pasolini è il Sud dell'anima, il mito. Era un grande peccatore che sapeva insegnare»/«Pasolini is the South of the soul, the myth. He was a great sinner who knew how to teach», Marco Martinelli's words transcribed during an interview during the COVID period, online. It is not insignificant in any case that both of these artists were heavily judged by society for their sexual orientation.
[203] «E quindi uscimmo a riveder le stelle.», See *If*. XXXIV, v. 139.
[204] For more information on the nature of the association and the humanitarian projects they have implemented and are *in fieri*, please visit their official website.

humanitarian projects. After trying various paths, as often happens, he returns to cross his artistic path with the *Commedia*. In this work, thanks to the contribution of the children, the desire to narrate and build parallels between the difficulties of the Poet and the lives of children in disadvantaged contexts emerges (*Figures 112-113-114*).

With few means at his disposal, Martinelli creates a sincere, strong-toned docu-film, in which what is now the well-established and strong work of the "public call" choral action emerges in all its naturalness. In the video that best represents the entire project, a young girl is seen, in the foreground, offering the viewer the first rudiments of this African adaptation. The yellow *Eresia* T-shirts and the procession along the streets of Kibera, which in Swahili means precisely forest[205], return:

> What is - "Paradise" -
> Who live there -
> Are they "Farmers" -
> Do they "hoe" -
> Do they know that this is "Amherst" -
> And that I - am coming - too – and that's Kibera, is it my place?
> Do they wear "new shoes" - in "Eden" -
> Is it always pleasant - there -
> Wont they scold us - when we're hungry -
> Or tell God - how cross we are - And they would laugh at me?[206]

After this plural context, structured according to the model of the non-school, we focus now on *Fedeli d'Amore, Polittico in sette quadri per Dante Alighieri* (2018) in which Montanari's mastery of her own body-voice, accompanied by the Simone Marzocchi's trumpet, comes to the fore. The performance is constructed in poetic pictures, in which seven elements are protagonists: we start with the fog, which envelops the Poet's room and presents him to us dying, in the fullness of his human frailty, speaking the dialect of Romagna; this is followed by the demon of the pit, a supernatural being inhabiting the Flegetonte, in which a clear reference is made to the corrupt world; the donkey, the totemic animal of Albe, then takes the floor and recounts how he led the Poet, by now ill, to die among the mosaics of the Romagna city; the protagonist of the next painting is the devil of the rabble, who starts fights over money; Italy itself then takes the floor, "kicking itself", representing a personal invective to the nation and to the entire contemporary world, as in a Sirventese poem in the wake of Dante's «Ahi Serva Italia, di dolore

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[205] For more on this work, see LAURA MARIANI, *Il teatro nel cinema. Tre film di Marco Martinelli e Ermanna Montanari*, Roma, Luca Sossella, 2021 (especially pp. 97-124 and 171-182); MARCO SCIOTTO, *Romagna più Africa uguale Dante Alighieri. L'Inferno in The sky over Kibera e in Ulisse XXVI di Marco Martinelli*, in SILVIO ALOVISIO, GIULIA CARLUCCIO, STELLA DAGNA (a cura di), *Schermi oscuri: L'inferno dantesco nel cinema e nei media audiovisivi*, Torino, Rosenberg & Sellier, 2023, pp. 235-250; STELLA DAGNA, MARCO SCIOTTO (a cura di), *A proposito di The sky over Kibera. Conversazione con Marco Martinelli*, in SILVIO ALOVISIO, GIULIA CARLUCCIO, STELLA DAGNA (a cura di), *Schermi oscuri: L'inferno dantesco nel cinema e nei media audiovisivi*, cit., pp. 251-260; DANIELA PALMIERI, *La Divina Commedia: intreccio di poesia, etica e politica. Intervista a Ermanna Montanari e Marco Martinelli, drammaturghi e registi del Teatro delle Albe*, in «Dante e l'arte», n. 9, 2022, pp. 199-212.

[206] The text recited by the girl is an interpolated version of the poem *What is Paradise*, by EMILY DICKINSON, *The Poems*, with an introduction by Martha Dickinson Bianchi, 3 voll., The Pennsylvania State University, 2003, vol. 1, Electronic Classics Series, p. 194, F241 - J215 (1861-1860).

ostello»[207]; finally, Dante's daughter, Sister Beatrice, the only human presence on stage, speaks, sitting at her father's bedside and recalling his first actions as a "faithful of love", with his friends. In the end, she appeals to those who will take up her father's legacy, inviting them to come forward artistically and humanly, saying «do you not see Love?»[208].

These seven voices are figures, as Montanari calls them, that draw heavily on the theoretical elaboration defined by Erich Auerbach[209]:

sicuramente figura è ciò che va oltre il perimetro. Figura è stellare, è germoglio, è generativa e questo porta ad altre nascite. L'eco è qualcosa di tremendamente corporeo a cui diamo forma poiché esso dà forma a noi, anche se è volatile. Il duetto con la tromba di Simone Marzocchi, in *fedeli d'Amore*, è un'improvvisazione sonora che *suoniamo* ogni sera. La postura che prendo, la danza che ne scaturisce, sono radice vocale, e il suono della tromba ne è l'elettricità; e se non ci fosse quella lingua, quella radice materna del dialetto romagnolo ormai in disuso, abisso azzurrino della mia nascita, i versi poetici che Marco Martinelli ha inanellato sulla mia voce, nulla succederebbe. È coro, prima di tutto. È verticalissimo mimetismo, concetto meraviglioso, poiché è il "mimetismo" che fa parlare me e te: siamo gentili, cerchiamo di capirci, ognuno con la propria lingua, coi propri suoni[210].

surely figure is what goes beyond the perimeter. The figure is stellar, it is budding, it is generative, and this leads to other births. The echo is something tremendously corporeal to which we give form because it gives form to us, even if it is volatile. The duet with Simone Marzocchi's trumpet in Fedeli d'Amore is a sound improvisation that *we play* every night. The posture I take, the dance that springs from it, are vocal roots, and the sound of the trumpet is its electricity; and if there were not that language, that maternal root of the now disused Romagnolo dialect, the azure abyss of my birth, the poetic verses that Marco Martinelli has looped over my voice, nothing would happen. It is a chorus, first of all. It is vertical mimicry, a wonderful concept since it is 'mimicry' that makes you and me talk: we are gentle, and we try to understand each other, each with our own language and our own sounds.

Montanari, offering body-voice to the seven different subjects of the performance, makes her way through the magma of Ceccarelli's electro-acoustic music, which delimits its boundaries. Marzocchi's trumpet, on the other hand, is a distracting and distorting element, in a constant duet-clash with the artist's fleshy and palpable voice: «it is steel against flesh, a blade that cuts but opens the way to elsewhere»[211]. Rarely, in fact, is the trumpet heard during Montanari's recitation at, more often delimiting the transition between one scene and the next through a bursting, forced brilliance typical of brass instruments. The moments in which instrument and voice coexist on stage are those in which they break through the dream barrier created by the voice to invest the conscience of the audience, as in the invective of Italy, or in the demon of the rebuke (*Figure 115*). These moments are emphasised by stroboscopic projections of images,

[207] *See Pg*. VI, v. 76.
[208] «non lo vedete Amore?», text elements taken from the performance and from material available on the Albe website. The performance was seen by the author of this thesis in Milan, at the Teatro Elfo Puccini, on 14 December 2019.
[209] See ERICH AUERBACH, *Figura*, in ERICH AUERBACH, *Studi su Dante*, cit., pp. 176-226. Si veda inoltre PIETRO CAGNI, *Erich Auerbach: quale figuralità nella Commedia?*, in ANDREA CAMPANA, FABIO GIUNTA (a cura di), *Natura, Società, Letteratura*, Atti del XXII Congresso ADI - Associazione degli Italianisti (Bologna, 13-15 settembre 2018), Roma, Adi editore, 2020, pp. 1-12; RAFFAELLA COLOMBO, FEDERICO FRANCUCCI, MATTEO QUINTO (a cura di), *"Mimesis" 1946-2016*, Atti delle giornate di studio su Erich Auerbach (Pavia, Collegio Ghislieri, 27-28 aprile 2016), Pavia, Pavia University Press, 2018; ALBERTO CASADEI, *Dante oltre la Commedia*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2012; ALBERTO CASADEI, *Letteratura e controvalori. Critica e scritture nell'era del web*, Roma, Donzelli, 2014.
[210] ERMANNA MONTANARI, *Voce, vocazione, invocazione. Conversazione con Ida Alessandra Vinella*, in VALENTINA VALENTINI (a cura di), *Drammaturgie sonore. Teatri del secondo Novecento*, cit., p. 58.
[211] «è acciaio contro carne, lama che taglia ma che apre la strada all'altrove», these statements are always taken from the hall booklet of *fedeli d'amore*.

depicting at exponential, almost psychedelic speed, the effects on nature and humanity of choices polluted by greed and cruelty: like Dante's, today's world also has its Guelphs and Ghibellines, both destined to perish if the devastating and impending climate change that will reset all strife is not addressed.

Montanari's presence on stage creates a strong cleavage between the singularity of the performer and the plurality of voices and characters she takes on: within the small space of the oral cavity, probed by the powerful lens-microphone (which allows her to amplify and play with every smallest recess with its own resonance and sound[212]), a new and unrepeatable universe of voices is generated. From the evanescent and hoarse, in the dialect of Campiano, which is the actress's mother tongue, to the shrill and pointed voice of the demons, to finally flow into the sweet Italian language of Dante's daughter. As Valentina Valentini points out:

Le sculture sonore che Ermanna Montanari compone con la voce si producono grazie a un processo di svuotamento della individualità per accogliere una polifonia di voci che contengono un mondo. […] scolpisce le voci disarticolandole dalla sua persona per rappresentare una coscienza collettiva, un corpo che è plurale, un corpo-voce sociale, storico e archetipico[213].

The sound sculptures that Ermanna Montanari composes with the voice are produced through a process of emptying individuality to accommodate a polyphony of voices that contain a world. [...] she sculpts voices by disarticulating them from her person to represent a collective consciousness, a body that is plural, a social, historical and archetypal body-voice.

Montanari can «trasumanar»[214], human onomatopoeia. Hers is a diaphanous presence, playing with space even from the costume. Dressed in a black suit and black Tabi boots, only her shoulders and arms are uncovered. Thanks to the skilful play of light and projections, it is possible to confuse her body with the black backdrop. In this way, the actress seems to dematerialise, accentuating, even more, the attention on the slight movements of her arms, which she makes from time to time, or on her facial expressions, which emphasise the character she is playing from time to time. The electro-acoustic music devised by Ceccarelli, then, is the «presupposition of vision»[215], which allows the shaping of a sound capable of extending «the regime of the audible, just as the figure does with that of the visible»[216] (*Figure 116*).

The creation of shadows is entrusted to the scenic wisdom of Anusc Castiglioni, a shadow theatre artist, who, together with Montanari, also designs the stage space and costumes. The space features a

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[212] See ENRICO PITOZZI*, Akousma*, cit., p. 90.
[213] See VALENTINA VALENTINI, *Teatro contemporaneo 1989-2019*, cit., p. 144.
[214] *Pd*. I, v. 70.
[215] «presupposition of vision», ENRICO PITOZZI*, Akousma*, cit., p. 85. In this case, we are entering the territory of sound theatre, i.e. the constitution of a dramaturgy in which, with the introduction of technologies, sounds are not composed out of sounds but directly, by intervening on their internal characteristics, See ANDREA CREMASCHI, FRANCESCO GIOMI, *Rumore bianco. Introduzione alla musica digitale*, Bologna, Zanichelli, 2008.
[216] «il regime dell'udibile, così come la figura fa con quello del visibile», ENRICO PITOZZI, *Akousma*, cit., p. 77. Moreover, as Valentini points out, «l'uso di altoparlanti spazializza il suono e permette alla voce di disegnare un percorso, inaugurando quel teatro delle fonti sonore che drammatizza il movimento acustico conferendo alla spazialità una valenza espressiva»/«the use of loudspeakers spatialises sound and allows the voice to draw a path, inaugurating that theatre of sound sources that dramatises acoustic movement by giving spatiality an expressive value», VALENTINA VALENTINI*, Teatro contemporaneo 1989-2019*, cit., p. 132.

minimal set design playing on empty and full, curved and straight lines (*Figure 117-118-119*). On the stage are placed platforms, which will be used by the actress and the musician, with a geometric square structure in the centre, which develops vertically; a precise and orderly grid, in front of which is placed a lectern on the left, a structure-pedestal a little lower in the centre and on the right another even lower structure supporting an intricate wooden crown of thorns. The horizontal platforms on which Montanari moves are slightly staggered, with steps between them, dividing in height the part of the lectern from that of the crown of thorns (which sometimes looks like a face, depending on the refraction of light) and behind which, beyond the grid, the trumpeter remains throughout the performance.

At first, the stage is immersed in darkness, then slowly, Montanari's voice emerges from the first scene, and at the same time, her figure also begins to emerge behind the grid of the geometric structure. Gradually the actress becomes visible from the dark and gloomy background and passes through this diaphragmatic grid, made even more ambiguous by the blades of light refracting in it. Enrico Isola's lights codify and delimit the space, making visible and concealing from time to time what appears and disappears on stage due to Montanari's body-voice. The frenetic carousel of images of contemporaneity is contrasted with Giotto's angels projected onto the entire surface of the geometric grid[217], colouring the scene with a religious hue. Lapis lazuli and blue, Marian colours, symbol of purity, recur; violent red, symbol of Charity and the force of Love, overpowering, all-encompassing; finally, yellow, gold, to be precise, the sacred and divine. The polychromy dialogues harmoniously with the deep black, dense and full of vibrations, which cloaks the areas of shadow and the perimeter of the scene. Just as in the case of Ceccarelli and Marzocchi's music, silence is a necessary and generative condition, so for the articulation of Montanari's body-voice, it is indispensable to dialogue with the shadows of the scene.

Starting at the back of the stage, the actress performs a sequence that outlines a simple and meaningful path through the stage space. Moving from the back to the front of the grid, bathed in the various lights and projections, Montanari follows a path in stations to the lectern, near the crown of thorns, and finally to the proscenium. Her movements are measured and focused on giving greater prominence to the character to whom she is lending her body-voice, holding the microphone, an indispensable element for her investigation.

The stage space is horizontally divided into stations, marking a path along which Montanari advances centrally; she moves to the right and left, and then returns to the centre in the finale. The vertical space, delimited by the plane of the grid and the lectern, first creates a barrier and then becomes a projection surface, on which first the angels and then the contemporary images of denunciation stand out, serving to indissolubly link Dante's journey of salvation, which belongs to a specific historical and cultural context, to our contemporary world (*Figures 120-121-122-123*).

[217] The angels projected during the performance derive from the frescoes in the Lower Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi and were expertly advised by Prof. Alessandro Volpe, lecturer in Medieval Art History at the Ravenna branch of the Alma Mater Studiorum of Bologna.

In this journey in stations, a new reworking of the medieval spectacularity already investigated in *Inferno*, this case declined in the version of sound dramaturgy, we arrive at the moment of Alighieri's death. The last character, the daughter, is entrusted with the questions that emphasise the legacy left by the poet to the world: what remains of the Supreme Poet's art after his departure, the ability to see Love and who the faithful of love are today. Albe, especially in this evocative and sensitive performance, declare themselves to be modern-day love worshippers, constant custodians and interlocutors of his message and indeed of the Lord Love, who still continues to exercise his magisterium in the art of poets and artists. *Fedeli d'Amore* is an indispensable piece in the long *Cantiere Dante*, because it stages a different kind of chorus, that of multiplicity in the uniqueness of Montanari's body-voice.

Purgatorio made its debut in Ravenna on 25 June 2019[218]. In the journey that leads to the construction of this «human cathedral» that is the *Commedia,* as Orazio Costa said[219], Albe were offered to present their work also in Matera, from 17 May to 2 June 2019, that year's capital of culture. Even though the company already had a solid basis in building its own Dante choruses outside Ravenna (think of Kibera), the request is undoubtedly a test case for the future of *Cantiere Dante*. Matera, with its rocky conformation, the climbs, and the materiality of its buildings, is perhaps one of the most evocative and suitable contexts for setting Dante's second cantica, as it recalls in some passages the same landscapes described by Dante in *Purgatory*'s Mount. As in the case of Ravenna, inspections were made and it was decided to start from the Church of Santa Maria di Costantinopoli, paying homage to the local rite of dismemberment of the sacrificial chariot, enacted by the people of Matera every year[220], thus developing in the Monacelle complex, overlooking the Murgia valley.

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[218] Again, the performance will ran from 25 June to 14 July 2019. The author of this thesis attended *Purgatorio* on Saturday 13 July 2019.

[219] It is interesting to note that Albe also resort to the same term previously used by Orazio Costa to describe his own adaptation, which later foundered.

[220] The annual Festa della Bruna is also found in Albe's Instagram content and is described as follows: «Per il carro trionfale di Matera, che aveva le statue di legno fino alla metà del 1800 e poi sempre di cartapesta, la scena centrale riprodotta sul Carro della Bruna è ogni anno diversa. Essa è sempre stabilita dal Vescovo e rimanda a parabole e vicende del Vangelo. Si aggiudica l'assegnazione della gara il cartapestaio che meglio raffigura la scena prescelta nella bozza di presentazione, al miglior prezzo. La data di consegna del caratteristico manufatto è quella del 29 giugno, festa dei Santi Pietro e Paolo, quando, di sera, il Carro viene benedetto dal Vescovo ed è esposto alla cittadinanza, che può così ammirarlo con attenzione girandogli intorno, nella sua completezza ed integrità. Il 2 luglio il carro ospita nella torretta a "poppa" la statua della Madonna e sfila da Piccianello fino al Duomo, dove, deposta la sacra effigie, si dirige verso la piazza centrale. La festa può così giungere al suo culmine con lo spontaneo ed incontrollabile "straccio", verso le ore 22,30, sotto gli occhi incuriositi ed increduli di tutta la città. Insolito ed unico è il rituale della distruzione del Carro Trionfale che ogni anno si ripete, dove ognuno cerca di afferrare una piccola immagine di cartapesta, un frammento, per conservarlo con devozione nella propria casa o nel luogo di lavoro, per mostrarlo con fierezza agli amici. Come dalla morte e dalla decomposizione della materia rinasce nuova vita, così lo smembramento del carro ricorda analoghi riti, che hanno la loro origine nei millenni di storia, dai sumeri agli egizi, rammentando il rinnovamento della vita dopo la morte, del rito sacrificale e del susseguirsi ciclico delle stagioni, le quali, per favorire la nascita di nuove piante e frutti, riesplodono in nuove gemme primaverili, però solo dopo la spoliazione autunnale e dopo la morte apparente dell'inverno»/«For the triumphal chariot of Matera, which had wooden statues until the mid-1800s and then always made of papier-mâché, the central scene reproduced on the Carro della Bruna is different every year. It is always set by the Bishop and refers to parables and events from the Gospel. The papier-mâché maker who best depicts the scene chosen in the presentation draft, at the best price, is awarded the contract. The delivery date for the characteristic artefact is 29 June, the feast day of Saints Peter and

In Ravenna, the "public call" in preparation for the performance attracted the many enthusiasts of the first edition, increasing the human "capital" available for the performance[221] (*Figure 124*). The performance once again begins at Dante's Tomb. There, in addition to Martinelli and Montanari and a crowd of purging souls, clearly recognisable thanks to the long reed carried in their hands[222], there are also Gianni Plazzi, who returns to play here Cato l'Uticense, the guardian of *Purgatory* whom Dante meets in the first canto, and Simone Marzocchi, who plays the trumpet (*Figures 125-126*). A different route is chosen for the procession within the city, which involves passing through the square in front of the Basilica of San Francesco, and the constant presence of music, which along the way radiates from various balconies and windows, even from private buildings, from which psalms and sacred hymns are sung and from which children and teenagers look out. The presence of children and adolescents is necessary, as the most humane canticle has as its subtext education, the re-education of the soul to the new liturgy of salvation. The children all wear old school uniforms, black, with white collars.

In contrast to the Canticle of Damnation, staged indoors at the Rasi Theatre, *Purgatorio* takes place outdoors, articulated through a series of stations set up in various places between the garden and the car park of the Istituto Superiore di studi musicali Giuseppe Verdi[223], which is located a short distance from the Rasi. The Dante-spectators are invited to walk along a non-linear path which ideally proceeds longitudinally from the entrance gates of the Instituto to the car park in a sinusoidal path. Along this route, some stations involve the use of the fire escapes of the school buildings or the constitution of ephemeral

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Paul, when, in the evening, the Chariot is blessed by the Bishop and exhibited to the citizens, who can thus admire it carefully as they walk around it, in its entirety and integrity. On 2 July, the Chariot houses the statue of the Madonna in the turret at the 'stern' and parades from Piccianello to the Cathedral, where, having deposited the sacred effigy, it heads towards the central square. The festivities thus reach their climax with the spontaneous and uncontrollable 'straccio' (rag-tag), at around 10.30 p.m., under the curious and incredulous eyes of the entire city. Unusual and unique is the ritual of the destruction of the Triumphal Chariot that is repeated every year, where everyone tries to grab a small papier-mâché image, a fragment, to keep it with devotion in their home or workplace, to show it proudly to friends. Just as new life is reborn from the death and decomposition of matter, so the dismemberment of the chariot recalls similar rituals, which have their origins in millennia of history, from the Sumerians to the Egyptians, recalling the renewal of life after death, the sacrificial rite and the cyclical succession of the seasons, which, to encourage the birth of new plants and fruit, re-emerge in new spring buds, but only after the autumn spoliation and after the apparent death of winter», See *Festa della Bruna*, in «SassiWeb», (https://www.sassiweb.it/eventi/festa-della-bruna/). For a detailed description of the performance in Matera, read: MASSIMO MARINO, *In viaggio con Dante*, in «Doppiozero», 15 maggio 2019; CATERINA PICCIONE, *Sei tu il monte, il verme e anche la farfalla*, in «IlPickwick.it», 6 giugno 2019.

[221] Some in-depth studies on participatory theatre: CARMEN PEDULLÀ, *Il teatro partecipativo. Paradigmi ed esperienze. Focus su Roger Bernat_FFF e Rimini Protokoll*, postfazione di Roberto Fratini Serafide, Corazzano, Titivillus, 2021; ROBERTO FRATINI SERAFIDE, *Liturgie dell'impazienza. Cultura, Performance, Partecipazione*, Spoleto, editoria&Spettacolo, 2021; ROBERTO FRATINI SERAFIDE, *Liturgie dell'impazienza - Soglie dell'inazione. Le culture della Partecipazione e la Cultura come Performance partecipativa*, in «Culture Teatrali», n. 27, 2018, pp. 227-257; MIMMO SORRENTINO, *Teatro partecipato*, post-fazione di Oliviero Ponte di Pino, Corazzano, Titivillus, 2009; EVA MARINAI, *Corpi im-memori. L'utopia dello spettatore partecipante*, in «Mimesis Journal», vol. 5, n. 1, 2016, pp. 14-29; CLAUDIO BERNARDI, *Il teatro sociale. L'arte tra disagio e cura*, Roma, Carocci, 2004; ALESSANDRO PONTREMOLI, *Teoria e tecniche del teatro educativo e sociale*, Torino, Utet, 2005.

[222] See *Pg*. I, vv. 94-96.

[223] In describing the search for the most suitable venue for the staging of "Mount of Purgatory", Martinelli and Montanari reveal how they initially screened other gardens in the city and only later decided to stage the show in the school, which is located a few steps away from the Rasi Theatre, their "theatrical home" and the venue chosen for the previous staging of *Inferno*.

structures that develop vertically and above which the performers of certain Dantean episodes are placed. These solutions are conceived to emphasise the condition of perennial ascent and the process of purgation of the soul characteristic of the *Purgatorio* canticle.

The Dante-spectators, therefore, having arrived at the Instituto's gates after the first part of the journey through the streets of Ravenna, can only enter the garden thanks to the touch of schoolchildren in black aprons, who mark a P on their foreheads, just as the angel does with Dante in the ninth canto of the homonymous cantica[224]. Along with the educational subtext, *Purgatorio* also develops a reflection on art (*Figures 127-128-129*).

Having entered the garden, the Dante-spectators take their places on stools to watch the first episode. The first chorus is dedicated to the sensitive issue of gender violence and the need to remind contemporary society, still conditioned by patriarchal dynamics, of gender equality and respect for women. The final tercets of the fifth canto of *Purgatorio* in which Dante gives the floor to Pia de' Tolomei[225], who died at the hands of her husband, are developed by Albe through a chorus of women, all veiled, placed on the different floors of the fire escape of the building opposite: altogether, through choral action, they recount episodes of violence suffered or felt, declaiming Pia's verses together, interweaving her tragic story with as many cases of violence and feminicide (*Figure 130*).

Resuming their walk inside the garden, the Dante-spectators arrive at a new station that reminds of a classroom due to the presence of desks and chairs arranged and a blackboard leaning against the opposite wall. Once again, they sit down as new schoolchildren and attend the lesson on art and pride given by an exceptional teacher. A contemporary of the superb 14th-century miniaturist Oderisi da Gubbio in the eleventh canto[226], the artist and performance artist Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) is chosen for his strong ethical commitment, as a convinced activist in environmental protection and promoter of dialogues of brotherhood. Some of his poetic declarations and speeches are hung like posters along the façades of the buildings delimiting the "class" of the superb ones, as the interpretation offered by Albe in the performance uses his life and artistic personality associated with Dante's episode to make the audience reflect on the need to associate today a mission, social, inclusive, with one's own character and talent, especially if artistic. In the performance, several actors on either side of the audience impersonate Beyus, dressed like him in a long light trench coat, black felt hat, and proud posture, creating a multi-voiced intervention (*Figure 131*). At the end of this intervention, just as Dante pays homage to artists and masters in *Purgatorio*, Martinelli chooses to project a clip from Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Uccellacci uccellini* (1966),

[224] See *Pg*. IX, vv. 112-114. Reference is made to the passage in which the guardian angel of the gates of Purgatory carves seven P's on Dante's forehead with a sword, a symbol for the seven deadly sins, which are to be expiated along the penitential path between the frames of the holy mountain, as proof of the Poet's goodwill in approaching *Paradiso* purified. See the video on Albe's Instagram page.
[225] See *Pg*. V, vv. 130-136.
[226] See *Pg*. XI.

where the actor Totò plays St. Francis, once again to pay homage to one of his Masters, a constant source of inspiration on the tragic in the comic[227] (*Figure 132*).

In Albe's *Purgatorio* everyone returns as a pupil, just like Dante. In a subsequent painting in the garden of the Instituto, in a short circuit between art and education, the audience observes a colourful mixed class standing on school desks. Here too, a blackboard shows the names of the poets who are part of Albe canon: Dante, Majakovsky, Hillesum, Donne, Whitman, etc. Another blackboard shows the title of the episode within the performance, «song of worms and butterflies», which reworks Dante's tercets still on the sin of pride in the tenth canto:

> O superbi cristian, miseri lassi,
> che, de la vista de la mente infermi,
> fidanza avete ne' retrosi passi,
>
> non v'accorgete voi che noi siam vermi
> nati a formar l'angelica farfalla,
> che vola a la giustizia sanza schermi?[228]

One by one, these schoolchildren start singing, shouting, and saying the verses of the famous poets indicated on the blackboards, followed by their classmates in the mode of the *non-school* chorus. Just as the poets are present in Dante's cantos and their lyrics are recalled, so Albe reworked Dante's text through the formula of choral action referring to different authors and different poems: a metapoetic metatheatre (*Figures 133-134-135*).

The following scenes bring the focus of the narration of Dante's journey through *Purgatorio* back to the individual performers, offering the audience moments of evocative beauty as they catch the grave and stony notes of the miserly King Ugo Capeto (Luigi Dadina)[229], who serves his sentence as a humble peasant; or the incisive presence of the envious Sapìa (Laura Redaelli)[230], who has a crown of thorns placed over her eyes, remindful of the punishment Dante inflicted her, that is to have her eyes sewn up. Luigi Ceccarelli with his musicians in an elevated position on a platform, performs live the electroacoustic music composed for the cantica. We cannot fail to mention the invective to Italy and the episode of the wrathful Marco Lombardo (Alessandro Renda), from the top of the school's fire escape, with an upside-down map of our peninsula at his side[231] (*Figure 136*).

Even the moment that seals Beatrice's arrival is declined by Albe in an educational perspective. Symbolically, the audience of pilgrims is made to pass through a wall of fire, composed of a sea of torches placed very close to each other. From the grass of the garden of the Istituto, the audience then passed onto

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[227] See MARCO MARTINELLI, *Nel nome di Dante. Diventare grandi con la Divina Commedia*, cit. The clip is taken from *Uccellacci uccellini* by Pier Paolo Pasolini (1966), where Totò plays a Franciscan friar.
[228] «canto dei vermi e delle farfalle», *Pg*. X, vv. 121-128.
[229] See *Pg*. XX.
[230] See *Pg*. VIII.
[231] During the Matera performance, the map was instead placed on the floor and trampled on by the souls of the wrathful men of *Pg*. XVI who make up the chorus.

the asphalt of the car park, where they are invited to take their seats for the last time in the cleared space and wait for the last meeting. Matelda, the purifying and severe handmaiden of Dante in Eden, is played by "four beauties", distinguished by double braids and a waxed yellow mackintosh. As a final message, therefore, while Montanari takes on the role of Beatrice, Albe encourage reflection on the need to actualise Dante's message by taking up the visual and verbal codes of Greta Thunberg's activism: «You have no alibi, and we have no more time!»[232]. These girls will be the future, the selfless struggle for a shared and common good. As a final gesture, they touch the forehead of each spectator to completely purify their vision: «Puro e disposto a salire alle stelle»[233] (*Figures 137-138*).

The road to *Paradiso* is already marked. Initially, the intention was to propose not only the last cantica, but all three together, in a single performance in Timisoara (Romania), Capital of Culture 2021[234]. Unlike all companies, which until then had staged trilogies and had had to come to terms with financial and artistic contingencies and everything else related to the preparation of a performance, between 2019 and 2020 Albe found themselves having to create the final performance in circumstances that were difficult to foresee.

In 2020, the worldwide pandemic of COVID 19 particularly affected Italy, starting from the regions bordering Lombardy and extending to the entire peninsula. The performing arts and live entertainment sector have been hard hit by the lockdown, by the need to suspend the very essence of its artmaking: contact, the sharing of space, the actual transmission in presence with the audience. This forced work stoppage imposed a period of separation, of isolation not always successful, which, however, after the initial difficulties, gave rise to new moments of reflection and sharing with the new means made available by the media and streaming platforms. The "public calls", for example, were transported to the video-conferencing platform Zoom[235].

There is ample evidence of this apparent stasis in Albe's work, which allowed the company to ask questions according to the changing and easily reversible directions of the government. Martinelli and Montanari are in life, as in art, a close-knit couple, and their isolation determined a further period of renewal for their work.

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[232] These are some of the phrases most frequently quoted on socials and in the world's newspapers to give space to the demands of the younger generations for a more sustainable and liveable world for all. In this regard, we refer to the article by the author of this thesis, where the correlation between the 2030 Agenda and its seventeen Sustainable Development Goals and Dante's performances in 2019, particularly receptive to this issue, was investigated: SARA FONTANA, *Rappresentazioni dantesche contemporanee a sostegno dell'Agenda 2030*, in SARA FONTANA, ELENA MATTEI, PAOLA PERATELLO, FABIO RAMASSO, STEFANO AMBROSINI (a cura di), *Margins and forgotten places*, Proceedings of the interdisciplinary Ph.D. conference (Verona, 17-19 May 2021), Alessandria, Edizioni Dell'Orso, 2023, pp. 15-30.

[233] *Pg*. XXXIII, v. 145.

[234] See IRINA WOLF, *Sulle orme di Dante: da Ravenna a Timisoara*, in «Doppiozero», 26 maggio 2021, available online.

[235] It would be difficult to enumerate and review all the conferences and moments of reflection on Dante's project and others that involved the Albe from 2020 to 2021. Perhaps important is the presence at the Martin Segal Talks in April 2020 (available online) or the episodes made for Rai Radio 3, in *Storie teatrali 50* edited by Laura Palmieri, where they recount their careers and define their theatrical foundations. The encounter between two worlds of theatre, that between Eugenio Barba and Marco Martinelli, which began in 2016, was followed by the publication of the book VALERIO APICE (a cura di), *Dialogo tra due asini volatori. Eugenio Barba e Marco Martinelli*, Imola, Cue Press, 2021.

In 2021, the centenary year, the Ravenna Festival proposed a programme once again dedicated to Dante[236], actually postponing the most eagerly awaited performance, *Paradiso* of Teatro delle Albe, by a year. In the meantime, the company was appointed as Italian cultural ambassadors to the world, planning a Dante *tour* in the five continents in the future[237]. In 2021, Albe performed a symbolic and much-needed show entitled *Verso Paradiso* (*Figures 139-140-141*). The usual "public call", this time, was not addressed to the citizens and the many friends who had previously flocked from different latitudes, but to those artists who had been particularly affected by the pandemic, starting with the companies and realities of the Emilia-Romagna region. During the long night of vigil on 25 June, from 8:30 p.m. to 5:00 a.m. the following morning, the entire canticle of *Paradiso* would be read as a collective prayer, gathering in the diversity of voices and in the co-presence of bodies the strength needed to complete the journey undertaken in 2017.

The venue chosen for the event from dusk to dawn is the same as that defined for the future *Paradiso* show: the Loggetta Lombardesca belonging to the MAR (Ravenna City Art Museum) museum system that opens onto the Public Gardens. Accompanied by the music of Luigi Ceccarelli and the *ensemble* he directs, the operation opens and closes with the reading of the songs by the hosts, Martinelli and Montanari, who afterwards, for the duration of the journey, remain at the side, as they often do in their shows, an attentive presence supporting the chorus. After the first part, particularly packed with spectators, the next two see the audience thinning[238]. Those who make it to the end, turning to Montanari's last verses of canto thirty-third of *Paradiso* to see dawn tint the tips of the trees with the sweet colours of the aurora, remember that night, according to Dante's vulgate, as a dream that one does not know if it ever was:

> Qual è colüi che sognando vede,
> che dopo 'l sogno la passione impressa
> rimane, e l'altro a la mente non riede,
>
> cotal son io, ché quasi tutta cessa
> mia visïone, e ancor mi distilla
> nel core il dolce che nacque da essa[239].

[236] Once again, please refer to the archive section of the Ravenna Festival website dedicated to the XXXII edition 'Dedicated to Dante'.
[237] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs mandated the Teatro delle Albe to take the entire trilogy on tour to the five continents as official ambassadors of Italian cultural heritage. To date, of the planned stops in New York, Nairobi, Buenos Aires, Melbourne and Jakarta, only those in the Americas have been realised; see https://italiana.esteri.it/italiana/eventi/spettacolo-dante-nei-cinque-continenti/ (last accessed 25/05/2025). It should also be remembered that Albe had already begun this process of "exceptional transport" of Dante abroad, at first in New York and at the University of Pennsylvania, see GIULIO GENOVESE, *Staging Dante Today. A three-day residency of Teatro Delle Albe at the University Of Pennsylvania*, in «Bibliotheca Dantesca», n. 2, 2019, pp. 161-167; GIULIO GENOVESE, *Convergence culture: Marco Martinelli and Ermanna Montanari's staging of Dante*, in ANTONELLA BRAIDA, JOSEPH CADEDDU, GIUSEPPE SANGIRARDI (a cura di), *La mondializzazione di Dante I: Europa*, cit., pp. 179-190.
[238] What no one expected was the prickly humidity that emerged during the night from the grass in the garden. Many took refuge in the only bar in front of it, shielding themselves with the few blankets and trying to drink hot drinks.
[239] *Pd*. XXXIII, vv. 58-63.

The show *Paradiso*, the canticle of joy and awareness, is staged from 24 June to 8 July 2022 and is an ode to being together, to community. Once again the rendezvous is at Dante's Tomb. Although returning to follow the same path as *in Inferno*, arriving in front of the Rasi, in this case, two little girls invite the procession to pass by. The route then continues to the square of MAR, where a choir of yearning souls stands. If in *Purgatorio* the music was a warm presence, an invigorating gospel, to support the fatigue of the purging souls, in *Paradiso* the music takes on another meaning and is inflamed with ardent desire. No longer is the psalm the main theme, but the fullness of the *Gloria*, of resurrection, of bliss, the jubilation of the Gregorian canon (*Figures 142-143*).

Along this route, from the balconies of the houses and buildings protrude blessing souls, of young people and adults, on the one side, and on the other, special mobile installations reminiscent of Alexander Calder's *Mobiles*. Instead of coloured panels, however, paper boats are placed (*Figures 144-145*). This choice should not come as a surprise, as Dante himself in the *Commedia* connotes himself as an *alter-Odisseus*: if the Greek hero was lost in a «mad flight»[240], Alighieri describes his own journey through the heavens as a «high flight»[241], granted by God and blessed with the sensory possibility of remaining intact in his human talents and thus being able to preserve and bring back memories of the experience. Dante's renewed boat, as opposed to Ulysses' destroyed one, is the only one that can aspire, with oars supported by the divine, to reach its destination.

For this performance, one is confronted with a new threshold, a new ritual: the portal for the entrance to the Gardens lets one hear children's laughter, happy cries, and the ringing of bells. In order to pass beyond, this time one must allow oneself to be touched by the guides: Montanari and Martinelli, in parallel, mark the forehead of each spectator, repeating one of the different "manifestations" of the Eternal: «tre giri, di tre colori e una continenza»[242]. As soon as the rite of passage is over, a cosy and familiar atmosphere welcomes the audience as they enter the representation of *Paradiso* conceived by Albe (*Figure 146*).

A small seating area is set up in front of the Loggetta Lombardesca, close enough to distinguish the statues set inside in the upper order (and the musicians positioned there in the lower order), but far enough away to leave a grassy space free, divided by a strip of pavement. In these areas children run and play, frolicking and having fun even with their bikes, all strictly dressed in white clothes (*Figures 147-148*). On either side of the steps, sits a group of ladies intent on knitting: at their side are Martinelli and Montanari once the last forheads have been sealed. Not surprisingly, when asked what *Paradiso* is and why it is filled with jubilant children, Montanari and Martinelli declare:

[240]«folle volo», *If*. XXVI, v. 125 (Hollander/DOL).
[241] «alto volo», *Pd*. XV, v. 54 (Hollander/DOL).
[242]«three circles having three colors but the same extent», see *Pd*. XXXIII, vv. 115-120. On the vision of God and the connotation of the different descriptions of God, we recommend DONATO PIROVANO, *Dante e la visione di Dio*, in «Rivista di Letteratura Italiana», vol. XXXVII, n. 1, 2019, pp. 9-19.

MM I bambini sono il “regno dei cieli” (sorride).
EM I bambini in bicicletta fanno il paio con le donne anziane che ricamano. Sono la trama e l’ordito del soffio divino[243].

MM Children are the ‘kingdom of heaven’ (smiles).
EM Children on bicycles match the old women embroidering. They are the warp and woof of the divine breath.

The intensity of the children’s chasing and playing gets faster and faster, everything starts to spin, and the colour white thickens into an expanse of festive children who arranged together, begin a poetic chorus addressed to the audience: «What is Paradise? Who lives there? Are they peasants? Do they hoe? Do they know that I too will come there?». The words that had been the little girl’s in Kibera, taken from the poet Emily Dickinson, return to be central in the last canticle, and just as Dante constantly asks his heavenly guides questions to understand the nature that governs the last realm, in the Albe’s performance the questions about life, its structure and meaning, are embodied in the multiple bodies of children who ask adults, all of us, about the world. In a constant bath of music, with ancient and modern instruments, which create an atmosphere rich in vibrations, and emphasise the already rich immersive panorama of a garden in which one can hear the crickets chirping, illustrious characters and episodes from Dante’s *Paradiso* are presented, some of whom are placed in the open niches of the upper order of the loggia, as if they were statues, while others form poetic choruses on the “stage” in front of it.

To present the first sky of the moon, where souls are reflected clear in the divine light, Albe propose a splitting of perspective: on the “stage” a chorus of souls is assembled, placing pieces of frosted glass in front of their faces, physically interpreting the metaphor used by Dante in the third *canto*[244]; on the upper part of the loggia, the first statue comes forward towards the audience on a linear winch and interprets Piccarda Donati’s verses[245]. Behind each statue in the background of the *loggetta* shines the sacred gold-leaf mosaic sky so similar to the mosaic walls of the Byzantine churches of Ravenna, which Dante had the opportunity to admire during his last stay with the Lords Da Polenta[246]. After the episode of Piccarda, there follows the episode in the sixth canto of *Paradiso*, during which the second statue of the Emperor Justinian advances and space is given to his monologue, in which he recalls how there can be no future without solidarity, recalling once again the green themes of *Purgatorio* and the strong component of political activism typical of Albe (*Figures 149-150*).

«Why has indifference become globalised? We must change the heart!». This is an example of the phrases that remain impressed on the audience watching this constant dance of figures, of bodies, standing together. Neglected by other adaptations, the blessed Cunizza da Romano[247] from the sky of Venus is chosen by Albe to emphasise once again the importance of respect and freedom for every person,

[243] DANIELA PALMERI, *La Divina Commedia: intreccio di poesia, etica e politica. Intervista a Ermanna Montanari e Marco Martinelli, drammaturghi e registi del Teatro delle Albe*, cit., p. 205.
[244] See *Pd*. III, vv. 10-24.
[245] *Ibidem*, vv. 34-90.
[246] See LAURA PASQUINI, *«Pigliare occhi, per aver la mente». Dante, la Commedia e le arti figurative*, cit.
[247] See *Cunizza da Romano*, a cura di Ferdinando Coletti, in ED; *Pd*. IX, vv. 13-66.

especially women, who are all too often the object of violence and exploitation. Here, accompanied by rhythmic drums, a chorus of Venuses with purple drapes dances sensually (*Figure 151*).

Then a chorus of men continue the dance, staging an ancestral rebound in which jumps and simple *pirouettes* alternate, at times reminiscent of dervishes. They are the holy Franciscan friars, the wise spirits of the sky of the Sun, who remind us how dance was a founding element of joy even in the constricting Christian landscape of the time[248].

Luigi Dadina plays the ancestor Cacciaguida[249] in this latest work. After his entrance on stage, he is surrounded by a group of soldiers wielding rifles to help him; they are assaulted and put on the run by a group of children, reminding everyone that violence and cruelty are not allowed in *Paradiso* (*Figure 152*). With the entry of St Peter, the question is asked what faith can still be seven centuries after Dante's *Commedia.* Instead of rambling philosophical metaphors to describe the greatness of God and how mankind can interpret it in his own life, Albe resort to Dante's text, using his elaborations on the sense of taste, as only by eating the body of Christ can mankind access salvation from a condition of sin.

A girl tells then the parable of the mustard seed, a symbol of the believer's faith, capable of moving a mountain[250], which becomes the pretext for wondering what the world would be if we could really feed everyone, "eating the body of God": bread is passed and broken, in the most sacred and simple of rituals, the table, the sharing of life (*Figure 153*). In this synaesthetic ceremony of harmony, music resounds powerfully, setting the scene for a vision. Montanari returns in new clothes to prepare to be body-voice for a final encounter with Dante's poetry.

The last scene allows the audience to remain seated in the stands or to stretch out on large black circles placed on the ground, six skies, to have the immensity of the vault of heaven above them and a cathedral of light, sounds and presences around them. Martinelli sets the scene for Montanari by recounting the research that interested him so intensely (*Figure 154*). In conceiving the heavens, the vault, and the architecture so finely elaborated by Dante in his work, Martinelli recalls the 17th-century diatribe between his two greatest architects, Gian Lorenzo Bernini and Francesco Castelli, known as Borromini. Their rivalry is secondary only to the difference in style between them, and so Martinelli recounts how, in the race to see who could do the best architectural work in Rome, and therefore in the world, Borromini was the most daring:

Marco avanza, nell'oscurità incipiente, e inizia uno strano discorso su Gian Lorenzo Bernini e la sua prospettiva frontale, contro le bizzarrie di architetti che costringono, con i loro torcigliamenti, a guardare sempre altrove, e in alto… In una chiesa, per esempio San Carlino alle Quattro Fontane a Roma, "anzi, peggio, ti conviene stendere il mantello al centro

[248] See FRANCESCO CIABATTONI, *Coreografie dantesche*, cit.; CLAUDIA CIERI VIA, *La danza come movimento ed espressione nelle immagini poetiche della Commedia di Dante*, cit.; PAOLO DE VENTURA, *"Donne mi parver, non da ballo sciolte": appunti su danza e pericoresi tra gli spiriti sapienti*, cit.; FRANCESCO CIABATTONI, *Theatre, Dance, and Polyphony in the Paradiso*, in FRANCESCO CIABATTONI, *Dante's Performance. Music, Dance, and Drama in the Commedia*, Berlin/Boston, De Gruyter, 2024, pp. 189-235.

[249] See *Cacciaguida*, a cura di Fiorenzo Forti, in ED; *Pd*. XV, XVI, XVII and XVIII.

[250] The power of faith, albeit as small as a mustard seed, is capable of moving what is most solid on earth like the mountain (Mt. 17:20; 21:21) or of transplanting into the sea what lives rooted in the earth, like the tree (Lk. 17:5-6).

del pavimento e sdraiarti per terra… è l'unico modo per guardarla comodamente…". Bernini non lo nomina, ma l'oggetto della sua polemica è Francesco Borromini, suo contemporaneo e rivale, un architetto che apriva gli occhi alla trascendenza per vertigine delle forme e delle prospettive, rifuggenti da quelle regolari, ortogonali. Variazione e moltiplicazione dei punti di vista contro l'ingessatura delle statue del Museo. Fuga infinita come itinerario della mente in Dio. Come Altrove, ascesi, estasi[251].

Marco moves forward, in the incipient darkness, and begins a strange discourse on Gian Lorenzo Bernini and his frontal perspective against the eccentricities of architects who force, with their twisting, one to always look elsewhere and upwards... In a church, for example, San Carlino alle Quattro Fontane in Rome, 'worse, you'd better spread your cloak in the middle of the floor and lie down on the ground... it's the only way to look at it comfortably...'. Bernini does not mention him, but the object of his polemic is Francesco Borromini, his contemporary and rival, an architect who opened his eyes to transcendence through vertiginous forms and perspectives, eschewing regular, orthogonal ones. Variation and multiplication of viewpoints against the cast of statues in the museum. Infinite flight as an itinerary of the mind in God. As Elsewhere, asceticism, ecstasy.

Once again, art is used to give voice to new resonances, consonances of intent in this case, as Albe, in simple dramaturgical and scenographic details, which are a sign of skilful research, and the use of highly qualified collaborators, leave the audience breathless, in realising how much the message of the *Commedia* can be read and revisited ad infinitum. From the mosaic reproduced behind the Baroque statues of the loggias, we move on to the capes-circles placed on the pit to observe Borromini's daring but perfect vaults, in defiance of all misconceptions. Some remain seated, others stretch out to prepare for the *lectura Dantis* of Montanari's thirty-third canto: «l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle»[252].

More than a participatory or social theatre, that of Albe is a theatre of relationships, and *Paradiso* offers one of the greatest examples of this. Each evening, as the show starts at 8pm, the citizens who have answered the call gather at the Giardini at 6.30pm for the collective 'ritual' that prepares them for the scene. This canticle, like its predecessors, resounds with the artistic friendship and the stubborn and *asinine* will to give thanks to the masters, the models, and Dante, to be traversed by poetry, by art. This is demonstrated by the fact that it is Montanari herself who confirms that the branch, which one sees being dragged or carried on stage and set and lit in the only niche beside the loggia, is an element taken from Leo De Berardinis's Dante performance, «found and copied»[253] (*Figures 155-156-157*).

Even the embroiderers, who constantly weave their work despite the show going on, are *alter-auctores*, Dante-like figures like Albe themselves: in the ancient practice of community storytelling, which is still practised in small villages or rural realities, they pass on what they have seen with their own vision, new rhapsodes of a future yet to be lived. The very knot they tie in their warp and weft is nothing other than Dante's metaphor par excellence, and a prefiguration of that sacred volume bound by love that is God (*Figure 158*).

This is an expression of the work carried out by Albe along this Dantean journey: intense, tiring, and unexpectedly familiar. Teatro delle Albe, with this performance, has decided to give everyone a place, a space where they can feel present, even though ties have been questioned, if not prematurely severed

[251] MASSIMO MARINO, *Albe: Paradiso Borromini*, in «Doppiozero», 8 luglio 2022, available online.
[252] *Pd*. XXXIII, v. 145.
[253] «trovato e copiato», this statement was the answer to a question posed to Montanari soon after the show *Paradiso*.

and alienated by the pandemic. This is why everyone is given a piece of that sky at the end of the performance, gilded and reflecting like the tiles of the Ravenna mosaics, like Dante's word that wants humanity to be an effigy of God, whatever she or he is, made in her or his likeness.

4.6. Not only Trilogies: from music to augmented reality

As previously seen, the push of the centenaries, first that of 2015, and then that of 2021, presents unavoidable stages to articulate the path of Dante's theatrical reception in the new Millennium.

The examination we have just concluded offers a detailed overview of the most influential companies on the Italian and European scene to have articulated their artistic and poetic journey in Dante's wake, becoming, in the case of the Albe company, Dante's ambassadors in the world. It does not seem secondary that, nowadays, theatre, from the most violent to the most participatory, social and inclusive, is one of the most effective tools of Dante's reception, as in most cases it allows a direct contact with the work of reference and brings poetry closer to contemporaneity with contemporary expressive keys, creating a fruitful and generative dialogue.

After having proposed a series of trilogies, we feel it is our duty to offer here mention of spectacular outcomes referring to Dante that do not properly articulate the entire *Comedy*, or other works of Dante, but which are just as important for understanding how lively and varied the panorama of Dantean reception is. To do this, we will refer only to a few specific Italian outcomes, or those of Italian artists working abroad, leaving a more precise reconnaissance to be defined elsewhere.

If a first aspect to be investigated is the link with musical theatre, a second is that which leads to the emergence of a hybridisation with narrative theatre. From the 19th century onwards, on the strength of the birth and popularity of melodrama, both the forms of *Lecturae Dantis* described and the first actual Dante performances present music as an element that offers support and an emotional alternative to the actor's performance. In the 20th century, this aspect persists, until it becomes a fruitful collaboration between voices, as in the case of Guidi with the double bass player Guerri, or Montanari with Ceccarelli's electroacoustic music or Marzocchi's trumpet.

4.6.1. Dante in music

4.6.1.1. Nicola Piovani

The first performance we want to deal with here is Nicola Piovani's (1946)[254]. On the occasion of its centenary in 2015, Ravenna Festival entrusted the Oscar-winning composer with the task of setting Dante Alighieri to music. At first he was asked to compose a piece inspired by the *Divine Comedy*, but the artist refused to take on such an operation. In an interview with Paolo di Paolo for the programme *La lingua batte* on Radio Rai 3, Piovani emphasised that it was inconceivable for him to set the *Commedia* to music because it had an intrinsic musicality. His attention then shifted to the *Vita Nuova*, a work that could create a bridge between the poet's era and the present through his youthful passion, the error that transforms the experience of the individual into a universal one, starting with an analysis of the emotions Dante describes and what they produce in his reader/listener:

La *Vita Nuova* è una partitura che scrivo con l'ambizione di raccontare in musica l'emozione che può ancora dare a un uomo del terzo millennio la lettura del capolavoro giovanile dantesco. Mi affascina il grande stupore che questo racconto d'amore può ancora suscitare in noi, pensando alla vita reale del giovane Dante – Dantino pare lo chiamasse Guido Cavalcanti – una biografia piena di lacune. E proprio queste lacune ci lasciano lo spazio per immaginare cosa potesse essere quest'amore irreale, infantile, paradossale, per l'intravista Bice Portinari, in arte Beatrice. Un grande amore epilettico. La musica che scrivo ha l'ambizione di cantare quello che questa storia d'amore riverbera dentro di me, un amore inumano, canalizzato in un altro amore: quello per l'endecasillabo, questo sì amore reale. Umano e divino insieme.

I wrote *La Vita Nuova* with an ambition: setting to music the emotions a man of the third millennium can still receive from reading Dante's juvenile masterpiece. I am deeply fascinated by the astonishment this love tale can still arouse: Dante's early biography - or 'Dantino', as Guido Cavalcanti seems to have called him - is full of gaps, which leaves plenty of space for us to imagine his unreal, childish, paradoxical love for Beatrice, a Bice Portinari he had only had a glimpse of. It was a great epileptic love. The music I wrote has an ambition: singing out the emotions this love story sparks in me, a not-human love, channeled into a real love for hendecasyllable poetry. Human and divine at one and the same time[255].

Thus was born *LA VITA NUOVA, cantata per voce recitante, soprano e piccola orchestra*, which makes its debut at the Pala De Andrè in Ravenna on 6 June 2015 (*Figures 161-162-163*). Together with the musicians of the Ensemble Aracoeli and the Orchestra Giovanile Italiana, there are actor Elio Germano and soprano Rosa Feola. Since Dante's opera is a *prosimetro*[256], Piovani leaves the sonnets and

[254] Please refer to the composer's official website for his biography and for the page dedicated to his *Vita Nuova* (2015). Moreover, it is emphasised that his closeness to Roberto Benigni, for whom he composed the music for *La vita è bella*, which won him an Oscar for the soundtrack, is certainly a key to understanding how Dante's component was present for him. Indeed, they are booked together for the Dante celebrations on Monday 4 May 2015 in the Senate, Palazzo Madama, in the presence of the President of the Republic.

[255] Both texts are taken from the description of the opera published in the complete programme of the Ravenna Festival 2015, available online, p. 33.

[256] See *Vita Nuova*, a cura di Mario Pazzaglia, in ED; MANUELE GRAGNOLATI, *Authorship and Performance in Dante's Vita nova*, in MANUELE GRAGNOLATI, ALMUT SUERBAUM (ed. by), *Aspects of the Performative in Medieval Culture*,

hendecasyllables to the actor's recitation at while setting the ballads and songs to music performed by the soprano. The composer recalls passages in the *Commedia* that attest to the love and importance of the music of the time for the Florentine poet (e.g. *Pg*. II with the meeting with Casella or *Pd*. XIV, vv.118-23), affirming that, as a musician, he recognises Dante's competence in the matter.

The structure of the performance, lasting about an hour, includes frequent transitions between music (orchestra and instrumental solos), arias for soprano, moments of accompaniment to the actor's recitative, and sometimes actual dialogues between music and recitative, or between the voices of the two soloists. However, the Dantean scansion of the *Vita Nova* is not respected. Piovani creates a score that revolves around the vision of Beatrice, the installation of Love in the poet's heart, the *requiem* for the death of the beloved and her subsequent ascent to heaven, concluding in the declaration of the future carme that will see her as a saint.

To give even more poignancy to the *Dominus* Amore, Piovani rearranges the text of the *Vita Nuova*, making Germano recite: «Behold a God stronger than I am, who coming will dominate me. O you who pass by on the way, stop and consider if there is suffering equal to mine». These verses combine two textual passages that are not consequential. The first, performed in Latin by soprano Feola immediately afterwards, is a precise translation from the original Latin prose of chapter two: «Ecce deus fortior me, qui veniens dominabitur michi»[257]. Immediately afterwards, the words of the prophet Jeremiah follow, referring to chapter seven: «O vos omnes qui transitis per viam, attendite et videte si est dolor sicut dolor meus»[258]. The operation performed by Piovani emphasises the triumph of the Lord Love, who completely subjugates Dante's soul. This dramaturgical choice is emphasised by the score with the use of horns and the explosiveness of the entire orchestra.

Let us cite another particularly significant passage: during the finale, where the sonnet «Tanto gentile e tanto onesta pare»[259] is performed. While the actor recites the verses so familiar to the audience in the auditorium, starting with the first triplet («Mòstrasi sì piacente a chi la mira»[260]) the music ceases and the voice deepens into an a-solo that fills the hall with vibratos. On the final verb «sospira», the Soprano then begins the aria entitled *Sospira* with a vocalisation. In constant dialogue with the orchestra, through a game of mirroring and a daring struggle between high notes and glissando, the Soprano's recurring motifs are further emphasised by sustained and broken passages. Praised by many for the

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Boston/Berlin, De Gruyter, 2010, pp. 125-141; FABIO CAMILLETTI*, Human Desire, Deadly Love: The Vita Nova in Gide, Delay, Lacan*, in MANUELE GRAGNOLATI, FABIO CAMILLETTI, FABIAN LAMPART (edited by), *Metamorphosing Dante: Appropriations, Manipulations, and Rewritings in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*, cit., pp. pp. 177-200; PAOLO BORSA, ANNA MARIA CABRINI (a cura di), *DANTE E IL PROSIMETRO. Dalla Vita nova al Convivio*, Atti del XIX Convegno internazionale di Letteratura italiana "Gennaro Barbarisi" (Milano - Fribourg: 15, 17, 22 e 23 ottobre 2020), Milano, Ledizioni, 2022.

[257] «Ecco un Dio più forte di me, che venendo mi dominerà. O voi che passate per la via, fermatevi e considerate se c'è sofferenza pari alla mia»; see Musa/DOL, cap. II, par. 4.

[258] Ivi, cap. VII, par. 7.

[259] «Such sweet decorum and such gentle grace», ivi, cap. XXVI.

[260] «Miraculously gracious to behold,» *Ibidem*.

strength of its emotional impact and its poignant evocation of Dante's youthful message, this performance remains one of the few to have brought Dante's *prosimeter* to the stage, embodying the mixed composition of the original text with this dialogue between word and music.

4.6.1.2. Simone Cristicchi

The second show we want to reflect on is *Paradiso, dalle tenebre alla luce* by Simone Cristicchi, staged in the summer of 2021. In his artistic journey as an all-round singer-songwriter and man of the theatre, Cristicchi connotes his Dante adaptation with a personal search for happiness, an investigation into the esoteric and a dialogue based on humanity, from artist to artist[261]. Re-elaborating material from previous shows, such as the political oration, or "civil musical", *Magazzino 18*, in which he acts as spokesman for the Italian Istrian and Dalmatian exiles, or the touching show on the search for happiness, *HappyNext*, Cristicchi constructs a particular encounter with Dante, to lay himself bare, to make a theatre of questions[262].

He defines his operation as a *musical for solo*, in that it is he alone on stage who sings his songs and creates a narrative theatre journey in dialogue with Dante, with what he still represents for everyone seven hundred years after his death. As for many, for him Dante is the poet who is read «at a certain age of life», but who has always been present, returning to inhabit his imaginary precisely during the pandemic. The conceived scenic space is simple and sees the return of elements that, unbeknownst to him, come directly from the 19th century, such as the desk, on which Cristicchi writes a letter addressed to Dante, to ask his advice, to have a hypothetical and wonderful dialogue with the poet who set his hand to «heaven and earth»[263].

In addition to themes referring to climate change, to the incessant presence of hatred, greed and cruelty in humanity, Cristicchi asks Dante about his journey, about the way to truly regenerate the spirit and dare to reach the stars of beatitude. As had been the case with Gustavo Modena and Paolo Ferrari, who resorted to pen, paper and book, so too Cristicchi resorts to sheets, to the sweaty papers of the artist, which, in this case, by means of invisible *nylon* threads, are literally made to fly across the stage, in a riot of colour. The projections created for this performance are very helpful, supporting Cristicchi's effective

[261] These answers were given by Cristicchi in an interview before the performance of the show *Paradiso* at the Sala Umberto Theatre, 24 March 2022. Please also refer to the *Lettera a Dante* he made public during the press conference at the Musei di San Domenico in Forlì, on 15 May 2021: https://www.simonecristicchi.it/2021/05/15/lettera-a-dante-alighieri-simone-cristicchi/ (last accessed 25/05/2025).
[262] Of the last show, specifically, a docu-film was also made (SIMONE CRISTICCHI, *Happynext. Alla ricerca della felicità*, directed by Andrea Cocchi, 2022), available on the *PrimeVideo* platform, and a book: SIMONE CRISTICCHI, *HappyNext. Alla ricerca della felicità*, Milano, La nave di Teseo, 2021.
[263] «cielo e terra», *Pd*. XXV, v. 2.

performance, which breaks through the fourth wall and from time to time poses questions to the audience in the auditorium, who go from silent to animated participants in the journey (*Figures 164-165*).

The truest contact with the audience, and with Dante's message, occurs when Cristicchi defines *Paradise* as the place of children, recalling that innocence that connotes everyone until it is soiled by life, by the inability to dream. Some children with whom he has had the opportunity to work, such as Maria Sole, one of the guests of the Meyer Hospital who know they have a short life due to illness, is the driving force behind his motivation to be an artist and to want to take care of the happiness of the collective *us* with his art. The song with which she won the San Remo Festival in 2019, *Abbi cura di me*, about the poignant meaning of relational compassion, is dedicated to her[264]. The performance ends with Cristicchi's *lectura Dantis* of the thirty-third canto of *Paradise*, introduced by a brief explanation that is still too much a child of Benigni's model not to declare: «*Paradise* is an exaggerated container».

4.6.1.3. Anagoor

Different from what we have seen so far is the performance by the Veneto company Anagoor[265], which re-stages the idea of Dante's *Paradise* by giving space to the music composed by Salvatore Sciarrino for the poetry recital at the Magazzini in San Vitale, Ravenna, in 1993[266]. This particular *Paradise* is 'one and trine', as the same performance is staged in three exceptional *locations*: the Armonie d'Arte Festival, in Catanzaro, with a performance from 10 p.m.; the OPERAESTATE Festival Veneto, in Bassano del Grappa, and finally the Palazzo della Ragione, in Padua[267] (*Figure 166*). In the Church of San Francesco in Bassano, a void is created. The pews of the restrained nave are placed against the walls

[264] From the show comes an album, SIMONE CRISTICCHI, *Dalle tenebre alla luce*, 11 unreleased tracks, Dueffel Music, 2024, as also reported by ANGELA CALVINI, *Musica. «Dalle tenebre alla luce»: il nuovo disco di Simone Cristicchi*, in «Avvenire», domenica 16 giugno 2024, available online.

[265] On the company we briefly refer to their official website, as well as the following essays and in-depth texts: SIMONE DERAI, *Il 'polittico' di Anagoor. Intervista di Mimma Valentino*, in «Acting Archives», a. X, n. 19 maggio, 2020, pp. 139-162; MIMMA VALENTINO, *Il 'mosaico' di Anagoor*, in «Acting Archives», a. X, n. 19 maggio, 2020, pp. 124-138; SILVIA DE MIN, *Decapitare la Gorgone. Ostensione dell'immagine e della parola nel teatro di Anagoor*, Corazzano, Titivillus, 2016; SILVIA DE MIN, *La scena erudita, o la svolta linguistica di Anagoor*, «cultureteatrali.org», n. 5 settembre, 2012, available online.

[266] One of the many performances in which Tiezzi stages *Lecturae Dantis* also sees this moment of rare beauty sealed in the Byzantine architecture of the Basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna. Salvatore Sciarrino's music embellishes this *Paradise*: *Dante's Paradise*, 17-19 July 1993, dramaturgy Giovanni Giudici, music Salvatore Sciarrino, directed by Federico Tiezzi, with Sandro Lombardi and the Actors of the Laboratory for a Theatre of Poetry "Divine Comedy", with the RAI Symphony Orchestra of Turin conducted by Ed Spanjaard.

[267] On the company's official website there is a trace of the three performances: the premiere on 28 August 2021, Anagoor for Salvatore Sciarrino, *Il Paradiso di Dante*, within the Armonie d'Arte Festival, at the Mediterranean Biodiversity Park in the International Sculpture Museum of Catanzaro; the première on September 2, 2021, Anagoor for Salvatore Sciarrino, *Il Paradiso di Dante*, within the OPERAESTATE Festival Veneto, in the Church of San Francesco in Bassano del Grappa (VI); the last stage on September 5, 2021, Anagoor for Salvatore Sciarrino, *Il Paradiso di Dante*, in the sacred music festival In Principio, at Palazzo della Ragione, Padua. Particularly useful is the review by Susanna PIETROSANTI, who saw the performance in Padua: SUSANNA PIETROSANTI, *Salvatore Sciarrino – Anagoor, Il Paradiso di Dante*, in «Arabeschi», available online. The author of this thesis attended the show in Bassano on September 2, 2021.

to create an enclosure for listening to Sciarrino's music, following three main directions, as described by Simone Derai, playwright and member of Anagoor:

il Vuoto, ciò che dobbiamo scoprire di dover accettare, per questo abbiamo scelto i testi di Simone Weil nei quali si parla della necessità di isolarsi, di essere in un deserto, in quanto colui che dobbiamo amare è assente, e dunque bisogna accettare il vuoto; l'Ascolto, inevitabile, imprescindibile, per curare la messa in scena di una composizione musicale così alta e metafora dell'ascolto verso l'altro; dunque l'irrappresentabile, in quanto il viaggio di Dante, al suo culmine, al cospetto della divinità si trova incapace di trovare le parole giuste, di capire se non è stato solo un sogno, una allucinazione, e chiede per questo ispirazione ad Apollo, il dio della poesia, immagine di Dio, per poter trovare e richiamare l'ombra di quella esperienza[268].

the Void, that which we must discover we must accept, which is why we have chosen Simone Weil's texts in which she speaks of the need to isolate oneself, to be in a desert, since the one we must love is absent, and therefore we must accept the void; the Listening, inevitable, unavoidable, to take care of the staging of such a high musical composition and metaphor of listening to the other; therefore the unrepresentable, as Dante's journey, at its culmination, in the presence of divinity finds himself unable to find the right words, to understand whether it was not just a dream, a hallucination, and for this he asks Apollo, the god of poetry, the image of God, for inspiration to find and recall the shadow of that experience.

The space is therefore suggestive and evocative in itself. In the centre of two circles of spectators, ideally concentric and adjacent to the space prepared for the orchestra on the apse, are old tape players placed on minimal stands, and all around the audience are large loudspeakers. The church, with its cross vaults, ancient frescoes and small paintings depicting the Stations of the *via Crucis*, is wired, emptied of its primordial meaning and filled with a new voice, to make room for a new possible paradise. In the orange and violet light of the sunset, one has the feeling of being in a huge sound box, in the heart of an amplifier. The sounds, whistles, hisses of the woodwinds clash with the pinches and gasps of violins and violas[269] (*Figure 167*).

Two figures advance from the back and approach the microphone in the centre of the space: the first canto of *Paradiso* is read in Italian and French, and reaches the audience as if it were an airport announcement, muffled, distant. During the declamation the two, new Virgil and Dante, pass each other large bundles of laurel, the plant of the Poets, to seal the invocation to Apollo, god of Poetry, just heard through Dante's words[270].

As in a dance, pervaded by the sacred and the ritual gesture, slow, punctuated, the two performers light incense and activate the tape recorder that begins to broadcast philosopher Simone Weil's words on the absence of God, on the way to the ineffable. In a polyphonic play between music, reproduced texts, Dante's words in diffraction, the sound enclosure is tinged with green, then blue, reddish lights, even

[268] These words derive from the conversation I had with Simone Derai, director and founding member of Anagoor, after the performance in Bassano, which saw the fortuitous presence of the scholar Silvia De Min. As Susanna Pietrosanti points out, fundamental to the staging and its conception were Weil's texts and the reflections of scholar Filippo La Porta, see SIMONE WEIL, *L'ombra e la grazia*, Milano, Bompiani, 2002; FILIPPO LA PORTA, *Il bene e gli altri: Dante e un'etica per il nuovo millennio*, Firenze, Bompiani, 2018.
[269] See ALESSANDRO RIGOLLI, *Il Paradiso di Dante secondo Sciarrino. Musiche per il Paradiso di Dante di Salvatore Sciarrino in un disco dell'Orchestra di Padova e del Veneto diretta da Marco Angius*, in «ilgiornaledellamusica.it», 17 agosto 2022.
[270] See *Pd*. I, vv. 13-36.

touching the church windows. The time of celestial glory after human suffering is imagined through noises, requiring the audience to immerse themselves in a new reality and try to be there, attentively.

The emptiness sought in Sciarrino's sound composition and the absence of God according to Weil become an unusual, new magma in which to suspend the work of imagination to fill the voids and instead let the hypnotic turning of the wheels of the radio and the two performers lying still, in contemplation, on the cold floor, allow the ineffable to emerge, which escapes the mind as it escaped Dante on his last journey:

> Da quinci innanzi il mio veder fu maggio
> che 'l parlar mostra, ch'a tal vista cede,
> e cede la memoria a tanto oltraggio.
>
> Qual è colüi che sognando vede,
> che dopo 'l sogno la passione impressa
> rimane, e l'altro a la mente non riede,
>
> cotal son io, ché quasi tutta cessa
> mia visïone, e ancor mi distilla
> nel core il dolce che nacque da essa[271].

The philosopher Simone Weil was of Jewish origin and born into an agnostic family, she converted to Christianity out of intellect and love, but her research, the fact that above all her *Notebooks*[272] are full of references to literature, science, mathematics, religion, and language itself, offer a methodological bridge to declare today what it is to seek God, to become fully acquainted with Him and to witness Him in one's own person, both physical and political. Picking up on his thoughts, juxtaposing them with the invocation to the Muse, a typical element of the proemial cantos of the poems, which certainly does not spare the first of *Paradiso*, but is even more closely linked to the invocation to Apollo, a metaphor for God, reflects the particular journey that Anagoor has decided to make through the Florentine poet in this centenary year of Dante's poem in a time of pandemic: to ask why one believes, what one believes in and how to make this faith present in life (*Figures 168-169-170*).

Absence, the inexpressible, the void are the subject of the dialogue between Sciarrino's music and Anagoor's contemporary vision, through the lens of the philosopher Weil's words. In view of the density that characterises the Veneto company's theatrical and operatic staging works, it should be emphasised that in this particular staging Sciarrino's music has been placed in the foreground, asking the philosopher's words, full of rhetorical questions addressed to the reader and that sense of emptiness that seeks the divine, that wants to give an accomplished sign of it, without, however, wishing to be its interpreter, to be the spokesperson for a new sacredness, secular, listening, reflective.

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[271] *Pd*. XXXIII, vv. 55-63.
[272] See SIMONE WEIL, *Quaderni*, a cura e con un saggio di Giancarlo Gaeta, 4 voll., Milano, Adelphi, 2020.

Referring back to Roberto Fratini's essay, the operation carried out by Monsignor Marco Frisina in several stages to realise his *Commedia Opera Musical*, which was a great success in its media run up to the centenary of 2021, does not meet the standards that this work set out to achieve, in terms of an original operation of reinterpretation of Dante's text through the spectacular *medium*, despite being a show of considerable means[273]. Unfortunately, the *lectura Dantis* conceived and set to music by Elio Germano and Teho Teardo, who stage *Paradiso XXXIII,* fits into this groove. Even in this case, the captivating multimedia effects produced by the *LED wall*, lasers and video effects fail to compensate for the dramaturgical choices and ineffective acting on the part of the leading performers who offer it[274].

4.6.2. The Dante of the kids. Le Piccole Canaglie (Brussels)

There are countless adaptations staged by more or less amateur companies, especially of children's theatre, who, on the occasion of the centenary, decide to work on Dante. We would like to mention here a *case study* that fits into the strand of musical dramaturgy in the sign of Dante. Similarly to what was done by the Teatro delle Albe, the company Le Piccole Canaglie, which has been working in the Italian language in Brussels (BE) since 2008 on the basis of a theatre workshop project for adolescents and children from international European schools, in 2019 decides to stage the *Commedia*, and work on Dante's masterpiece in its own way, following an inclusive compositional method[275]. The script is written by several hands on the basis of the elements that are elaborated by the children and, through a constant process of content elaboration in dialogue with the different actors that make up the group, the main themes to be dealt with during the performance are outlined. A show that instead sets itself new challenges in constructing an operetta by basing its operation on the very structure of the rhyme of Dante's triplet and by punctually investigating the musicality of the *Comedy* through a new combinatory praxis is *Bad Dante Bad English Bad Opera* created by the Spreafico Eckly company and the original music by Matteo Fargion brought to Italy at the Triennale di Milano in March 2023. The innovative and overwhelming approach of the double dramaturgy, theatrical and musical, lays the foundations for new rewritings in the sign of the contamination between genres[276] (*Figures 171-172*).

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[273] See ROBERTO SERAFIDE FRATINI, *Quasi una catabasi. La Divina Commedia nella danza. Part II*, cit., pp. 288-289.
[274] The show debuts and is produced with the support of Ravenna Festival at the Teatro Alighieri in Ravenna, on 11 October 2021. You can find all the material produced for the show on the Festival website. The author of this thesis saw the show at the Teatro Sociale in Mantua, on 24 January 2024.
[275] Denise Monas (director) and Antonella Casillo (communication manager) volunteered to be interviewed as contact persons of the company Le Piccole Canaglie during the rehearsals of the show *Comedia 3.0 Inferno* and the subsequent research stay in Brussels.
[276] The author of this thesis saw the show in Milan on 23 March 2023. On that occasion, it was also possible to participate in the workshop *Musical Composition and Dramaturgy* held by Andrea Spreafico and Matteo Fargion, and to obtain an initial interview with the playwright. The company desires to continue this punctual journey through each canto of Dante's

For the *musical* project *Comedia 3.0 Inferno*, the youngsters reflected on the concept of evil in contemporary times and, for them, one of the cruellest examples is the lack of intergenerational ties and dialogue. Once again, as 2019 is the climax of the protests and demonstrations of the youth for the climate (*Fridays for the future*), the emphasis is also placed on the pressing environmental problem, deciding to build a strong and coherent dramaturgical dynamic around it as a subplot of Dante's journey into the infernal realm (*Figure 173*).

The organic structure of the *Commedia* is sometimes distorted, proposing, for instance, to interpolate the text of the fifth canto of *Inferno* with an incursion into the corresponding fifth canto of *Purgatorio*, starting from the experiences of Francesca da Rimini and Pia de' Tolomei to reflect gender violence, feminicide and possible future actions to be implemented to change the way old and new generations relate the gender gap[277] *Figure 174*).

Youthful instances and the discussion on climate change are at the heart of the play, which in fact begins by presenting Dante and Beatrice, married, with two children, seeing these children prepare and encouraging them to participate in a *Friday*. From this picture, which reveals some family frailties and misunderstandings, a new journey into *Hell* is proposed for Dante, precisely with the children, with a rediscovered Virgil. In the set design, in the costumes and in all the furnishings of the stage box, the decisive intention of constructing the show as a climate action is expressed. Just a few examples: at the sight of Lucifer, Dante and his children realise that the souls are not immersed in the ice of Cocito, but in a sea of filth and radioactive waste, and Lucifer declares how today there is no longer any point in creating an expedient of evil on Earth, since man is autonomously providing for his own destruction by destroying the environment; the stage is enriched with the works of 'recycled textile art' provided by Belgian artist Arlette Vermeiren[278] (*Figures 175-176*); in the auditorium, the active, participatory component of the fight to support the climate cause is emphasised with signs designed and made by the young actors themselves and placed at the sides and in the *foyer,* where the famous imperative at the door of *Inferno* is changed to «Abandon all hope, you who pollute!»[279] (*Figures 177-178*).

Purgatorio, and they are currently awaiting the new dates for Durante, a production from 2023, which investigates cantos X-XXVI. More information and photo and video material can be found on the company's official website: https://www.spreaficoeckly.no/bad-dante-bad-english-bad-opera (last accessed 25/05/2025).

[277] See the video on the website of the Le Piccole Canaglie company, where you can see clips referring to this particular scene described from minute 1:41: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bief63P8iuk&ab_channel=LePiccoleCanaglie (last accessed 25/05/2025).

[278] After graduating in 1963 with a degree in textile screen-printing, she soon created installations out of textiles and recycled materials, which she exhibited in numerous solo and group exhibitions. By chance, Vermeiren was a neighbour of a member of the company and, having heard about the initiative to adapt and 'weave' Dante's Comedy with environmental themes, she decided to contribute to the production of the show by providing her own handicraft creations. Her works embellish the set design of the musical *Comedia 3.0. Inferno*, such as the damned man wearing what looks very much like a mask to protect himself from toxic gases, or the huge rosette made of recycled fabric that she herself designed. Images of the artist and the works she produced for the show can be found on the company's official website: https://www.lepiccolecanaglie.eu/copy-of-prossimamente (last accessed 25/05/2025).

[279] An examination of the performance is offered in SARA FONTANA, *Rappresentazioni dantesche contemporanee a sostegno dell'Agenda 2030*, cit., pp. 22-24.

4.6.3. Dante in natural and virtual space

4.6.3.1. In the caves

One who has instead created a show starting from the orographic needs of her territory, to give it prestige and propose a powerful and immersive experience to the public is Giusy Frallonardo, who together with Enrico Romita, created *Hell in the cave*[280]. The show, staged for the first time in 2011, is a perfect example of the valorisation of a territory applied to cultural heritage: the show is set in the geo-speleological caves of Castellana, a town in the province of Bari, Apulia. While in itself the town could certainly not boast the presence of Dante, as in Florence, Verona and Ravenna, ideally the physical conformation of the place, with the descent to the caves and the exceptionally large cavernous environment, allows Dante's imagery of the *Inferno* to be juxtaposed with that of the *Inferno*.

In the uniqueness of this environment, an immersive journey is created that transports the public into Dante's journey, makes them forget that they are themselves and, not without suggestion, makes them identify with Dante. In the grave (as the large main grotto is referred to) there is no Virgil, only stations among the thousand-year-old stalactites that let the characters of Dante's most famous episodes appear. Ideally, the vertical and horizontal planes on which the scene is conceived make it possible to outline the underlying dramaturgical thought: horizontally, between the stations, the audience moves and also the damned, who at times pass through the crowd, dispersing it and creating moments of strong involvement, fear at times, genuine dismay, given the inability to move too much; on the vertical axis the *visiones* with Dante's characters are solicited. To do this, in addition to using the cave's conformations, points are also set up for aerial drapes, obscured and put on display thanks to an appropriate *light design*: the performers of Paolo and Francesca, as well as Ulysses and finally Beatrice, fly in the large vault of the grave, offering the audience circus-like evolutions of aerial dance with the drapes while their tercets are declaimed, enlarging the surface of the scene and in fact using all the available space. In this way, the show succeeds in creating an immersive, enthralling atmosphere that leaves the audience with bated breath for the entire duration of the performance, ready in the literal sense of the term to «riveder le stelle»[281], come out of the gloomy air (*Figures 179-180*).

[280] See SARA FONTANA, *Hell in the Cave: Falling down to find the light*, in «Performance Research», vol. 26, nn. 1-2, pp. 58-68.
[281] *If*. XXXIV, v. 139.

4.6.3.2. The city and the soundscape

In Verona, another performance exploits the concept of sound scape and immersive horizon, providing a walk through Dante's places, rich in history and suggestions related to the presence of Alighieri in the city of Verona. Equipped with wireless headphones, Silvia Mercuriali's *Silent Dante* takes its cue from the youthful fashion of silent parties, a way of celebrating outdoors that respects the surrounding community and offers the user a personalised and stimulating listening experience, and suggests a human interface with the auditory device[282] (*Figure 181*). The audience has as reference Virgil and Beatrice, two guides they can hear in their ears but cannot see. Thus, the very personal imagination of each participating user is solicited, who despite being in a group, lives an individual experience, and at the same time, feels part of the places and spaces that Dante himself frequented and experienced, again creating a cogent link between reality and imagination, the memory of Dante's work and the new layer of experience shared with it.

4.6.3.3. Augmented reality

Only one company to date has designed an immersive experience with visors and an augmented reality sensory implant. In 2021, the project *Nel mezzo dell'Inferno* by Fabrizio Pallara and Roberta Ortolano, with the help of programmers and graphic designers, structured a virtual reality journey through Dante's first cantica, giving the audience (only one user at a time) the possibility of confronting the journey, the encounter with Virgil and the fairs, and a character of their choice between Ulysses (*If.* XXVI) and Count Ugolino (*If.* XXXIII)[283]. The actual space required for virtual reality is a rectangular room surrounded along three sides of the perimeter by fans (a technical aid for effects during the narration and also a necessary cooling element for the machines involved), while on one side is the director's rig with computers and screens to see what the user sees in the visor at all times (*Figure 182*).

The user is provided with a visor, headphones, and a plate to be placed on the sternum or back to sensually stimulate the bass in the headphones with gentle pressure and shocks to the solar plexus to make the vision more realistic. Despite the fact that the graphics are still very simple, in the process of being

[282] See the artist's official website: https://www.silviamercuriali.com/silent-dante (last accessed 25/05/2025).
[283] Please refer to the CSS page that supported and produced the project: https://www.cssudine.it/produzioni/1308/nel-mezzo-dell-inferno (last accessed 25/05/2025). The author of this thesis saw the show on 16 December 2021, at Teatro Contatto 39, Udine, Teatro S. Giorgio, thanks to the company that allowed the author of this thesis a special midnight slot.

implemented, as they would require much more sophisticated machinery and a higher calculation capacity, the overall sensation as an audience is exciting: as was already the case with *Hell in the cave*, the space created on Dante's imagery and proposed with captivating and modern graphics allows the audience to leave their own reality and immerse themselves in Dante's 2.0. In the Ulysses episode, the user's ability to move is stimulated through an obstacle labyrinth. The user knows he/she is safe, knows he/she does not really have to jump from one point to another of a building with an infinite abyss in the middle, but at the same time is transported by the virtual reality he/she is experiencing and can experience the same sense of vertigo and adrenalin rush that he/she would have in a normal condition. This totally immersive performance allows us to evaluate future frontiers of dramaturgy, in collaboration with game design, virtual reality and theatre.

4.6.4. New Dantesque trilogies for the Teatri Stabili

4.6.4.1. Stabile del Veneto

Among the group of performances culminating with the 2021 celebrations, two trilogies must be mentioned, which present a direct filiation with the 'classics' of the late 20th century. Both prepared by two Stable Theatres for Dante's celebrations, they see different outcomes and solutions. Both experiences emerge from contingency solutions and directives provided by national bulletins during the various phases of the Covid-19 pandemic. These performances were some of the first to be able to return to the theatre after long months of closures, to be experienced by the public with all the devices to prevent contagion but feeling the palpable joy of a newfound closeness.

For the Teatro Stabile del Veneto in Padua, director Fabrizio Arcuri decided to reinterpret the Magazzini trilogy in methodological terms and entrusted the design and reworking of each cantica to a different playwright, setting the work of *Trittico dantesco* together with the actors of the Compagnia Giovani[284]. If at the end of the 20th century, Tiezzi and his companions considered it vital to maintain the poetic force inherent in the words, strongly connoting their own journey in Dante with the characteristics of the Theatre of Poetry, in the new millennium, director Arcuri's solution is shifted to the axis of theatrical

[284] Please refer to the project's official page, which offers for each performance its own focus, the theatre sheets with director's notes and insights, and the logbook created by the poet and scholar Anna Garbo: https://ww2.teatrostabileveneto.it/events/event/trittico-dantesco/ (last accessed 25/05/2025). Images and stage photos are also available on the social accounts of the Teatro Stabile del Veneto. We also recommend reading LAURA PERNICE, *La Divina Commedia sulla scena contemporanea: Trittico dantesco di Fabrizio Arcuri*, in SILVIO ALOVISIO, GIULIA CARLUCCIO, STELLA DAGNA (a cura di), *Schermi oscuri: L'inferno dantesco nel cinema e nei media audiovisivi*, cit., pp. 225-234; RITA BORGA, *Fabrizio Arcuri racconta il Trittico Dantesco di Paradivino, Russo e Sinisi*, in «Krapp's last post», 13 maggio 2021, available online; ELENA SCOLARI, *Fabrizio Arcuri racconta il suo Trittico Dantesco e noi andiamo nel Paradiso di Sinisi*, in «paneacquaculture.net», 1 giugno 2021, available online; ROBERTO CANZIANI, *Il peccato, il desiderio e il lieto fine itinerari danteschi di Arcuri & Co.*, in «Hystrio», a. XXXIV, n. 1, 2021, p. 49.

dramaturgy, renewing a reflection on writing for the stage. The entire operation is set up in the contingency of pandemic restrictions and, as can be seen from the logbook on the project's website, the activities begin on the Zoom videoconferencing platform, and then move with masks and contingencies to the theatre, for a long time still without an audience in the auditorium.

An Inferno is entrusted to Fausto Paravidino. As Alighieri finds himself «in the middle of the journey of [his] life»[285], this play opens on the adult life of the protagonist Dante, operating a gender change, who must retrace and rewrite his own existence. A black box forms the scene, gloomy, cramped, in which the protagonist must pass through various trials. Her *Inferno* is a personal initiatory journey into contemporary reality, where religion and a cohesive society are contrasted with the alienation of modernity, corrupt politics deaf to the needs of the people, an economy that annihilates the weak with the logic of capitalist profit, all under the lashing notes of pollution and the impending climate disaster (*Figures 183-184*). The audience's attention is aroused with frequent flashbacks in the protagonist's life, playing on lived events and dreams, unfulfilled or shattered. According to Arcuri's dictation, the component to look for in this cantica is memory and the construction of identity, so elusive because it is subjective and subject to reworking or forgetting:

> La memoria è il principio post-psicanalitico della nostra identità e la narrazione è il territorio in cui si stratifica la nostra identità. Questo potrebbe valere anche per la storia con la S maiuscola, la società ricorda determinati autori e certe imprese in funzione della narrazione dominante e trascura episodi e personaggi che non concorrono alla strutturazione della memoria, e quindi all'identità che si è deciso di conservare e tramandare[286].
>
> Memory is the post-psychoanalytic principle of our identity and narrative is the territory in which our identity is stratified. This could also be true for history with a capital S. Society remembers certain authors and undertakings as a function of the dominant narrative and neglects episodes and characters that do not contribute to the structuring of memory, and thus to the identity that has been decided to preserve and pass on.

The stage costumes play on generating short circuits with the pop, grotesque and kitschy contemporaneity of advertising, contrasting with the greyness of some white-collar workers' office elements and with a dreamlike Disney fairytale imagery, declined in its dark and horror version of post-Burtonian werewolves and skeletons. To crown it all, in this mixture of fragments suspended between dream and reality, real memory and nightmare, is the live music composed and played by Giulio Ragno Favero (a former member of the band Il Teatro degli Orrori), who actively participates on stage with his own instrument, offering a further body and a musical declination to the dramaturgy of memory[287] (*Figure 185*).

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[285] «nel mezzo del cammin di [sua] vita», *If*., v. 1.

[286] FABRIZIO ARCURI, *Note di regia*, in *Foglio di sala - un Inferno. Trittico dantesco*, quotation at p. 7, available online.

[287] It should be noted that director Arcuri and musician Giulio Ragno Favero are also collaborating on a Veronese project called *Dante's box*, which is part of the celebrations of Dante and financed by the Municipality of Verona - Department of Culture in the context of Dante in Verona 1321-2021 in collaboration with the Arteven Multidisciplinary Circuit. The two artists curate the direction and soundscape for a *jukebox* of Dante's cantos selected from the *Comedy* and read by as many actors from selected companies in the Verona area (Orti Erranti / Modus Produzioni, Cantieri Invisibili, Casa Shakespeare, Ippogrifo Produzioni, Mitmacher, Punto in Movimento, Teatro Scientifico, and with Isabella Ragonese,

A Purgatorio instead sees its realisation with Letizia Russo. Instead of the fractured and chaotic imagery of the first performance, inscribed in the total darkness of the stage box, in this case the curtain opens on a road with an old Alfa Romeo[288] in the middle (*Figures 186-187*). The second performance of the triptych focuses on the journey of the protagonist Dante, still the same actress (Federica Fresco), with her sister, to a place marked by war, «one of those events that could be placed between the war in Bosnia or in some territory in the Middle East where the Peace Forces exercise the exportation democracy»[289]. The dramaturgical focus chosen by Russo investigates what sloth is, that non-choice contrasted with the strong stance of the souls Dante tends to encounter on his journey:

Se ci capitasse la sfortuna di morire al momento sbagliato, tutti potremmo finire nell'antipurgatorio, e scorgere da lontano un visitatore che non avrebbe neanche la curiosità di fermarsi a parlare un po' con noi. E avrebbe ragione, perché non c'è nulla di interessante nella vita di chi non sceglie. Ma poco interessante non significa indegno di essere raccontato[290].

If we had the misfortune to die at the wrong time, we could all end up in anti-purgatory, and glimpse from afar a visitor who would not even have the curiosity to stop and talk to us for a . And he would be right, because is nothing interesting in the life of one who does not choose. But uninteresting does not mean unworthy of being told.

Two women sit inside the car and begin a dialogue, which soon turns into a soliloquy on the part of the protagonist, as the second is a ghost, the living presence in the memory of her long-dead sister, and recalled here to recount how one can be the failed counterpart of an activist, partisan, courageous sister who decides to commit suicide in order not to fall into enemy hands.

The set design aids this investigation into the personality and reflection of the protagonist, her values and the ethics of her actions, which in itself recalls many themes present in Dante's cantica, such as the need to perform an action and the freedom that guides free will towards the salvation of the soul. A screen is placed behind the car, where the context, the landscape in which the car is travelling is projected, giving the scene the connotations of the drive-in, the open-air cinema. The scene is augmented by this play of mirrors of memory, of reflection in the dramaturgy, reflected in this double projection between stage and screen. It acquires a further complicated form at the moment when the self-narrative of the protagonist faces the moment when her sister committed suicide for freedom (just like the guardian of Purgatorio, Cato the Uticense), and crashes.

Lino Guanciale, Iaia Forte, Leo Gullotta, Filippo Nigro, Vinicio Marchioni, Fortunato Cerlino, Lucia Mascino, Dajana Roncione, Lino Musella and other surprise guests) for a total of 21 episodes. All episodes and information on the project are available at: https://rocketradiolive.com/dantes-box (last accessed 25/05/2025).

[288] As Anna Garbo recalls in her *Diario di Bordo*, the staging machine was donated by the Motus company and had been placed in the theatre courtyard for rehearsals of the performance, still in the time of the pandemic, in order to rehearse outdoors, circumventing some of the critical issues caused by pandemic restrictions. Her reflections are also formalised in ANNA GARBO, *Teatro in Veneto ai tempi della pandemia: un punto d'osservazione sullo stato del teatro contemporaneo*, Relatrice Prof.ssa Cristina Grazioli, A.A. 2019-20, Corso di Laurea Magistrale in Scienze dello Spettacolo e Produzione Multimediale).

[289] «una di quelle vicende che potrebbero collocarsi tra la guerra in Bosnia o in qualche territorio del Medio oriente dove le Forze della Pace esercitano l'esportazione di democrazia», FABRIZIO ARCURI, *Note di regia*, in *Foglio di sala - un Purgatorio. Trittico dantesco*, citazione a p. 7, available online.

[290] LETIZIA RUSSO, *Note per un Purgatorio*, in *Foglio di sala - un Purgatorio. Trittico dantesco*, citazione a p. 5, available online.

The atmosphere becomes even more unreal as Dante's carcass is found and stripped bare, denuded, and the vehicle set on fire, photographing like a voyeur the dissonant juxtaposition between the naked body of the young woman and the catastrophe behind her. This last sequence, to the notes of *(feels like) heaven* by the Fiction Factory (1983), amidst the flames so Dante-like that they hone in on the last rehearsal before passing on to the kingdom of heaven, lies the key to the elaboration of this canticle, namely the elaboration of the crisis of intellectuals and the role of culture.

The woman-artist Dante, like the butterfly in Peter Brook's play *US* (1966), burnt in series because one can, because art must be true, calling the audience to question the limit, ethics, the need to have a position in life, finds herself questioned in her poetic function[291]. Beauty, symbolised by the woman, in her classical, plastic nudity, is once again objectified and abused in desolation, as art finds itself helpless in the hands of its author, who must choose what to do with his gift. The reflection, shared by Arcuri and Russo, is on the need of the present time to bring art and the making of art back to the centre of political discourse, capable of being the engine of a revolution that includes, that offers perspectives[292].

Finally, *Un Paradiso (A Paradise*) is the dramaturgical rewriting by Fabrizio Sinisi, author of another Dante project with the Magazzini. In this last chapter, desire is questioned, as a form of research, an engine of living and doing, until this cantica declined in its economic and social implications and now offered in a political key. From the black of *Inferno*, to the approximate and disturbing vital reminder of reality that characterises *Purgatorio*, we move on to the aseptic and all-encompassing white of *Paradiso*. In a parallel, abstract and dystopian world, the set design presents itself as the first coefficient of meaning, offering the audience a key to fit into the plot of the performance: the entire stage of the Maddalene theatre is used, creating a very large stage up to the former apse of the church (*Figures 188-189*). The sensation is that of observing a place that is both a hospital and a museum, a "neural beehive": on both sides, as if to form a backdrop of objects, there are very tall trolleys housing artefacts and objects testifying to human genius (the head of the Statue of Liberty, the Purgatory machine, a Doric column, an analogue television, a cast of a Banksy graffito, typewriters, and so on).

The juxtaposition between Dante (in this case back as a man) and Beatrice (an icy, serene aviatrix in a sparkling suit) is surreal: catapulted into this futuristic *Paradise*, where all the predictions due to climate change have come true, such as the rising sea level and the submergence of cities like Venice, New York and London, Dante finds himself coming to terms with Artificial Intelligence, machines now so sophisticated as to be the new God, capable of intercepting the slightest trace of germs and infections with algorithms and ensuring a life far from perdition, a new and scientific detachment. Beatrice is a guide

[291] On this subject, see LAURA PEJA, *«US» (1966). La questione del Vietnam nella scrittura collettiva firmata da Peter Brook*, in ANNAMARIA CASCETTA, LAURA PEJA (a cura di), *La prova del Nove: scritture per la scena e temi epocali nel secondo Novecento*, cit., pp. 97-144; OLIVIERO PONTE DI PINO, *Le farfalle bruciano? Un prologo e due atti*, in LAURA BUDRIESI (a cura di), *Animal Performance Studies*, Torino, Accademia University Press, 2023, pp. 127-148.

[292] Part of this information can be found in the interview ELENA SCOLARI, *Fabrizio Arcuri racconta il suo Trittico Dantesco e noi andiamo nel Paradiso di Sinisi*, in «paneacquaculture.net», 1 giugno 2021, available online.

and presence at ease in the new sidereal world of *techne*. During the performance, a bed is placed in the centre, where they both lie down, and it would seem to be the moment of a true reunion and revelation of the love that has always united them. Instead, this union, at least spatially, is disregarded and provides the pretext for reworking the whole thing, literally rewinding the tape of what has just been seen to re-propose it with minimal differences, in a constant repetition of situations and dialogues, analepsis and prolepsis.

The time machine in the futuristic conceived by Sinisi, where the scene rewinds and all the combinatorial variants appreciable in a framework of immutable detachment are experienced, offers the spectator a singular journey together with Dante in the wonders created by humanity and connecting evil, that which is capable of destroying the world, with the very concept of disease, bringing to mind the classical conception of the plague, of the spreading evil so similar to COVID. In the almost three hours of the show, without intermission, the spectator is invited to the exhaustion caused by the information overload, deliberately expressed in this retracing of historical milestones, such as the moon landing, and in the scanning of places and dates, and frantically asking: what happened at that time and in that place? And above all, why are they dancing?

The souls that appear on stage dance. Dance, in its corporeal dimension and in its historical and artistic declinations, is present in the performance and always as an alienating question. Just as the heavens and souls of Dante's *Paradise* dance, in an incessant and luminous blissful chorus, in the performance conceived by Sinisi and Arcuri, dance is a further reflection in the flow of the dramaturgy, which breaks and places the spectator in an attentive and cognitive dimension: why dance if this *Paradise* is not joyful? Dance, therefore, in its polysemy, offers Sinisi a further dramaturgical coefficient to investigate the relationship between body and knowledge, between perception and conscience, in the final analysis going to decline that desire in its naturalness, dance as true but unattainable happiness, far from contemporary feeling:

Corpi che si sono scrollati le pene della mortalità. Corpi elevati, liberati dalla storia: corpi che ascendono al sublime della macchina, il paradiso artificiale di una grande messinscena. Godono il piacere di contraddire, rimescolare, performare il tempo: spezzarne la crudeltà progressiva, costringerlo a stare in un teatro. Ma la domanda che questi corpi pongono al vuoto della storia, oggi come allora, sembra sempre la stessa: più vita, più vita, più vita[293].

Bodies that have shaken off the pains of mortality. Elevated bodies, freed from history: bodies that ascend to the sublime of the machine, the artificial paradise of a grand staging. They enjoy the pleasure of contradicting, remixing, performing time: breaking its progressive cruelty, forcing it to stay in a theatre. But the question these bodies pose to the emptiness of history, today as then, always seems the same: more life, more life.

Disturbing and at the same time necessary is the theatre-within-the-theatre offered in a dialogue between Beatrice and Dante. In her questioning of the meaning of life, saved unwillingly, innervated with an incomprehensible natural vitalistic desire so dissociated from the awareness of her own finiteness, fragility, her problematic and determined desire to live as an artist, a person who searches for the profound

[293] FABRIZIO SINISI, *Oltre il muro del corpo. note per un Paradiso*, in *Foglio di sala - un Paradiso. Trittico dantesco*, pp. 5-6, available online, citazione a p. 6.

meaning of the self and of the whole in relation (once again Dante's creator-creature focus), Beatrice offers Dante as a counterpoint the vision of a model representing in miniature the Magdalene Theatre itself, with a seated audience, and says: «this is the great paradoxical theatre and you are in it»[294].

The elliptical and psychedelic structure, in rhyme at times, of Sinisi's journey through the heavens of *Paradiso* is enriched with astonishing *ekphrasis* of works of art, offered initially in the archival sides of the 'quinte-scaffolding', and then rendered in clear *tableau vivant* as in the case of Adam and Eve, nude and with exaggerated pubic hair, colours and poses reminiscent of Flemish altarpieces, or when all the actors position themselves on the scene like Edouard Manet's *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe*, or Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo's painting *The Fourth State* appears reproduced on a blackboard. There is also no shortage of references to cinema (especially to the aesthetic imagery of director Wes Anderson) or to theatre itself, with the entrance of a desolate Pierrot, finally using some musical hits such as Frank Sinatra's *Fly me to the moon* as a *refrain* to the heavenly journey.

In this last performance, which closes Arcuri's triptych in Padua, the clear perception is that what is laid bare is the very relationship of the author with the work of art and the never exhausted need for the human being to continue to elaborate a thought in artistic form, both for the artists and for the public, as the motor of a more universal machine of desire.

4.6.4.2. CSS Stabile di Innovazione di Udine

Different in form but reminiscent of the same original performance, at the CSS Teatro Stabile di Innovazione in Udine playwright and director Rita Maffei proposes a participatory triptych of Dante, which might recall the experiences of the Teatro delle Albe or Babilonia. Instead, hers is a very personal journey, inspired by the Magazzini's performance in Cividale del Friuli in 1991. The trilogy proposed by Maffei, in fact, is the only one to date to have succeeded in the feat of proposing the consequential representation of all three shows dedicated to the *cantiche* in a single marathon (*iNFERNO* at 6 p.m.; *pURGATORIO* at 8 p.m. and 9 p.m.; *pARADISO* at 10.30 p.m.), inside the Teatro S. Giorgio, Sala Pinter, in Udine[295].

As Maffei reports, the approach behind the conception of the shows is diametrically opposed to that of the Magazzini, or Arcuri. Having worked together with Giuliano Scabia, and also taking his cue from some elements of Milo Rau's democratic theatre, real, she decided to make the former's fabulous, imaginative and extended matrix her own, basing her directing practice on a constant dialogue with the

[294] «questo è il grande teatro paradosso e voi ci siete dentro», the quotations come from personal notes taken during the performance on 21 May 2021 in Padua. *Un Inferno* was seen on 7 May 2021 and *Un Purgatorio* on 14 May 2021.
[295] The author of this thesis attended the participatory marathon on 18 December 2021, in Udine, having been able to witness some rehearsals and discussions with the artist, See RITA MAFFEI, *Da partecipativo a partecipato, il teatro con i cittadini*, in «Quaderni di Teatro Carcere», n. 7/8 (dossier il nuovo attore), 2019/20, pp. 41-44.

audience, increasing the possibilities of contact with it, to define her own work within the framework of the permanent, democratic workshop (according to Rau), which admits and annexes without distinction into the stage machine all those who wish to consign their own experience, their memories, to a collective enterprise, believing in a theatrical work made on the territory for the territory. In this case too, for the creation of the show and for the preparatory work of Dante readings, the pandemic has decreed stalemates in the production, requiring lengthy prophylactic "swabs" for everyone and constant monitoring, even if only to be at the rehearsals.

In *iNFERNO*, the entire theatre is upside down, turned upside down first of all in its structure, remodelled to allow people and actors to use the whole space. The stalls are the place where the performance is articulated, leaving the stage empty (*Figures 190-191*). The audience is thrust into the stalls, overlooked by the famous passages from the *Comedy* that are declaimed from above, from the lighting bridge; other actors are inside Plexiglas cones, from which they give voice to different souls of the damned and contemporary damnations: we go from gender violence, to reflections on migrations and the prevailing violence perpetrated against people who have to leave their homes, their roots, to escape from a grim fate. There is no shortage of mentions of Italian 'hells' with international resonance, such as the dramatic and still unresolved events of the violent repression of the G8 in Genoa (2001), or direct questions linking personal experience to the proposed dramaturgy: «What were you doing when 11 September 2001 happened?».

What emerges in this *Inferno* is the component linked to the border territory, of plurality of cultures, languages and ethnic groups typical of this part of Italy, which has seen its territory change according to historical and political events, through much fratricidal pain, stratifying its identity in diversity. Women, the repositories of horror and remembrance, are the true protagonists of this dramaturgy that seeks to stage mainly the evil generated by man: war, in all its forms (as in the orthodox war of 1992) is recounted through direct episodes, anecdotes, chronicles, placing the actresses inside Plexiglas cones lit from below, or having others extend lights from the stage, in a continuous verticalism and disorientation.

A half-hour is needed to change the setting of the theatre and allow the performers to take on more humble, purgatorial souls. *Purgatory* is a play in stations, always using the space of the stalls and delimiting each room with yellow tape on the floor. A semblance of reality, of intimacy, which transports the spectators on a participative journey through memories. In each room there is a performer and objects to characterise it (some are also empty).

Here too, the work of processing Dante's material in a participatory key brings to the surface the personal experience and interests of each performer, from old school notebooks and books to passions for chess, art and food (*Figures 192-193-194*). Very present is the still all too vivid and prevailing condition of the pandemic: the sanitising gel is located in many places, attention to the quantity of people present is evident, there is a quota, and the audience wears masks for the duration of the performance. One of the

rooms proposes the 'tunnel of hugs'[296] a large sanitised plexiglass tarp that has been proposed in nursing homes and settings where particularly frail patients were admitted in order to allow them and their loved ones to see each other and simulate a filtered hug (*Figure 195*).

Touch, contact, even if only given by the co-presence of bodies that have remained apart for so long, and the possibility of dialogue, are central elements of Dante's cantica: a *timer* is used to mark off the time possible to be in a station, the performers themselves raise their hands to declare that they are available to host a person in their room, and so in turn visit more or less all the stations. Humanity and a newfound community characterise this participatory experience.

Finally, *Paradiso* returns the scene to a frontal Italian-style theatre layout, with a partial recomposition of the seats in the stalls and a traditional Italian-style scene, almost a cinema in some respects. In the choral restitution of what the shared experience of Dante has left as furrows to follow and inhabit in order to move forward, the reworking of the last cantica sees the performers stand behind a large white cloth, on which images and videos produced together are projected, like a large *collage*. Moreover, thanks to the use of lights and small LEDs that the performers hold in their hands, a projective game is created for the benefit of the audience, which sees points of light, frames of portraits and thus the actual performers appear from the light that gradually becomes more and more present. A praise of presence, of friendship, of the search for what love is that Dante extols so much in this last cantica, the motionless motor of all things, capable of embracing every creature (*Figure 196*).

This last part of the Triptych does not find any particular artistic match in terms of ideas and setting, but in any case bears witness to a constant of work in participatory theatre supported by Maffei, which sees in its performers the first frontier, the first artistic encounter-counterpoint in a new way of making art together (*Figure 197*). The Udine triptych lives on a choral and local dimension, openly acting on its own territory and for its own territory, defining itself as a collective participatory practice in the sign of Dante.

[296] In order to break down isolation and keep the focus on everyone's health, the *tunnel of hugs* has been created in an RSA (i.e. a nursing home) in Brescia: REDAZIONE ONLINE, *Covid a Brescia, in Rsa arriva «il tunnel degli abbracci». Nei prossimi giorni saranno inaugurati altri ambienti a Concesio, a Montichiari e in città*, in «Corriere della Sera», sezione Brescia, 4 dicembre 2020, online al sito: https://brescia.corriere.it/notizie/cronaca/20_dicembre_04/covid-brescia-rsa-arriva-il-tunnel-abbracci-b857fd3a-3617-11eb-ab19-bbfa6037f17b.shtml (last accessed 25/05/2025).

FIFTH CHAPTER

DANTE AND DANCE: CONTEMPORARY CHOREOGRAPHIC EXAMPLES BETWEEN ITALY AND EUROPE

To represent Dante on stage is to force the viewer to return to his work, because the theatrical transposition highlights the fact that Dante had left a space open, had created a scene[1].

Only those who do not let themselves be blinded by the lights of the century and manage to discern in them the shadow part, their intimate darkness, can call themselves contemporaries. Giorgio Agamben[2]

Being conscious of the constant evolution of the human gesture, which is a locus of knowledge and of exchange, we are obligated to choose an idea to transmit, assuming the risk of getting it wrong, aware of the whoever comes after us may overturn the meaning of that transmission. Emio Greco[3]

5.1. International Dantesque reception in twentieth-century dance

5.1.1. Choreographic prodromes

In the twentieth century, all the transmission lines found for the theatrical reception of Dante and his works are grafted into the new and different typologies of the art of dance. Referring back to other studies that offer an effective overview of the different languages that dance developed in this century, from the early avant-garde onward[4], in search of new expressions and ways to free the body from the

[1] «Rappresentare Dante in scena vuol dire costringere chi guarda a tornare alla sua opera, perché la trasposizione teatrale evidenzia il fatto che Dante aveva lasciato aperto uno spazio, aveva creato una scena», ALBERTO CASADEI, PAOLO GERVASI*, La voce di Dante. Performance dantesche tra teatro, tv e nuovi media,* cit., p. 12.

[2] «Può dirsi contemporaneo soltanto chi non si lascia accecare dalle luci del secolo e riesce a scorgere in esse la parte di ombra, la loro intima oscurità», GIORGIO AGAMBEN*, Che cos'è il contemporaneo?*, Milano, nottetempo, 2008, p.14.

[3] FRANCESCA PEDRONI (a cura di), *Dialogo, Emio Greco e Virgilio Sieni*, Pontedera (PI), Artout-Maschietto Editore, 2009, p. 36.

[4] See ELENA RANDI, *Protagonisti della danza del XX secolo. Poetiche ed eventi scenici*, Roma, Carocci, 2014; ELENA RANDI, *La modern dance*, Roma Carocci, 2018; ELENA RANDI, *Il corpo pensato. Teorie della danza nel Novecento*, Roma, Dino Audino, 2020; FRANCESCA FALCONE, *Tecniche di danza contemporanea. Percorsi di studio tra teorie e pratiche*, Roma, Dino Audino, 2020; ALESSANDRO PONTREMOLI, *Teatro e danza*, in LUIGI ALLEGRI (a cura di), *Il teatro e le arti. Un confronto tra linguaggi*, Roma, Carocci, 2017, pp. 125-152; LAURENCE LOUPPE, *Poetics of contemporary dance*, translated by Sally Gardner, Hampshire, Dance Books Ltd, 2010 [ed. or. LAURENCE LOUPPE, *Poétique de la danse contemporaine*, Brussels, Contredanse, 1997]; ELISA GUZZO VACCARINO, *La danza d'arte. Balanchine, Cunningham, Forsythe. Tre maestri della danza formale*, Roma, Dino Audino, 2015; AMBRA SENATORE, *La danza d'autore. Vent'anni di danza contemporanea in Italia*, Novara, Utet, 2007; ELENA CERVELLATI, GIULIA TADDEO (a cura di), *La danza in Italia nel Novecento e oltre: teorie, pratiche, identità*, Atti del convegno (Bologna, 28-30 marzo 2019), Macerata, Ephemeria, 2020; VITO DI BERNARDI, LETIZIA GIOIA MONDA (a cura di), *Immaginare la danza. Corpi e visioni nell'era digitale*, Atti del convegno internazionale (Università Sapienza di Roma, 3-4 dicembre 2015), Bologna, Piretti, 2018; VITO DI BERNARDI, *Cosa può la danza. Saggio sul corpo*, Roma, Bulzoni, 2012; ALESSANDRO PONTREMOLI (a cura di),

stringent impositions and rigid dictates of classical ballet, in this last chapter we intend to provide a few examples and analyse the reception in the choreographic sphere of Dante's poetry.

No art is currently more active than dance in its declination of Dante's reception, for it is precisely in the multifaceted development that connotes it that the desire for dialogue with Alighieri's works, and primarily with the *Commedia,* is grafted. This receptive peculiarity is even more emphasized by the few but relevant studies that have so far been reserved for this discipline, published especially in conjunction with the 2021 centenary[5].

If in theatre, one can find a specific way of "saying Dante" linked to the directorial choices of the individual artist or company, dance offers a more complex picture. Given the nature of studies preceding this chapter, an attempt will be made here to provide a reading of some performances that can be framed in the choreographic reception by also considering examples peculiar to the European sphere. Moreover, by grouping the selected performances by different geographical areas, an attempt will be made to offer a distinction between performances that, on the one hand, draw on the style and discipline of classical ballet, utilizing its codes *in toto* and concentrating Dante's reception more in the dramaturgy and the scenographic components of the *mise en scène*, and on the other hand, those

Drammaturgia della danza, Milano, Euresis, 1997; SUSAN LEIGH FOSTER, *Reading dancing. Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, University of California Press, 1986.

[5] A brief survey of studies of Dantesque choreographic reception: FRANÇOISE SYSON CARTER, *Celestial Dance: a Search for perfection*, in «Dance Research», vol. V, n. 2, 1987, pp. 3-17; DONATELLA TRONCA, *Spectacula turpitudinum. Christian Schemata of the Dancing Body*, in «RIHA Journal», (special issue *From Living to Visual Images. Paradigms of Corporeal Iconicity in Late Antiquity*, edited by Michele Bacci, Vladimir Ivenovici), 2019, open access; RIYAKO CECILIA HIKOTA, *The Christological Perichōrēsis and Dance*, in «Open Theology», n. 8, 2022, pp. 191–204; LICIA BUTTÀ, *Introduzione: Dante e il "visibile danzare"*, in «Dante e l'arte», n. 4, 2017, pp. 5-8; FRANCESCO CIABATTONI, *Coreografie dantesche*, in «Dante e l'arte», n. 4, 2017, pp. 11-30; CLAUDIA CIERI VIA, *La danza come movimento ed espressione nelle immagini poetiche della Commedia di Dante*, in «Dante e l'arte», n. 4, 2017, pp. 31-66; LUDMILA ACONE, *Danser la Rédemption*, in «Dante e l'arte», n. 4, 2017, pp. 101-124; PAOLO DE VENTURA, *"Donne mi parver, non da ballo sciolte": appunti su danza e pericoresi tra gli spiriti sapienti*, in «Dante e l'arte», n. 4, 2017, pp. 125-136; ROBERTO SERAFIDE FRATINI, *Quasi una catabasi. La Divina Commedia nella danza degli ultimi 200 anni. Parte I*, in «Dante e l'Arte», n. 4, 2017, pp. 137-184; ROBERTO SERAFIDE FRATINI, *Quasi una catabasi. La Divina Commedia nella danza degli ultimi 200 anni. Parte II*, in «Dante e l'Arte», n. 5, 2018, pp. 273-334; ROBERTO SERAFIDE FRATINI, *Vacabimus. Appunti per una cinesiologia dantesca*, in LUCIA BUTTÀ, JESÚS CARRUESCO, FRANCESC MASSIP, EVA SUBÍAS (editors), *Danses Imaginades, Danses Relatades. Paradigmes iconogràfics del ball des de l'antiguitat clàssica fins a l'edat Mitjana - Dancing Images and Tales. Iconography of dance from classical to Middle Age*, Institut Català d'Arqueologia Clàssica, Plaça d'en Rovellat, Tarragona, 2014, pp. 85-108; ROBERTO SERAFIDE FRATINI, *Inferni orizzontali o l'improbabile anelito a danzare La Divina Commedia*, in «Hystrio», anno XXXIV, 1, 2021, pp. 54-55; ANDREA CAMPEGGIANI, *Les dances dans la Comédie*, in SILVIO ALOVISIO, EMANUELE DE LUCA, PAOLO DESOGUS, ANDREA FABIANO, DONATO PIROVANO (a cura di), *Dante et les arts performatifs. Corps dansants, théâtre et cinema*, Milano/Udine, Mimesis, 2024, pp. 75-90; STEFANO TOMASSINI, *Sempre in piedi: Dante e la danza*, in LINA BOLZONI (a cura di), *La Commedia di Dante nello specchio delle immagini*, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, Treccani, Roma 2021, pp. 601-627; STEFANO TOMASSINI, *Sempre in piedi: Dante e la danza*, in ANTONIO ATTISANI, STEFANO TOMASSINI, *L'umanità mancata. Dante e la scena*, cit., pp. 47-87; FRANCESCO CIABATTONI, *Chapter four. Dancing in the Afterlife*, in FRANCESCO CIABATTONI, *Dante's performance. Music, Dance and Drama in the Commedia*, cit., pp. 137-188; FRANCESCO CIABATTONI, *Chapter five. Theatre, Dance, and Polyphony in the Paradiso*, in FRANCESCO CIABATTONI, *Dante's performance. Music, Dance and Drama in the Commedia*, cit., pp. 189-235; ROBERT POGUE HARRISON, *The Love That Moves*, in DANTE ALIGHIERI, *The Inferno*, edited by Patrick Hunt, Pasadena, Salem Press, 2012, pp. 43-44; MADISON U. SOWELL, *"Dentro a la danza de le quattro belle" (Purg. XXXI, 104). Dance in Dante's Commedia*, in «Bibliotheca Dantesca. Journal of Dante Studies», vol. I, 2018, p. 166-167.

that belong instead to the broad spectrum of contemporary dance. As the latter offers an extremely varied panorama in terms of style and forms, it will be observed how Dante enters the specific language of dance, innervating the way the staged gesture is processed and becoming a kinetic metaphor.

As a result, "saying/doing Dante" takes on a dialectical, at times provocatively antagonistic significance, as addressing the Florentine poet and his literary masterpiece means, once again, declaring one's view on the art of dance and one's purpose in practising it in a particular way.

For the different countries in which this examination has been conducted, an attempt has been made to privilege examples that have relevance to what has previously been discussed in the world of *Lecturae* and theatre. In this sense, thinking about the ways of access and confrontation with Dante, especially in the case of non-Italian artists, we want to highlight the organic and interconnected framework that binds the different European companies and artistic realities, especially thanks to the role of exchange and contamination constituted by the networks of festivals and residencies offered by the companies themselves, which allow and have allowed for the knowledge of works dedicated to Dante's text now no longer on the bill, and have given rise to unconventional filiations.

Dance and poetry have always been interconnected, as well recalled by the very function of the chorus in classical tragedy, par excellence the most complete artistic phenomenon marked by music, dance, and poetry, co-present and active in the transmission of the poetic message[6]. Once again, the time in which Dante lived is confirmed as a period rich in dance among the many

[6] See ERIC R. DODDS, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1951, pp. 28-63 [trad. it. *I Greci e l'irrazionale*, traduzione di Riccardo Di Donato, Milano, Sansoni, 2003]; LEONARD CHARLES FELDSTEIN, *Choros. The Orchestrating Self. Lamentation and Celebration*, New York, Fordham University Press, 1984; A. P. DAVID, *The Dance of the Muses. Choral Theory and Ancient Greek Poetics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006; KATHRYN BOSHER, *To Dance in the Orchestra: a Circular Argument*, in «Illinois Classical Studies», nn. 33-34, 2008-2009, pp. 1-24; JESÚS CARRUESCO, *La dansa a l'origen de la polis: textos e imatges*, in LICIA BUTTÀ, JESÚS CARRUESCO, FRANCESC MASSIP (a cura di), *Danses imaginades, danses relatades. Paradigmes iconogràfics del ball des de l'antiguitat clàssica fins a l'Edat Mitjana*, cit., pp. 9-20; ANASTASIA-ERASMIA PEPONI, *Theorizing the Chorus in Greece*, in JOSHUA BILLINGS, FELIX BUDELMANN, FIONA MACINTOSH (edited by), *Choruses, Ancient and Modern*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 115-134; DEBORAH TARN STEINER, *Choral Construction in Greek Culture: the Idea of Chorus in the Poetry, Art and Social Practice of the Archaic and Early Classical Period*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2021; PETER SLOTERDJIK, *Sphären I. Microsphärologie. Blasen*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1998 [trad. it. *Sfere I. Bolle*, traduzione di Gianluca Bonaiuti, Milano, Cortina, 2014]; ROBERTO FRATINI SERAFIDE, *Coropolitiche della modernità. Collettivi danzanti e comunità desideranti*, in «Danza e ricerca», a. XIII, n. 13, 2021, pp. 231-285; JANE C. DESMOND (edited by), *Meaning in motion: new cultural studies of dance*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1997; ELLEN W. GOELLNER, JACQUELINE SHEA MURPHY, *Bodies of the Text: Dance as Theory, Literature as Dance*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1995; EDWARD C. WARBURTON, *Of Meanings and Movements: Re-languaging Embodiment in Dance Phenomenology and Cognition*, in «Dance Research Journal», vol. 43, n. 2 Winter, 2011, pp. 65-84; MARY FLEISCHER, *Embodied Texts: Symbolist Playwright-dancer Collaborations*, Amsterdam/New York, Rodopi, 2007; JANET ADSHEAD-LANSDALE (Editor), *Dancing Texts: Intertextuality in Interpretation*, London, Dance Books, 2009; LAURA COLOMBO, STEFANO GENETTI (a cura di), *Figure e intersezioni: tra danza e letteratura*, con un saggio di J. Lotman inedito in Italia, Verona, Fiorini, 2010. See also the speech by ELENA CERVELLATI within the online *Dante Performatico*, entiteled *La "poesia delle braccia e delle gambe", ovvero dell'irriducibilità della danza* (from minute 1:01:06 to 1:33:53) as recorded in the YouTube channel of Accademia Nazionale di Danza in Rome: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-GPO485stg&ab_channel=AccademiaNazionalediDanza (last accessed 23/05/2025).

spectacular forms, and it is precisely in the various choreographic forms, from the most codified and noble to the most impetuous and popular, that the poetry of the *Comedy* develops metaphorical connections, traceable above all in the *cantica* of joy, *Paradiso*:

> In the mobile kingdom of Paradise, the inhabitants dance for all time. Indeed, movement and temporality distinguish Paradise from other realms of afterlife. By contrast, residents of Inferno (Hell), the first book of Commedia, enact grotesque gesticulations or stunted inertia, signifying their eternal punishments. Purgatorio (Purgatory), the second book, exudes a penitentiary ethos in which its penitents "do time." Situated along linear temporal sequences, the collective choreography of Purgatorio's penitents is (as I have analyzed elsewhere) goal driven, designed to purge sins and repair social bonds. In Paradiso, eternal life and eschaton (the end of the world) converge in a Christian afterlife; the elect enjoy everlasting bliss following the Last Judgement.[7]

This is the *cantica* that tends to be described as arduous and difficult to understand, but also the one in which Dante offers the boldest metaphors and allows himself the most neologisms while taking his cue from a vivid reality, full of life, and spectacular forms, rich in symbolism and communal character. By thus reworking the real and comparing it with the eternal, Dante succeeds in expressing the ineffable through the embodiment of divine grace. In his ultimate vision of God and the kingdom of heaven, the poet points to poetry as embodied memory, declaring that his vision was made possible precisely because it was mortal, sensual, limited and, therefore, shareable in terms of reality with every human being, making his testimony universal and experiential.

As Kathryn Dickason points out, a metaphor particularly used by Dante to describe the motion and joy connoting the souls of *Paradiso* is that of the *carola*, a dance popular in the medieval period, which involves a group of people moving clockwise while holding hands, accompanied by music and poetic forms codified in canto[8]. In this way, the poet can associate the motion that governs the stars forming the heavens of *Paradiso* with the cyclical image of prayer, of life codified by the *horae*, by living in community according to a shared rhythm: «caroling, like clockwork, integrated technological, theological, and teleological ways of knowing»[9]. Certain specific types of dance, mentioned by Dante and used as metaphors for souls and the context that governs *Paradiso*, are immediately associated with the perichoresis of the Trinity, in its constant mobility and interpenetration, transcendent immanence[10].

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[7] KATHRYN DICKASON, *Caroling Like Clockwork: Technologies of the Medieval Dancing Body in Dante's Paradiso*, in «Dance Chronicle», vol. XLI, n. 3, 2018, pp. 303-334, quotation at p.305. See also KATHRYN DICKASON, *Discipline and Redemption. The Dance of Penitence in Dante's Purgatorio*, in «Dante e l'arte», vol. 4, 2017, pp. 67-100; KATHRYN DICKASON, *Ringleaders of Redemption. How Medieval Dance Became Sacred*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2020.
[8] ROBERT MULLALLY, *The Carole: A Study of a Medieval Dance*, Burlington, Ashgate, 2011; JEAN-MICHEL GUILCHER, *Rondes, branles, caroles: Le Chant dans la danse*, Brest, Universite de Bretagne Occidentale, 2003.
[9] KATHRYN DICKASON, *Caroling Like Clockwork: Technologies of the Medieval Dancing Body in Dante's Paradiso*, cit. p. 311.
[10] Here, in addition to KATHRYN DICKASON's aforementioned essay, *Discipline and Redemption. The Dance of Penitence in Dante's Purgatorio*, cit, reference is made to the other essays in the journal «Dante e l'arte», n. 4: LICIA BUTTÀ, *Introduzione: Dante e il "visibile danzare"*, in «Dante e l'arte», n. 4, 2017, pp. 5-8; FRANCESCO CIABATTONI, *Coreografie dantesche*, in «Dante e l'arte», n. 4, 2017, pp. 11-30; CLAUDIA CIERI VIA, *La danza come movimento ed espressione nelle*

Unusual, but particularly felicitous, is also the choreutic metaphor of jumping that Dante uses in his poem. For if the dance that connotes the blissful souls and their mode of being around the "motionless engine" is that of the *carola*, the metaphor of jump/jumping/*saltarello* is used to express the difficulty the human encounters in approaching the divine. The most sensual and popular form of dance, in which the saltarello is codified, in its simplicity offers Dante a singular *imago agentis* to highlight not only the vitalistic nature of the act of faith and poetic creation but also the difficulty of being able to give a linear and clear explanation for what is being experienced. So, literally, he and his poem make a leap, operating a figurative nexus within a logical concatenation that would otherwise find no solution, blurring the binary distinctions between men and women, human and divine, truth and fiction, as in a performance: «rather than devise negative theological language (apophasis, or saying what God is not), the poet resorts to a saltatory trope that conveys vertical motion (toward Paradise) and unmediated contemplation»[11]. The presence of dance in Dante's poem gives the discipline of dance a particularly central role in the practice of rereading it through its elements. Like music, painting and sculpture (but not forgetting also the arts of crafts and trades), dance is implicated in Dante's imagery as a material figuration of the immaterial divine presence.

As has already been pointed out above, the nineteenth century includes some danced performances inspired by or even dedicated to Dante, but usually only certain episodes of the *Comedy* are developed within a ballet, or the vicissitudes of individual characters. During the twentieth century, however, as is the case with theatre, it is the entire *Comedy* that arouses the interest of choreographers, becoming the object of study and representation in its complex entirety. Increasingly evident is the trajectory that taking off from ballets that have as their subject single episodes, or characters from Dante (such as Michail Fokin's *Francesca da Rimini* in 1915 to the music of Pyotr Il'ič Tchaikovsky, or David Lichine's *Francesca da Rimini of* 1937) precisely in the years when the tragedy written by D'Annunzio in Zandonai's adaptation was *in vogue*, leads to performances that amplify the range of interest in Dante, his personal life and works, without neglecting the influence exerted by certain illustrated editions of the *Comedy* created by William Blake, John Flaxman and Salvador Dalì, which offer various "bodies" to the poetic imagery of dance[12]. Such is the case with

immagini poetiche della Commedia di Dante, in «Dante e l'arte», n. 4, 2017, pp. 31-66; LUDMILA ACONE, *Danser la Rédemption*, in «Dante e l'arte», n. 4, 2017, pp. 101-124; PAOLO DE VENTURA, *"Donne mi parver, non da ballo sciolte": appunti su danza e pericoresi tra gli spiriti sapienti*, in «Dante e l'arte», n. 4, 2017, pp. 125-136.

[11] KATHRYN DICKASON, *Caroling Like Clockwork: Technologies of the Medieval Dancing Body in Dante's Paradiso*, cit., p. 322. See also MICHAEL SELLS, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994; WILLIAM FRANKE, *The Place of Proper Names in the Topographies of Paradiso*, in «Speculum», vol. 87, n. 4, 2010, pp. 1089-1124; TEODOLINDA BAROLINI, *The Sacred Poem is forced to Jump: Closure and the Poetics of Enjambments*, in TEODOLINDA BAROLINI, *The Undivine Comedy. Detheologizing Dante*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1992, pp. 218-256.

[12] See ROBERTO SERAFIDE FRATINI, *Quasi una catabasi. La Divina Commedia nella danza degli ultimi 200 anni. Parte I*, cit., pp. 141-147; STEFANO TOMASSINI, *Sempre in piedi: Dante e la danza*, in ANTONIO ATTISANI, STEFANO TOMASSINI, *L'umanità mancata. Dante in scena*, cit., pp. 57-63.

the ballet *Dante Sonata (d'après une lecture de Dante)* by Frederick Ashton to music by Franz List in 1940. Beginning already to open up to the specifics of modern dance, leaving the dancers with hair down and sometimes even barefoot[13], he staged a personal reworking of the salvific and vitalistic themes of Dante's canticles as opposed to the contingencies that emerged after World War I and the disquiet given by Nazi Germany's aggression of Poland[14]: «The ballet had a therapeutic effect on audiences, although much of its power evaporated after the war»[15]. Dividing the cast into two groups, the *Children of Darkness* and the *Children of Light*, the main idea, according to Jane E. Everson, is to rework the opposition of Good and Evil that runs through Dante's *Comedy* by presenting a few main characters with whom to evolve the narrative and identify episodes in the text.

After World War II and the development of performing arts such as happenings, body art, and paint art, along with post-modern dance, Pina Bausch's *Tanztheater*[16], Robert Wilson's image theatre, and Jan Fabre's physical theatre, the subsequent forms of artist dance materialized between the United States and Europe mark a universe pervaded by multiple constellations in contact. Within these forms there is no shortage of Dantean projects, sometimes sudden lightnings, at others the result of contact and exchange between artists and artistic projects[17].

At a time when the body is placed at the centre of these new styles, the focus is on quite unusual qualities of movement, of relationship with space and time, also intercepting the technological advances of video, motion capture, archiving and artificial intelligence, to conceive choreographies and performances that are no longer simply narrative and didactic, but true art objects in their own right, capable of investigating even the most microscopic and intangible components that govern movement and the vibration generated by it. The transmission of contemporary dance, of its specific training and the vocabulary related to it, becomes a major object of interest for choreographers and theorists of the discipline, who recognize the points of contact with the centuries-old model given by classical dance, but also want to sift through new possibilities of movement, gestures and the search for them:

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[13] «He went back to his memories of Isadora Duncan and invented a free or 'modern' style in which the dancers went barefoot, the women's hair unbound», DAVID VAUGHAN, *Frederick Ashton and His Ballets*, London, Dance Books, 1977, p. 179 in STEFANO TOMASSINI, *Sempre in piedi: Dante e la danza*, in ANTONIO ATTISANI, STEFANO TOMASSINI, *L'umanità mancata. Dante in scena*, cit., p. 61.

[14] See JANE E. EVERSON, *From Dante to Dante Sonata*, in ANTONELLA BRAIDA, LUISA CALÈ (a cura di), *Dante on View. The Reception of Dante in the Visual and Performing Arts*, cit., pp. 53-64. See anche IDA ZICARI, *A writing that dictates the choreography: Dante Sonata by Frederick Ashton*, in «Studia musicologica», vol. 54, n. 4 dicembre, 2013, pp. 417-429; VICTORIA THOMS, *Modernity as Trauma and Frederick Ashton's Dante Sonata*, in «Modernism/modernity», n. 15, vol. 3, c. 4, 2019, DOI:10.26597/mod.0083.

[15] JULIE KAVANAGH, *Secret Muses. The Life of Frederick Ashton*, New York, Pantheon, 1996, p. 244.

[16] See ELENA RANDI, *Protagonisti della danza del XX secolo. Poetiche ed eventi scenici*, Roma, Carocci, 2014, pp. 205-236.

[17] See ROBERTO SERAFIDE FRATINI, *Quasi una catabasi. La Divina Commedia nella danza degli ultimi 200 anni. Parte I*, cit., pp.161-164.

la pratica di un *training* trasversale che prescinde dall'insegnamento di pose e vocaboli di movimento specifici ed è orientato alla predisposizione della presenza scenica del danzatore è ormai un dato ricorrente in molti danza-autori, dai quali è declinato in base a esigenze coreografiche personali […] Mentre le accademie di danza classica ripropongono agli allievi i pezzi del passato, assieme ai principi e alle forme costitutive del balletto, in questo caso la trasmissione si proietta esclusivamente nel presente e verso il futuro, a seconda della capacità di assimilazione dei singoli partecipanti ai corsi. La trasmissione del gesto, che presuppone quindi una relazione problematica con la tradizione coreutica, sembra avere come obiettivo il passaggio di un'esperienza del movimento e di una capacità di azione del corpo, che non riguarda più la costituzione di un repertorio tramandabile (soprattutto quando l'attività pedagogica e performativa si rivolge a non professionisti di differenti fasce d'età). […] La conoscenza che si trasmette non ha, perciò, nulla dell'oggettività noiosa dell'accumulazione di un sapere tecnico, ma è il riflesso e il frutto di un desiderio di comprensione e di condivisione di cui conserva i passi, elaborati anche grazie all'incontro con diverse pratiche più strettamente fisiche[18].

the practice of a transversal *training* that prescinds from the teaching of specific poses and movement vocabulary and is oriented toward the predisposition of the dancer's stage presence is now a recurring datum in many dance-authors, by whom it is declined according to personal choreographic needs [...] While ballet academies reintroduce to their students the pieces of the past, along with the constituent principles and forms of ballet, in this case the transmission is projected exclusively into the present and into the future, depending on the assimilation capacity of the individual participants in the courses. The transmission of the gesture, which thus presupposes a problematic relationship with the choreographic tradition, seems to have as its goal the passing on of an experience of movement and a capacity for body action, which no longer concerns the constitution of a repertoire that can be handed down (especially when the pedagogical and performance activity is aimed at non-professionals of different age groups). [...] The knowledge that is transmitted has, therefore, nothing of the tedious objectivity of the accumulation of technical knowledge, but is the reflection and fruit of a desire for understanding and sharing whose steps it preserves, elaborated also through encounters with different, more strictly physical practices.

Some significant examples that have marked a new way of approaching Dante's *Comedy* can first be found in the post-modern reworking offered by international choreographers, as in the case of Belgian Micha Van Hoecke (1944-2021)[19]. The syncretic nature of his style, in constant dialogue between East and West, features elements of neoclassical ballet, ethnic influences and *Tanztheater* motifs. In 1990 for example, he was commissioned by Ravenna Festival to perform the opera *Dante Symphony*: conceived with an encomiastic value towards the Romagna city that hosts the remains of the Poet, the performance proposes the reading of verses from the *Comedy* together with several group scenes and narrative modules that give more space to the individual Dante episodes with their characters. As Fratini reports:

[Van Hoecke] decide di assegnare a ogni cantica, senza troppi scrupoli critico-ideologici, una differente temperatura stilistica: dipingendo l'Inferno come un luogo "astratto", convulso, a volte acrobatico; il Purgatorio come un "Teatro-Danza" intessuto di gesti quotidiani; e il cielo dei beati come un elisio minimalista di gestualità estatica, intrisa di elementi orientali (come il lieve ondeggiare della testa dei danzatori che avanzano in meditazione, sulle voci bianche del *Magnificat*)[20].

[Van Hoecke] decides to assign to each cantica, without too many critical-ideological qualms, a different stylistic temperature: Painting Hell as an "abstract," convulsive, sometimes acrobatic place; Purgatory as a "Dance-Theater"

[18] ROSSELLA MAZZAGLIA, *La danza delle lucciole. Oralità e trasmissione nell'opera di Virgilio Sieni*, in «Danza e Ricerca», 2011, pp. 91-120, quotation at pp. 95-97. See also ALESSANDRO PONTREMOLI, *La danza. Storia, teoria, estetica nel Novecento*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2004; ROSSELLA MAZZAGLIA, *Sul filo delle sensazioni. Tracce contemporanee del corpo danzante*, in «Teatro e Storia», a. 27, n. XX, 2006, pp. 243-267.

[19] See ROBERTO SERAFIDE FRATINI, *Quasi una catabasi. La Divina Commedia nella danza degli ultimi 200 anni. Parte I*, cit., pp. 147-149; STEFANO TOMASSINI, *Sempre in piedi: Dante e la danza*, in ANTONIO ATTISANI, STEFANO TOMASSINI, *L'umanità mancata. Dante in scena*, cit., p. 63.

[20] ROBERTO SERAFIDE FRATINI, *Quasi una catabasi. La Divina Commedia nella danza degli ultimi 200 anni. Parte I*, cit., p. 149.

woven of everyday gestures; and the heaven of the blessed as a minimalist elysium of ecstatic gestures, imbued with oriental elements (such as the slight swaying of the heads of the dancers advancing in meditation, over the white voices of the *Magnificat*).

Particularly important for the Italian scene, as a promoter of dancers and young choreographers who have marked the history and scene of dance in the second half of the twentieth century, is Californian Carolyn Carlson (1943), a student of choreographer Alwin Nikolais, promoter of abstract, totalizing and multimedia dance-theatre. Carlson, who enriched her teaching by enhancing subjectivity and inner reality, conceiving dance as visual poetry, brought *Commedia* to the stage in 1993 at the Deutsche Schauspielhaus in Hamburg[21]. The search for a more universal approach to dance and its conception is confirmed in the U.S. dancer's choreographic adaptation of Dante, creating parallels with the message contained in the *Commedia.* In her performance, there is a literal display of volumes on the proscenium to also visually connect Dante's primal creative process to Carlson's choreographic one, which is also followed by the declamation of some tercets by the performers in different languages, forming dissonant multilingual choruses[22].

The U.S.-based choreographer's research investigates the Dante's personal and experiential journey of faith within his own work as a witness to his community. In his performance, *Zen* Buddhist inferences are associated with Dante's Christian principles, relating the contrapasso to the law of cause and effect of *karma*, developing, moreover, through luminous elements and staged globes the celestial perspective of the salvation of souls in *Paradise*: «De l'enfer, il disait apercevoir les étoiles; au purgatoire, il se glissait à leur hauteur avant de devenir lui-même un astre lorsqu'il parvient au paradis. À travers sa marche douloureuse, c'est l'espoir qui toujours le guide»[23]. Carlson's intention is to create a resonance of analogies between Dante's artistic operation and her own, in creating a universe through a work: «Je veux mettre en mouvement les âmes, rendre visible l'invisible à travers la performance. Et c'est précisément là qu'est la performance»[24].

The 1990s also focused on some site-specific adaptations that, unlike investigating a precise gestural code, focused on the dimension of the body in the broader space, attempting to investigate

[21] See ROBERTO SERAFIDE FRATINI, *Quasi una catabasi. La Divina Commedia nella danza degli ultimi 200 anni. Parte I*, cit., pp. 149-151; STEFANO TOMASSINI, *Sempre in piedi: Dante e la danza*, in ANTONIO ATTISANI, STEFANO TOMASSINI, *L'umanità mancata. Dante in scena*, cit., pp. 63-64. See also MICHELE OLIVIERI, *Intervista a Carolyn Carlson*, in «Sipario», 21 Gennaio 2018, available at: https://www.sipario.it/attualita/dal-mondo/item/11161-intervista-a-carolyn-carlson-a-cura-di-michele-olivieri.html (last accessed 23/05/2025).

[22] Excerpts from the show can be seen at the following link: https://www.numeridanse.tv/videotheque-danse/commedia?s (last accessed 23/05/2025).

[23] «From Hell, he said he could see the stars; in Purgatory, he rose to their height before becoming a star himself when he reached Paradise. Throughout his painful journey, it was hope that always guided him», RAPHAËL DE GUBERNATIS, *Divine Carlson*, in «Le Nouvel Observateur», April 1993, cit. in THIERRY DELCOURT, *Carolyn Carlson de l'intime à l'universel*, Paris, Actes Sud, 2015, pp. 197-198.

[24] «I want to move souls, to make the invisible visible through performance. And that is precisely what performance is», from Carolyn Carlson's interview with Rosita Boisseau in ROSITA BOISSEAU, *Panorama de la danse contemporaine. 90 chorégraphes*, Paris, Textuel, 2006, p. 88.

the experiential dimension of travel, of discovery, by providing for the dislocation of the audience in various places, within a Dante scene. For example, *Dante in the Elevator. Lindy's Divine Comedy. Ein Stück für 17 Personen und einen Paternoster* is a performance conceived by American Lindy Annis and performed in Berlin in 1991 within the Gebäude des Senators für Bau- und Wohnwesen in Fehrbelliner Platz[25]. The spectators, as well as the dancers, are protagonists of the scene as they have to move, mostly with ascending or descending motion in the cathedral of bureaucracy[26].

The second chapter of a trilogy based precisely on the study of this machinery as a theatrical device, at the centre of the dramaturgy is the mechanism of the *Paternoster*, a specific model of elevator widely used in public buildings in Berlin before the wall's fall. The mechanism that governs and moves the elevator involves the operation of double cabins that parade in parallel shafts, counterbalancing each other. There are no sliding doors accessing the cabins on the floors, so open compartments on the elevator shafts are the only way up or down. Declined as a Dantesque adaptation in the different floors that make up this mobile scene, it is a new opportunity given to medieval *mansions*: images, sequences and music are presented simultaneously inside and outside the elevators, focusing the audience's attention on this constant flow of individual scenes, linked into an indissoluble whole, ideally echoing the very idea of the episodic composition of the *Comedy:*

Die traditionell starre Gegenüberstellung von Zuschauerraum und Theaterbühne wird aufgelöst in der kontinuierlichen Umlaufschleife der auf- und abwärtsfahrenden Aufzugskabinen (Einzelbühnen). Die endlose Kabinenkette befördert Gegenstände, Akteure, Klänge und Musik auf- und abwärts, - durch alle Etagen am Zuschauer vorbei. Das Publikum hat die Möglichkeit die Geschoße zu wechseln und damit die Rezeptionsebene zu verändern[27].

The traditionally rigid juxtaposition of the auditorium and the theatre stage is dissolved in the continuous loop of the elevator cabins (individual stages) moving up and down. The endless chain of cabins transports objects, actors, sounds and music up and down, through all floors and past the audience. The audience has the opportunity to change floors and thus alter their level of perception.

Responding to the same ordering principle underlying the *Commedia*, in 1991 Brazilian artist Regina Miranda staged *The Divine Comedy* at the Museo de Arte Moderno in Rio de Janeiro[28]. The action involved one hundred and sixty-five performers divided into fifty-two fixed locations, determining which places in the museum were best suited to house and summon the three

[25] See ROBERTO SERAFIDE FRATINI, *Quasi una catabasi. La Divina Commedia nella danza degli ultimi 200 anni. Parte I*, cit., pp. 159-164; STEFANO TOMASSINI, *Sempre in piedi: Dante e la danza*, in ANTONIO ATTISANI, STEFANO TOMASSINI, *L'umanità mancata. Dante in scena*, cit., pp. 64-67.

[26] See PAUL M. FARBER (curated by), *The Wall in Our Heads: American artists and the Berlin Wall*, catalogue of the Goethe-Institut Washington DC, 25/10-25/10/2014), Washington, 2015; ROBRECHT VANDERBEEKEN, CHRISTEL STALPAERT, BORIS DEBACKERE, DAVID DEPESTEL (edited by), *Bastard or Playmate? Adapting theatre, mutating media and the contemporary performing arts*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2015.

[27] See the website of artist Lindy Annis: http://lindyannis.net/portfolio-item/the-paternoster-triology/ (last accessed 23/05/2025).

[28] ROBERTO SERAFIDE FRATINI, *Quasi una catabasi. La Divina Commedia nella danza degli ultimi 200 anni. Parte I*, cit., pp. 159-164; STEFANO TOMASSINI, *Sempre in piedi: Dante e la danza*, in ANTONIO ATTISANI, STEFANO TOMASSINI, *L'umanità mancata. Dante in scena*, cit., pp. 64-67. Some photos can be found on the artist's official website: https://www.reginamiranda.com/#/ciareginamiranda/ (last accessed 23/05/2025).

otherworldly realms: in the places that tend to be dark and inaccessible to the public, there is *Inferno* with performers executing short acted sequences in repetition; at street level, the open-air space of the gardens offers the human refreshment of *Purgatorio*, while the rooms on the upper floors of the exhibition house the stations of *Paradiso*. In this case, the audience is less constrained and can move at will, encountering Dantean characters and episodes reinterpreted critically in regard to capitalism. Reflecting comparatively on the differences inherent in the two performances, Fratini notes that Annis' highlights the fleeting and ephemeral nature of the performance, never equal to itself because it is singular in its form, within a polytopic space, while Miranda's involves a constant repetition of frames of the action, reminiscent in its dramaturgy of medieval *mansiones* rather than in its dislocation in space:

Se Annis intende decostruire in chiave metafisica l'idea di burocrazia, il lavoro di Miranda segna un precedente interessante in materia di associazioni della *Commedia* alla nozione di museo, catalogo, campionario, repertorio, collezione, *Wunderkammer*, caravanserraglio, grande magazzino, quando non deposito oggetti smarriti della memoria culturale e della patologia sociale[29].

If Annis intends to deconstruct the idea of bureaucracy in a metaphysical key, Miranda's work marks an interesting precedent regarding the associations of the *Comedy* with the notion of museum, catalogue, sampler, repertory, collection, *Wunderkammer*, caravanserai, department store, when not lost property storage of cultural memory and social pathology.

[29] ROBERTO SERAFIDE FRATINI, *Quasi una catabasi. La Divina Commedia nella danza degli ultimi 200 anni. Parte I*, cit., p. 160.

5.1.2. The Tetralogy of ICK Amsterdam

A wealth of examples and ways of staging Dante in dance emerge from these few pages. An early turning point with respect to this choreographic practice of Dante adaptation is found in the series of performances composed by the company ICK Amsterdam (Internationaal Choreografisch Kunstencentrum), directed by Emio Greco and Peter Scholten[30]. To best explore the kind of work done by the ICK company, the present study agrees with scholar Roberto Serafide Fratini's lucid two-part published analysis of contemporary choreographic Dantean reception[31], which offers a very thorough insight into the work of Greco and Scholten[32]. Fratini writes what, to date, is the seminal study of Dantean reception in dance, and our work builds on his to offer new developments on the work already presented and expand the analysis to new performances and companies. Therefore, we agree with Fratini in conceiving of ICK Amsterdam's work on Dante and his Works as a turning point for all performance disciplines, as these works are to be ascribed not only to dance: «[The] trilogy on the *Comedy* by Emio Greco and Pieter C. Scholten marks, between 2008 and 2011, a real *turning point* in the history of Dante productions»[33].

Precisely 2008 and the LXII Festival of Avignon, directed that year by Castellucci and Dréville, are considered fundamental for the relationship of dance and theatre with the representation of Dante. On that occasion, in fact, Greco and Scholten presented the first two canticles of the *Comedy*

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[30] See SCOTT DELAHUNTA (ed.), *(Capturing intention). Documentation, analysis and notation research based on the work of Emio Greco/PC*, with DVD and DVD Rom, Amsterdam, Emio Greco|PC and AHK/Lectoraat, 2007; ADA D'ADAMO, *Emio Greco|PC*, Palermo, L'Epos, 2004; CARLOTTA PLEBS, *Quando il corpo è curioso: la danza di Emio Greco:PC*, Catania, Akkuaria, 2006; SCOTT DELAHUNTA, BERTHA BERMÙDEZ, entry *Emio Greco | Pieter C. Scholten*, in BUTTERWORTH JO, SANDERS LORNA (a cura di), *Fifty Contemporay Choreographers*, London, Routledge, 2021, pp. 108-116; FRANCESCA MAGNINI, *Inspiration Emio Greco-Pieter C. Scholten. The multiplicity of dance. Dissemination of knowledge. Contamination of cultures. Food for thought*, Roma, Artegrafica PLS, 2015; FRANCESCA MAGNINI, *Pre-Choreographic Elements: alla sorgente delle energie corporee e dei materiali di movimento*, in VITO DI BERNARDI, LETIZIA GIOIA MONDA (a cura di), *Immaginare la danza. Corpi e visioni nell'era digitale*, Atti del convegno internazionale (Università Sapienza di Roma, 3-4 dicembre 2015), Bologna, Piretti, 2018, pp. 131-142; FRANCESCA PEDRONI (a cura di), *Dialogo, Emio Greco e Virgilio Sieni*, Pontedera, Artout-Maschietto Editore, 2009; FRANCESCA MAGNINI, *Trame di tecniche e stili nelle tradizioni della danza contemporanea. Note su studi e ricerche*, in «Danza e Ricerca», a. IV, n. 3, 2012, pp. 1-34; FRANCESCA MAGNINI, *Sistemi di trasmissione delle conoscenze nella danza contemporanea: la relazione coreografo-danzatore*, in «Teatro e Storia», n.s. 34, 2013, pp. 325-357.

[31] Reference is made to the essay, divided into two installments, in the journal «Dante e l'arte», ROBERTO SERAFIDE FRATINI, *Quasi una catabasi. La Divina Commedia nella danza degli ultimi 200 anni. Parte I*, cit.; ROBERTO SERAFIDE FRATINI, *Quasi una catabasi. La Divina Commedia nella danza degli ultimi 200 anni. Parte II*, cit.

[32] See ROBERTO SERAFIDE FRATINI, *Quasi una catabasi. La Divina Commedia nella danza degli ultimi 200 anni. Parte I*, cit., pp. 164-178. See also the later but more concise study by STEFANO TOMASSINI, *Sempre in piedi: Dante e la danza*, in ANTONIO ATTISANI, STEFANO TOMASSINI, *L'umanità mancata. Dante in scena*, cit., pp. 75-78.

[33] «[La] trilogia sulla *Commedia* di Emio Greco e Pieter C. Scholten segna, tra il 2008 e il 2011, un vero *turning point* nella storia degli allestimenti danteschi», ROBERTO SERAFIDE FRATINI, *Almost a Catabasis. The Divine Comedy in the Dance of the Last 200 Years. Part I*, cit., p. 165.

under the titles *Hell* and *[purgatorio]Popopera*[34], later merged and condensed into *La Commedia* (2011). As Fratini recalls, the genesis of this great work is to be found, but as Greco and Scholten have stated[35], both together and separately in some decisive encounters for the artistic experience of both[36].

The key to understanding their decades-long approach to Dantean *Commedia* lies in Greco's apprenticeship with the physical theatre of Jan Fabre (1958)[37], with whom he remained from 1992 until 1996. He then spent a few years with Japanese artist Saburo Teshigawara and finally founded a company with Dutch director Peter C. Scholten in Amsterdam. In 2005 Fabre, associate artist of the Avignon Festival, invited Greco and Scholten to perform the company's first Dantean outcome, *Double Point: Hell*[38] (*Figures 198-199*):

> Il movimento o anche il non-movimento è una delle componenti principali del teatro corporeo, così come l'incedere stilizzato, coordinato, non spontaneo. Si tratta di un teatro artificiale in cui il regista non insiste nel voler trascinare lo spettatore nelle sensazioni dell'attore, ma gli concede tutto lo spazio necessario per una riflessione personale capace di condurlo a sensazioni affatto individuali. I movimenti dell'attore nel teatro "formalistico" e "corporeo" non sono obbligati a esprimere un sentimento specifico. Essi conducono piuttosto a un viaggio immaginario della mente, alla creazione di immagini ricche di significati simbolici. L'azione rimpiazza il pensiero e in tal modo diventa la mente dell'attore. Il rapporto del cronotopo teatrale viene ridefinito dalla peculiare posizione del corpo, creando nuovi codici di comunicazione e di influenza sia con il pubblico sia con la scena stessa[39].

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[34] Once again, reference is made to the Avignon Festival website, which contains all theatrical and photographic materials. Also useful is viewing the official website of the company ICK Amsterdam.

[35] In August 2022, it was possible to conduct a study and research residency at the ICK's Amsterdam headquarters. Having been able to access the company's archives and to view otherwise unrecoverable materials, as well as conduct interviews with the directors and dancers, it was possible to give a spatial and temporal collocation to certain moments of conception and confrontation between artists that formed the basis and prerequisites for the construction of these Dante performances. Thanks again to the ICK company, in all its components, for the kindness and courtesy with which they allowed the work to take place.

[36] For the poetics of Scholten and Greco, we refer to the writings of Francesca Magnini again.

[37] See JAN FABRE, *Teatro*, con la traduzione di Franco Paris, Milano, Ubulibri, 2010; JAN FABRE, *Teatro I*, Spoleto, Editoria & Spettacolo, 2019; JAN FABRE, *Teatro II*, introduzione di Anna Bandettini Spoleto, Editoria & Spettacolo, 2024. Inoltre: GERMANO CELANT (a cura di), *Jan Fabre. Arti & Insetti & Teatri*, Genova, Costa & Nolan, 1994; JAN FABRE, LUK VAN DEN DRIES, *Dall'azione alla recitazione. Linee guida per il performer del XXI secolo*, con i contributi di Mikhail Baryshnikov, Anna Benedetti, Richard Schechner, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2023; JAN FABRE, *Stigmata: actions & performances 1976-2013*, Milano, Skira, 2014; STEFAN HERTMANS, *L'Ange de la métamorphose. Sur l'OEuvre de Jan Fabre*, Paris, L'Arche, 2003 [ed or. STEFAN HERTMANS, *Engel van de metamorfose*, Amsterdam, J. M. Meulenhoff, 2002]; EMIL HRVATIN, *Ripetizione, Follia, Disciplina. L'opera teatrale di Jan Fabre*, Torino, Infinito Ltd, 2001 [ed. or. EMIL HRVATIN, *Ponavljanje, Norost, Disciplina: celostna umetnina Fabre*, Ljubljana, Moderna galerija Ljubljana, 1993]; LUK VAN DEN DRIES, *Corpus Jan Fabre. Annotazioni su un processo di creazione*, Milano, Ubulibri, 2008 [ed. or. LUK VAN DEN DRIES, *Corpus Jan Fabre. Observaties van een creatieproces*, Gent, Imschoot uitgevers, 2004]; ROBERTO GIAMBRONE, *Jan Fabre: morte e rinascita del teatro*, in «Danza e Ricerca», a. IV, n. 3, 2012, pp. 169-180; GIUSEPPE BURIGHEL, *Dal teatro di Jan Fabre. Attitudini performative del corpo sulla scena: quali forme di presenza, e quali mimesi?*, in «Mimesis Journal», a. 2, n. 2, 2013, pp. 134-143; HANS-THIES LEHMANN, *When rage coagulate sinto form… On Fabre's "Aesthetics of Poison"*, in «Theaterschrift», n. 3, 1993, pp. 90-103 [trad. it. HANS-THIES LEHMANN, *Quando la collera si coagula in forma… Sull'"estetica del veleno" di Jan Fabre*, traduzione a cura di Michela Giovannelli, in «Biblioteca Teatrale», nn. 74-76, 2005, pp. 105-110]. See also JAN FABRE, ROBERTO RIZZENTE, *Fabre: Dante, dalla provincia un artista in lotta per conquistare la Bellezza*, in «Hystrio», a.XXXIV, n. 1 GENNAIO-MARZO, 2021, pp. 44-45.

[38] A docu-film MAITE BERMUDEZ, *Imagined Hell*, Las negras Productions, 2008 (45 min) is also made about the performance.

[39] ELINA DARAKLITSA, *Il risveglio dei sensi nel corpo dell'attore. Uno sguardo al teatro fisico della Grecia contemporanea*, in «Itinera», n. 13, 2017, pp. 198-212, quotation at p. 201.

Movement or even non-movement is one of the main components of body theatre, as is the stylized, coordinated, non-spontaneous gait. It is an artificial theatre in which the director does not insist on dragging the spectator into the actor's sensations but gives him/her all the space he/she needs for personal reflection capable of leading him/her to sensations that are wholly individual. The actor's movements in "formalistic" and "corporeal" theatre are not obliged to express a specific feeling. Rather, they lead to an imaginary journey of the mind, to the creation of images rich in symbolic meanings. Action replaces thought and, in this way, becomes the actor's mind. The relationship of the theatrical chronotype is redefined by the peculiar position of the body, creating new codes of communication and influence with both the audience and the stage itself.

The underlying concept of the entire exhibition conceived by Fabre in Avignon is to transcend the imposed limit and to delve into what connotes the artist's vision, finding new forms and new horizons to confront art itself and poetry making:

Nous avons convié à ce festival de nombreux poètes de la scène. Ils interrogent, à travers leurs créations, notre qualité d'être humain dans sa dimension spirituelle et animale. Ces artistes interpellent la relation que nous entretenons avec notre corps, nos rêves et nos fantasmes, notre rapport à la beauté mais aussi à la violence qui parfois cohabitent en nous, notre rapport à la science, à nos limites et à la loi, notre besoin de croire et d'aimer. Ils nous entraînent à penser notre humanité d'aujourd'hui et imaginer celle de demain. En sondant leur intimité, ils affirment la possibilité de trouver quelque chose qui s'apparenterait à l'universel ou au sacré pour, peut-être, réenchanter le monde. En quête d'utopies, ces poètes recherchent aussi de nouvelles formes théâtrales pour transcender leur paysage intérieur, leur vision du monde et les partager dans l'espace et le temps de la représentation. Le corps et le verbe sont les matériaux premiers de ces artistes de théâtre et de danse qui conçoivent souvent leur création de façon globale et nourrissent leur langage d'autres formes d'arts - cinéma, arts plastiques, musique, performances - effaçant parfois la frontière entre les genres[40].

We have invited a number of performing poets to take part in this festival. Through their creations, they question our quality as human beings in both its spiritual and animal dimensions. These artists question the relationship we have with our bodies, our dreams and fantasies, our relationship with beauty but also with the violence that sometimes coexists within us, our relationship with science, our limits and the law, our need to believe and to love. They encourage us to think about our humanity today and imagine the humanity of tomorrow. By probing their intimacy, they assert the possibility of finding something akin to the universal or the sacred, to perhaps re-enchant the world. In search of utopias, these poets are also looking for new theatrical forms to transcend their inner landscape and their vision of the world, and to share them in the space and time of performance. The body and the spoken word are the primary materials of these theatre and dance artists, who often conceive of their creations in a holistic way and feed their language with other art forms - cinema, visual arts, music, performance - sometimes blurring the boundaries between genres.

The fact that we are interested in poetic making, in an artistic vision that can transcend even what had been taken for normal up to that present moment, leads one to think mainly of Fabre's subversive and impactful art, which profoundly marked the era investigated in our work. One need only think of concepts such as those of the artist «Guerrier de la beauté»[41], or of his techniques of spectacle construction based on extreme formalism, on the reiteration of abstract gesture, on working tirelessly on the limit inherent in artistic expression and its own declination of ethically acceptable. Through episodes of violence carried out towards oneself and others on stage, thus declining these specificities directly on the body of the artist on stage, Fabre experiments with the physical limit and its overcoming by acquiring a new dimension of body-technique:

[40] HORTENSE ARCHAMBAULT, VINCENT BAUDRILLER, Note dei Direttori nel programma del 59° Festival di Avignone 2005, material available online, p. 5.
[41] See JAN FABRE, *Le Guerrier de la beauté*, Paris, L'Arche, 1994.

L'arte della performance è l'arte del superamento dei confini tra realtà e finzione, attraverso le realtà dure del corpo, come il sangue, gli escrementi, il vomito, il dolore, le ferite o il vero pericolo mortale[42].

Performance art is the art of crossing the boundaries between reality and fiction, through the hard realities of the body, such as blood, excrement, vomit, pain, wounds or true mortal danger.

La disciplina imposta al corpo è un nodo importante nell'opera di Fabre. Può essere compresa partendo dall'analisi del potere di Foucault. […] Il potere ha tutto l'interesse a rendere il corpo il più produttivo possibile ed esercita quindi un effetto strumentalizzante. Trasforma i corpi in strumenti, i quali a loro volta possono incarnare il potere[43].

The discipline imposed on the body is an important point in Fabre's work. It can be understood by starting from Foucault's analysis of power. [...] Power has every interest in making the body as productive as possible and thus exerts an instrumentalizing effect. It turns bodies into instruments, which in turn can embody power.

His is a physical theatre, complete in its being simultaneously art, performance, theatre, music and dance. It is a complex art form, associated not surprisingly with that of German artist Pina Bausch, or Castellucci's iconoclastic post-modern theatre[44]. Its exercise of control over the uncontrollable, with its own violence and unpredictability, aims to shake the audience's stagnant calm, its perception of "safety", creating performances that are at times brutal, marked by the exposure of bodily fluids, the presence of extreme symbolism and the setting in motion of strong psychological repercussions:

Nel corso dello spettacolo si alternano una serie di scene nelle quali l'escalation della violenza raggiunge un climax molto simile a una raffica di adrenalina. Non c'è azione: si tratta di una concatenazione di atti violenti che necessitano di essere espressi in un corpo a corpo. […] assomiglia a una forma di *art brut*. Nulla è dissimulato o rassicurante. L'opera è ribelle, polemica e va controtendenza. Il teatro come arte della rappresentazione volge totalmente al ridicolo. Fabre vuole denudarlo e ricominciare da zero[45].

Throughout the course of the play, there are a series of scenes in which the escalation of violence reaches a climax, much like a burst of adrenaline. There is no action: it is a concatenation of violent acts that must be expressed in a melee. [...] it resembles a form of *art brut*. Nothing is disguised or reassuring. The work is rebellious, polemical and goes against the trend. Theatre as the art of representation turns totally ridiculous. Fabre wants to denude it and start from scratch.

As Hans-Thies Lehmann summarizes, his theatre approaches the complex feeling of the still lifes of the Baroque age, where the co-presence of ephemeral and perfect beauty referring to the sphere of *vanitas vanitatum* is offered to the eye of the admiring observer along with its counterbalance of putridity and *memento mori.* The challenge, in Fabre's shows and works, is to understand the beneficial operation of the *pharmacon* despite the acrid taste of poison:

Un teatro di morte, che riporta alla mente il fatto che fu la mela avvelenata dal peccato originale a portare la mortalità all'uomo insieme alla coscienza. […] L'aggressione realmente produttiva, il veleno della privazione di significato, si devono cercare non tanto nei temi e nei motivi singoli, quanto nella formalizzazione stessa. Nel teatro di Fabre, l'ordine totale esclude tenacemente ogni tipo di significato. È vero, ci sono segni, nomi, riferimenti, insinuazioni (in effetti ce n'è una quantità paurosa che confonde), ma essi non permettono che li si accosti per produrre un qualsiasi tipo di significato.

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[42] LUK VAN DEN DRIES, *Corpus Jan Fabre*, cit. p. 282.
[43] Ivi, p. 24.
[44] See LUK VAN DEN DRIES, TIMMY DE LAET, SIMON SHEPHERD (edited by), *The Great European Stage Directors: Bausch, Castellucci, Fabre*, New York, Bloomsbury, 2021.
[45] LUK VAN DEN DRIES, *Théâtre écrit avec un <k> est un matou flamand*, in JAN FABRE, *Théâtre écrit avec un <k> est un matou flamand*, Paris, L'Arche, 2009, pp. 8-9.

Dal momento che l'insieme è concentrato sul sistema e sulla struttura, questo teatro si presenta nei suoi propri elementi individuali, assurdi, concreti, e non lascia spazio organico che potrebbe nascondersi dietro le quinte[46].

A theatre of death, bringing to mind the fact that it was the apple poisoned by original sin that brought mortality to man along with consciousness. [...] The truly productive aggression, the poison of deprivation of meaning, must be sought not so much in the individual themes and motifs as in the formalization itself. In Fabre's theatre, total order tenaciously excludes all kinds of meaning. True, there are signs, names, references, insinuations (indeed, there is a frightening amount of them that is confusing), but they do not allow them to be brought together to produce any kind of meaning. Since the whole is focused on system and structure, this theatre presents itself in its own individual, absurd, concrete elements and leaves no organic space that might be hiding behind the scenes.

In 2005, the theatre festival he conceived for Avignon, connoted by the image on the cover *Searching for Utopia*[47], included several performances by his company, Troubleyn|Jan Fabre, the exhibition of some of his works, and the presence of Romeo Castellucci with Socìetas with parts of *Tragedia Endogonidia*, Emio Greco and Peter C. Scholten with prodromes of the later *La Commedia* in *Double Point Hell*, and finally William Forsythe and Marina Abramovich. Undoubtedly this was a unique edition that condensed contemporary dance, iconoclastic and post-dramatic theatre, and performing arts.

In this sense, it represented a model for the following edition in 2008, one of the most acclaimed, also dedicated to Dante's *Divine Comedy*. In particular, one of the shows re-staged by Fabre in 2005, cited by Emio Greco as an indispensable element for his future Dante operation, was *Je suis sang* [*I am blood*][48], a reprise of what he had already offered for the 2001 Festival (*Figure 200*).

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[46] HANS-THIES LEHMANN, *Quando la collera si coagula in forma… Sull'"estetica del veleno" di Jan Fabre*, cit., p. 108.

[47] This particular sculpture of Fabre depicts a huge, polished bronze tortoise ridden by a man holding its reins. It is part of the *Spiritual Guards* series of sculptures that was hosted at MuSe in Florence in 2016. Please refer to the museum's page for an overview of the works: https://musefirenze.it/en/exhibits/jan-fabre-spiritual-guards/ (last accessed 23/05/2025).

[48] «Especially for the Cour d'honneur at the Festival d'Avignon, Jan Fabre wrote a long dramatic poem on the theme of blood. It is a visionary text where, one day in the future, the human body will be liquid, fluid, made of blood only. When this metamorphosis occurs, the colour of the planet will change, it will become red, another way of life will begin. All the beliefs attached to blood, Christ's blood, bad blood etc. will disappear. The repertoire of essential feelings will be entirely different. Then, the Middle Ages will be over. Because humanity today has yet to undergo a revolution to tear it from the darkness of the Middle Ages. Voices in the night sketch images of Man in the past, the present and the future. They evoke the burden that is the body, which is prey to obsessions, fixations, suffering and illness. The body is the source of passions and, at the same time, social taboos that precisely relate to blood such as wounds, menstruation, stigmata; all "effusions of blood". The human condition has, over time preserved the same physical laws and the same fears. Man is addicted to blood, in all senses. The verses develop like mantras: an idea, repeated and slowly expanded. The voices express the desire to become solely blood. As if trying to ward off some evil, he puts the notion of flesh and bones to one side, so that they can change into some other form, free from pain and fault, into a liquid that penetrates matter. Human beings and animals occupy the space, the performance expands in the amplitude of the Cour. It is an intense production, bathed in a red shadow. "I am freeing myself from myself", says a voice in the last moments of the play. Has the human overcome good and evil? Is it now invulnerable? Jan Fabre wrote this fresco in French and in Latin. It seems to adopt the aesthetic of the Middle Ages, but in fact it explodes it in a prophetic language, a ritual action in electrified gesture and stage setting that is somewhere between heaven and earth. The forms and themes dear to this artist who is a poet, director, choreographer and visual artist resound in this show. For example, we can see traces of the choreographer of As Long As The World Needs a Warrior Soul, as well as the painter and the sculptor (who actually made a series of drawings in his own blood.) However, they are placed in this other dimension that demands a symbiosis with the architecture and the history of the palace in Avignon. It is a new step in the passion of the "warrior of beauty". Created especially for the stage

For Fabre, the particular conformation of the stage, located in the square of the Cour d'Honneur du Palais des Papes in Avignon, is a peculiar source of inspiration: the overlap between past and present, represented by the papal court, allows him to focus on the body and its grotesque conception, constructing with his own show (which features twenty-two actors, dancers and musicians) a living picture worthy of the greatest masters of Flemish painting because of the dark setting opposed to the vivid colours and naked bodies of the performers, a medieval reworking in a modern key:

> Once again we witness the uprising of grotesque bodies, this time literally in a historical setting. The production which was especially created for the festival of Avignon was custom-made for the Cour d'Honneur of the Palais des Papes, where the suffering of the heretics who were executed there is still palpable. The starting point for this performance is the medieval body. Fabre shows us the physical and mental wounds which we still carry with us since the Middle Ages. Guilt-ridden religious thinking contrasts shrilly with unfettered natural wisdom. In an attempt to break free from the physical limitations and the taboos (the title can also be read as 'je suis sans', 'I am bereft, without) the bodies have become completely liquid, have become blood, the body's fuel. The spectator is confronted with bloody, gruesome, ritualistic scenes of torture, menstruation, castration, exorcisms, orgies, etc. The apocalyptic and grotesque images are populated with brides in white dresses, surgeons, knights.... Fabre creates scenes that look as if they were taken from a painting by Brueghel or Hieronymus Bosch. The text, which sounds like a litany, is partly written in Latin and contains references to the works of the twelfth-century mystic, Hildegard von Bingen[49].

Fabre's *Je suis sang*, therefore, offers an inescapable element of reflection and suggestion not only for Greco and Scholten, but for many of the artists mentioned above: medieval culture and, in particular, Dante's *Comedy*, which constitutes an artistic *summa* of it, investigate and shape the antithetical pair formed by the extremes of *Inferno* and *Paradiso* (the Catholic expression of the universal opposition between Good and Evil), and become a particularly suggestive territory of exploration for the artistic context between 1990 and 2000. The works produced in these years leading up to the first Dantesque centenary of the New Millennium investigate the human soul through art, articulating their own poetics considering such fundamental questions as: who the artist really is, what art is for living, and what art is.

As Fratini points out, this need to confront «world-works»[50] is particularly urged in the «two decades preceding the cultural acceleration of reunified Berlin, when spectacular totalitarianism and authoritarian capitalism are still relatively minority philosophical hypotheses»[51], leading the dance world to confront actions that are less and less *danced* (i.e., impoverished of its previous formal

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in the Palais des Papes, *Je suis sang* (conte de fées médiéval) (I Am Blood, a Mediaeval Fairy Tale) will be performed exclusively in Avignon, four times only», Jan Fabre, *Je suis sang (I am Blood)*, 59° Festival d'Avignon Programme, online.

[49] See the show's fact sheet, with photo and video material, on the Troubleyn/Jan Fabre company's official website.

[50] «opere-mondo», see FRANCO MORETTI, *Opere mondo. Saggio sulla forma epica dal Faust a Cent'anni di solitudine*, Torino, Einaudi, 1994.

[51] «ventennio che precede l'accelerazione culturale della Berlino riunificata, quando totalitarismo spettacolare e capitalismo autoritario sono ancora ipotesi filosofiche relativamente minoritarie», ROBERTO SERAFIDE FRATINI, *Quasi una catabasi. La Divina Commedia nella danza degli ultimi 200 anni. Parte I*, cit., p. 163.

parameters of excellence) and less and less *dance* (i.e., increasingly difficult to distinguish from other disciplines):

Troppo spesso, quando si considera la stupefacente fecondità degli anni '80 in materia di nuove correnti, si tralascia di sottolineare che quella fioritura di congetture poetiche, tecniche e formati è in buona misura il prodotto convulso di un certo sospetto di "terminalità" dal retrogusto apocalittico; sospetto tout court che la danza debba fare i conti con se stessa; riformulare i suoi dilemmi poetici sub specie aeternatis; sistematizzare la sua storia; prepararsi a sopravvivere nel tempo liquido che viene; finanche rivendicare, fuori tempo massimo, una misteriosa leadership in materia di "universalità": eccellenti ragioni, tutte, per appellarsi in termini più o meno pertinenti all'autorità del maggior poema sacro di tutti i tempi. Non credo di esagerare affermando che parte della danza di fine secolo, sedotta e, almeno in parte, atterrita dall'ipotesi poetica di una dissoluzione accelerata della sua Storia, ma anche mossa da una erma determinazione a sussistere "con altri mezzi" di là da se stessa, cedesse quasi naturalmente alla tentazione di sdipanare, dispiegare, rappresentare, esorcizzare i suoi Aldilà vari ed eventuali. E che Dante fosse là per oggettivare e, in qualche caso, lenire lo stress di questa escatologia "minore" [52].

Too often, when considering the astonishing fecundity of the 1980s in the area of new currents, one neglects to point out that the flowering of poetic conjectures, techniques and formats is in good measure the convulsive product of a certain suspicion of "terminality" with an apocalyptic aftertaste; suspicion tout court that dance must come to terms with itself; reformulate its poetic dilemmas sub specie aeternatis; systematize its history; prepare to survive in the coming liquid time; even claim, out of time, a mysterious leadership in matters of "universality." Excellent reasons, all, for appealing in more or less relevant terms to the authority of the greatest sacred poem of all time. I do not think I am exaggerating when I say that part of the turn-of-the-century dance, seduced and, at least in part, appalled by the poetic hypothesis of an accelerated dissolution of its History, but also moved by a resolute determination to subsist "by other means" beyond itself, yielded almost naturally to the temptation to unravel, unfold, represent, exorcise its various and eventual Afterlives. And that Dante was there to objectify and, in some cases, soothe the stress of this "minor" eschatology.

During the aforementioned 2005 edition, Fabre also exhibited some of his own artworks, films, and some preparatory sketches of his shows in a solo exhibition at Maison Jean Vilar: singular is the re-presentation of the preponderant image of medieval swords, displayed upside down on the walls of Maison's central staircase, as if they were so many crucifixes[53]. The cross, as a symbol, and the sword, as an object of death, condense the hitherto described elements of Fabre's art into a single figure and are also particularly present in the figural imagery of Greco/Scholten's second Dantean performance, *[purgatory]Popopera* (*Figures 201-202-203-204*).

Considering the assumptions that germinate Dante's seed in ICK's productions, it is useful to construct a chronology leading from the first *Double Point: Hell* in 2005 to the mature, and in some respects conclusive, performance of *La Commedia* in 2011, tracing places and dates:

- 2005 *Double Points: Hell* (*Première*: Avignon Festival)
- 2006 *HELL* (*Première*: Festival Montpellier Dance, Montpellier)
- 2008 artistic residency at Cango - Centro Nazionale di Produzione Virgilio Sieni, (Florence, Italy)

[52] *Ibidem*.
[53] Again, please refer to the official website of the Avignon Festival, which shows some of the images, For intérieur - Exhibition by Jan Fabre.

- 2008 *HELL* (Avignon Festival)
- 2008 *[purgatory] Popopera* (Avignon Festival)
- 2008 *[purgatory] IN VIEW* (*Première*: Holland Festival, Amsterdam)
- 2010 *you PARA | DISO* (*Première*: Monaco Dance Forum, Monte Carlo)
- 2011 *La Commedia* (site specific) (*Première*: Hangar Bicocca, Milan)
- 2011 *The Comedy* (in theater*) (Première*: Torino Danza, Turin)

Further steps, post centennial 2015:

- 2017 *PARA|DISO Revisited* (De Meervaart, Amsterdam)
- 2021 *We Want It All* (LAC, Lugano)[54]

Referring again to Greco and Scholten's statement, the specification *Hell*, inserted after the title *Double Point* of the show staged in 2005, was not initially intended to refer to Dante's imagery, but more properly to give voice to an extended and complex concept of darkness, which the two artists had been working on since the initial conception of *Double Point* in 1998. It is an extended concept of double and shadow, which connotes being in the world: «the abyss of the soul not external, but internal to us. The instance was more about breaking taboos and creating something explicit, putting ourselves to work with garbage, with remains»[55]. From this first seed, from this idea of probing the darkness, from the subsequent dialogue with Fabre on these issues emerges the contact with Dante's First Canticle, which will be developed with the show *HELL*, first presented at the Montpellier Festival in 2006[56].

Along with the Dante shows, in line with the idea of all-round art, Greco and Scholten produce magazines for each show, in which they collect the elements that led to their creation or contributed in various ways to their collective imagination. Not surprisingly, a writing by Fabre finds space in *Risorgimento for Hell*, while the latest magazine entitled *you para|diso* features a writing by Castellucci[57].

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[54] We thank the ICK company for providing the writer with video recordings of some of the performances here. The recent *We want it all* was seen in Rome, in the RomaEuropa Festival, on September 9, 2022.

[55] «l'abisso dell'anima non esterno, ma interno a noi stessi. L'istanza era più quella di rompere i tabù e creare qualcosa di esplicito, metterci a lavorare con la spazzatura, con i resti». Again, we report what Scholten and Greco stated in the various conversations they had during their study and research residency at the ICK in August 2022.

[56] See DONATELLA CAPALDI*, Review: HELL ON THE BODY*. [*Hell*, choreography and direction by Emio Greco and Pieter C. Scholten. Premiere: Festival Montpellier Danse, 2006 (Montpellier, France, June 28, 2006). An Emio Greco | PC production (Premiere: Festival ImPulsTanz, Vienna, Austria, July 18, 2006), 100 min.], in «Dante: International Journal of Dante Alighieri Studies», vol. 3, 2006, pp. 189-191.

[57] See EMIO GRECO, PETER C. SCHOLTEN (edited by), *Risorgimento for Hell*, with contributions of Jan Fabre, Christian Néri, Laurent Goumarre, Stephen Greco, Irène Filiberti, Victor Bergen-Henegouwen, Amsterdam, Emio Greco | PC, 2006; EMIO GRECO, PETER C. SCHOLTEN (edited by), *Risorgimento for Purgatorio*, with contributions of Arnon Grunberg, Levi van Velux, Maki Ueda, Gérard Mayen, Johan Reyniers, Bart Boone, Pasquale Martini, René van Peer, Amsterdam, Emio

To enrich the holistic, synaesthetic experience of the performance, which aims to liberate the creative processes of dance completely, Greco and Scholten also made a series of scents, trying to condense "in a bottle" the effort, the intangibility of dance, focusing on those olfactory markers that distinguish the dancer's work: from the environment of the rehearsal, with the smell of the different bodies standing together for hours, to the dancer's body, to the sweat that crystallizes in the fibres of the fabrics used; first with *Extremalism*, together with Romano Ricci, and then with *Paradiso, l'essence de la dance*, with Maki Ueda.

The cut of Scholten and Greco's encounter with Dante is a highly personal journey of discovery of the resonances between the concepts of work, artist, poetics and vision. Fratini evaluates the operation of the ICK on par with a "meta-choreography"[58]. This definition highlights how traversing *the Comedy* and its multiple elements allows Greco and Scholten to work on Alighieri's text, but more importantly, on their own conception of the dance discipline, the methodology of learning, transmission, and the type of dance to be used. To fully understand their intentions, it seems necessary to take up here the seven points that Greco and Scholten published as a joint manifesto of their art in 1996, *Les sept nécessités*, which at the time merged Greco's research in dance and Scholten's trained directorial gaze into a theoretical *unicuum*:

1. **Il faut que je vous dise que mon corps est curieux de tout et moi: je suis mon corps**
I must tell you that my body is curious about everything and I: I am my body
2. **Il faut que je vous dise que je peux contrôler mon corps et en même temps jouer avec lui**
I must tell you that I can control my body and play with it at the same time
3. **Il faut que je vous dise que je ne suis pas seul**
I must tell you that I am not alone
4. **Il faut que je vous dise que mon corps m'échappe**
I must tell you that my body is slipping away from me
5. **Il faut que je vous dise qu'il faut que vous tourniez la tête**
I must tell you that you should turn your head
6. **Il faut que je vous dise que je peux multiplier mon corps**
I must tell you that I can duplicate my body
7. **Il faut que je vous dise que je vous abandonne et que je vous laisse ma statue**
I must tell you that I am leaving you and my statue is staying behind[59]

Greco | PC, 2008; EMIO GRECO, PETER C. SCHOLTEN (edited by), *you para|diso*, with contributions by Louis Andriessen, Govert Schilling, Jean Paul van Bendegem, Gus Van Sant, Kevin Rushby, Romeo Castellucci, Marcel Wanders, Franco Battiato, Amsterdam, Emio Greco | PC, 2010.

[58] ROBERTO SERAFIDE FRATINI, *Almost a Catabasis. The Divine Comedy in the Dance of the Last 200 Years. Part I*, cit., p. 164.

[59] ANTOON VAN DEN BRAEMBUSSCHE, *It's Life Jim, but Not as We Know It: A Philosophical Approach on Emio Greco|PC's Trilogy*, Amsterdam, Stichting Zwaanprodukties, 2001. The two versions of the text are the company's work, which wishes to account for its gaze in a linguistically representative and plural dimension at this stage. See also SARAH PINI, JOHN SUTTON, *Transmitting Passione: Emio Greco and the Ballet National de Marseille*, in KATHRINA FARRUGIA-KRIEL, JILL NUNES JENSEN (edited by), *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Ballet*, Oxford, Oxford Unversity Press, 2021, pp. 595-612. It also makes one reflect how recurrent the number seven is in the conception of the artistic manifestos of those years, think of the one already observed of the Ravenna-based company Teatro delle Albe.

The show *HELL* (2006) begins with the curtain open, and the dancers present on the stage. The feeling is of being watching a sequence of music videos, which in the early 2000s was typical of television channels such as MTV, in this case in a live version. The audience in the auditorium is still coming in and sitting down while the music is playing (the first is *We'll be together* by Sting, 1987). The dancers, dressed in black, follow one another alternately on the proscenium. One by one, when they are in the centre, framed by the bright beam of the bull's eye, ideally "on camera," in addition to dancing to a piece of music, they mimic in lip-sync the words of the song, as if each of them were the singer of the song, and that their personal video clip. The result is an intense compilation of very famous and iconic songs, particularly associated with the collective imagination, such as pop, rock, hip hop, and swing, danced according to different dance styles (*Figure 205*).

The energetic physical exuberance is suspended by complete darkness and the appearance of an arc of lights resembling that of a makeup station in the artists' dressing rooms: «a dressing room mirror and sarcastic synecdoche of the luminous, electric, thaumaturgic substance of a god increasingly secularized in the miracles of technology and increasingly identified with the leading eminence, the director of this show paroxysm»[60] (*Figure 206*). This motif, a veritable *Leitmotif* for this and subsequent Dantesque performances, stands alone at the back of the stage and is followed by the appearance of a milky projector, which is pointed at a silhouette crawling on the floor. The light from the projector begins to shift sideways, spotlighting a bare tree on the opposite side of the stage bottom, the only bare presence in Dante's dark forest. Accompanied by soft music reminiscent of an aseptic waiting room, all the dancers enter one by one, each wearing different clothes, carrying a lectern; many solitudes against a grazing light. A shadowy figure comes in and out through the luminous arch: to the roaring sound of applause, he enters back on stage, and then all goes dark, and the milky projector and empty stage return again.

Along with the reprise of sequences and themes already present in *Double Point: Hell*, the structure of *HELL* is based on isolation, repetition and returning, looping modules: catwalks, military gestures, poses and elements of classical statuary, making the diffraction between object and subject in the dancer's body constant. In addition, a shadowy character, covered by a black full-body suit even on his face, manifests himself and enters the stage at different times, first revealing himself, then drawing to himself one dancer at a time: «dance (a theme that was already dear to Pina Bausch) is the

[60] «specchio di camerino e sineddoche sarcastica della sostanza luminica, elettrica, taumaturgica di un dio sempre più secolarizzato nei miracoli della tecnologia e sempre più identificato con l'eminenza concertante, il regista di questo show del parossismo», ROBERTO SERAFIDE FRATINI, *Quasi una catabasi. La Divina Commedia nella danza degli ultimi 200 anni. Parte I*, cit., p. 169.

spectral and eschatological double, the *Doppelgänger* of life»[61], as Fratini writes. Instead, as the director of the Genomic Biology Laboratory Christian Néri, questioned about the human body and its inherent compositions by Greco and Scholten, points out, the *Inferno* is in each of us, is part of us, and as such is investigated within this particular performance according to the effects it has on the quality of movement of the human body:

> From birth till death, what can we do that is not in some way or other linked to the background of our "family flesh," imprinted in our memory, but perhaps also in our genes? [...] Hell lies within. Dante's voyage is a form of initiation in this respect, since it instructs us on the existential odds between what seems necessarily occur always, or never. A permanent friction of the predictable world of the flesh and the uncharted flames of the spirit. [...] Art does what biology science does not do, or does insufficiently, i.e. re-establishing an intuitive track by which we may recover our spiritual strength. Like writing uses reason to interrogate reason, dance uses the body to interrogate the body, its texture, its identity, its limitations and its drives. Dante's reflection lies in the body as an interface, between the inner and outer flesh, a "human quest at the border," an *avant-mouvement* preparation of the body. Could biological facts refer to that *avant-mouvement* preparation, confronting us with the polymorphic attributes of the living, systems of genes and other molecules, invisible messengers of our existence?[62]

The long apical moment of this dense performance, played on a fractured rhythmicity, braked and then resumed in accelerando, takes place on the notes of Ludwig van Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5 in C minor*, with the bodies of the dancers in intimate garments, in all their carnal prowess. The symphony is chosen because it gives voice to the fatality of fate that comes knocking at the door, nailing the listener into the present, making him or her feel in unison all the sensuality of that sound: in the case of music, the composite body of the orchestra is asked for total synchrony to be able to render the tension of each pause and attack; in the case of dance to this music, the many bodies are asked for a collective breath, an organic and precise whole, offering the audience's gaze a multiplied presence, unified in perfect synchrony and adherence to the same atmospheric magma[63]. The shadow of the "classic" in the music selected and in adapting the text of Dante is broken by the presence of rock guitars, which each dancer lays on the proscenium. During this time, Greco moves away from the group of dancers and begins to turn off, by unscrewing them, the bulbs of the arch, aided by Scholten who climbs onto the stage, thus destroying the fiction of the fourth wall.

As in a photographic negative, the last dance sequence is offered on the distorted notes from a rock guitar of Claude Debussy's *Claire de lune* (*Suite bergamasque, L. 51*, 1905): from the full light of the Symphony, it switches to a dark background, with a projector irradiating the bodies of the dancers from the left side with light, making their presences equally sinister, lunar, but connoted by an alienating note. On the last distortion, it all goes out. In this avowedly Dantean first performance,

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[61] «la danza (un tema che fu già caro a Pina Bausch) è il doppio spettrale ed escatologico, il *Doppelgänger* della vita», ROBERTO SERAFIDE FRATINI, *Quasi una catabasi. La Divina Commedia nella danza degli ultimi 200 anni. Parte I*, cit., p. 170.

[62] CHRISTIAN NÉRI, *Hell within?*, in EMIO GRECO, PETER C. SCHOLTEN (edited by), *Risorgimento for Hell*, cit., pp. 22-24, quotation at p. 23.

[63] See STEPHEN GRECO, *Fate for the Making*, in EMIO GRECO, PETER C. SCHOLTEN (edited by), *Risorgimento for Hell*, cit., pp. 3-5, reference p. 5.

there is the shadow of Samuel Beckett's theatre of the absurd, visually evoked by the bare tree of *Waiting for Godot*, by the shattering of every nexus and every expectation, constantly disregarded by external actions that crash into the dramaturgy. It is not the *Commedia* through dance that is being questioned but dance itself, as art and craft, which is portrayed as a Hell to be staged, placing at the centre the suffering body of the dancer, the repetitiveness of every gesture and the total adherence without the perspective that is necessitated by art (*Figure 207*).

In contrast, the show *Purgatorio* only apparently leaves this inquiry in the background and foregrounds the idea of the rock concert, in this case reflecting further on the broad concept of *musicality*. In the second magazine published by ICK, Gérard Mayen questions extensively the concepts of *musicality*, *danceality, vocality*, and *orchesality*, believing that, in the various theoretical transitions enacted in the twentieth century between choreographers and musicians (for example, he refers to Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, the singular relationship between Merce Cunningham and John Cage), in the contemporary, the link between music and dance needs to be redefined especially with regard to the notions of time and space, as both music and dance are autonomous in their development and require their actors to refine their relationship with the self (the instrument) and with others (other performers, place, audience, time) to succeed in acquiring a better quality of expression[64]:

> Our senses work in tandem. And in the sensory function there operates the original force of an imaginary projection that generates a speech act (and by extrapolation forms the basis of language). There is not a single perception that can be represented as passive and stripped of any reference to a system of representations. [...] the body of the spectators, too, become actively involved in this unifying relationship[65].

Proposed in 2008 in at least two different settings *[purgatorio] Popopera* (Avignon) and *[purgatorio] IN VISION* (Amsterdam), in the Avignon version the performance involves the dancers playing rock guitars, left on the proscenium in the previous performance, offering the audience the feeling of an actual resumption of dramaturgical elements for a new beginning, a renewal. Not only do the dancers play, but in this case, they also sing live, simultaneously seeking a further expansion of the motor possibilities offered by dance to offer a new performer's body (*Figures 208-209-210*). The second canticle no longer focuses on molecularity, on the pathological subdivision of the body, in manifesting the evil inherent in each like a disease, but on imagination and purification: «An undecided situation. Pregnant with lots of strategies for living. An intermediate phase in which the existential knot of internalized injuries and social grief is disentangled under the hope-bearing

[64] SEE GÉRARD MAYEN*, Partners in Crime*, in EMIO GRECO, PETER C. SCHOLTEN (edited by), *Risorgimento for Purgatorio*, cit., pp. 28-33, reference pp. 28-29.
[65] Ivi, p. 29.

constellation of "reaching out". Inner transformation is germinating. The outcome shines like a promise»[66].

This new quest is applied to the seven deadly vices described in the frames of the Mount of *Purgatory* (*superbia*, *ira*, *avaritia*, *luxuria*, *invidia*, *acedia*, *gula*) and declined according to the «idea of dance as work, travail, discipline, penance [...] emblematic of all alliances between dance and work ethic»[67]. The strictness of Benedictine monastic rule, *ora et labora*, in this secular tangle of references to the sacred, is echoed by the costumes, humble and sober robes reminiscent of monastic tunics, and by the repetition of movements on stage, no longer the work of a fragmented meaningless existing, but methodical hopeful proceeding toward a future goal. The group is even more pronounced in its "being together/doing together," giving evidence of its work on the stage, of the quality of regimentation of one's body for the performance by learning to play an instrument and move along with it, bringing music-making into dance-making in an organic *unicuum.*

Welcome to Paradise. Are you comfortable? [...] Do you trust me? Let's go right here, together, right now. Repeat after me: I'm going to be generous! I'm going to be cosmic! I'm going to be futuristic! I'm going to be pure! I'm going to be exclusive! I'm going to be divine! I'm going to be you-Paradise!
I'm going to live each day as if I'm going to live forever. What's your name? Let's go! It's happening forever and ever![68]

This is how the third canticle is introduced in the performance related to it, *you-Paradiso*, which opens on the proscenium, with a woman, in a white petticoat, welcoming the audience to the auditorium, and repeating the phrases above until pronouncing «forever and ever!» a projector is aimed at her and floods her with blinding light, finally revealing a snow-white stage, surrounded by long white, or iridescent, drapes, transporting the audience into a dreamlike atmosphere. On the notes of the *Ode to Joy* (Symphony No. 9 in D minor for soloists, chorus and orchestra, Op. 125, by Ludwig van Beethoven), the last Dantesque canticle performed by ICK begins and closes, an ode furrowed by a yearning for unattainable, unreal, resplendent perfection:

paradise is characterized by an intense light. [...] There is only light. That is a governing factor. That gives direction in a space that is devoid of any determination. [...] If Paradise exists it will look exactly like this world, albeit a little displaced. [...] My place in space - and all the places I occupied in this life - will be almost the same as now, a few millimeters removed from the cavity I generated. This will be Paradise: the minimal distance between me and him (him=me)[69].

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[66] EMIO GRECO, PETER C. SCHOLTEN, *Editorial*, in EMIO GRECO, PETER C. SCHOLTEN (edited by), *Risorgimento for Purgatorio*, cit., pp. 4-7, quotation at p. 4.
[67] «idea della danza come lavoro, travaglio, disciplina, penitenza […] emblema di tutte le alleanze tra danza ed etica lavorativa», ROBERTO SERAFIDE FRATINI, *Quasi una catabasi. La Divina Commedia nella danza degli ultimi 200 anni. Parte I*, cit., p. 172.
[68] Quotations transcribed from the recording of the show made available to the author of this thesis by the ICK company.
[69] ROMEO CASTELLUCCI, *7 Infinity. Paradise for him, for me*, in EMIO GRECO, PETER C. SCHOLTEN (edited by), *you para|diso*, cit., pp. 74-77, quotation on pp. 74-75.

On the luminous quality of the dancers' presence is played the whole choreographic component of *Paradise*, which sees an insistence and reiteration of rotations, elevations, and suspensions of the bodies, constantly struck by beams of laser lights and projections, which amplify the intensity of their presence thanks to the costumes, at first simple petticoats or white pants and then, toward the finale, full-body suits completely covered with sequins and spangles: through a prismic game refraction, which increases the surface area of the bodies on stage infinitely, ICK's *Paradise* offers divine, luminous bodies, radiating light like Dante's blissful souls (*Figure 211*).

Again, the *Leitmotif* of the luminous arch of the previous canticles is revived with two variations: *in primis*, its evolution into a full circle emerges in a fade-out from behind the impalpable sheets, bringing to mind that feeling of shadow, of a dull and gloomy presence contrasted with the total happiness of the dancers, a reminder that joy is not ecstasy, but living memory, a reminder of reality; on the finale, again sticking to this play of overlays with the impalpable sheets of the backdrop, the very arch of light appears, and its warm light is juxtaposed with the cold, ascetic light of the entire performance, once again referring to a different meaning, to a return to the *here* and *now* (*Figures 212-213*).

Having concluded these singular productions on the three different canticles of the *Comedy*, the ICK company offers a new show that presents itself as the most articulate elaboration through dance on the hells and paradises of existence. *La Commedia* (2011) takes all the gestural, choreographic, and devising material already presented in previous shows, enriching and reworking it further. Its first version, conceived for the space of Hangar Pirelli-Bicocca in Milan, which housed at the time Anselm Kiefer's art installation, *Seven Heavenly Palaces*[70], offers a singular key for the articulation of the performance: seven is the number of the seven days of the week, of the seven vices and virtues, seven will be the dancers involved on stage (*Figures 214-215*).

Reprising the mode used in *Paradiso*, with an artist to welcome the audience and talk to people, the show begins with a circus master of ceremonies who, placed at the side of the rectangular stage space, performs a slapstick sequence, explaining the symbolism used to conceive the show, and introducing the dancers who will each go on to interpret a day of the week and an associated vice/virtue. The choice of having each dancer wear a red clown nose, emphasizing their appearance on stage with the usual entrance music of clowns, underscores this circus turn of the show *La Commedia*, echoing the poet's subversive and desecrating attitude towards the literary genre. The audience members find themself to be Dante, having to follow this master of ceremonies along the path of the three canticles, into which the seven days of the week are divided (indicated by a blue

[70] For more information about the work and the artist, see the website of the Pirelli-Bicocca Hangar, which hosted the work from 2004 to 2015: https://pirellihangarbicocca.org/anselm-kiefer/ (last accessed 23/05/2025).

LED on the backdrop). They are encouraged to leave out of the fiction of the performance the cares associated with life, such as thoughts on economics and politics, and let themselves be invested by the shared experience (*Figure 216*).

The light arch, a *Leitmotif* taken from previous performances, is in this case turned upside down, creating a luminous installation that allows it to be interpreted as an abbreviation of the word YOU, in the letter U (*Figures 217-218*). The Beckettian bare tree is once again placed at the side of the stage, and at its feet are the guitars of *Purgatory* (*Figure 219*). After a few choreographed sequences, a break is declared by the master of ceremonies, a pause that he prefers to call *musical interlude*, recalling in this the Renaissance spectacular, during which the dancers, who had just left, reappear slinging their guitars, all wearing gold or silver half-face masks, and give rise to a real moment of suspension of the main scene.

Decisive and innovative compared to the other plays previously analysed is the use of the circus, in subject matter and manner, which allows the fourth wall to be broken through, as was mentioned earlier, but made more pronounced here. In *La Commedia* the audience's active participation in the circus farce is required. A particular example, in addition to the opening slapstick, is the sequence coordinated by the master of ceremonies who asks the audience to express volunteers who will throw silver inflatable balls at the dancers, who are arranged in balancing poses on the stage like skittles on a bowling alley, generating no small amount of hilarity in the room.

The choice of resorting to clowns and clowning by Greco and Scholten in the ideational phase for this specific show, which emerges as a point of arrival after the long artistic parabola of Dante that began with *Double Point:Hell*, is not without specific antecedents and is the result of a long preparatory study on the subject. In the archives that can be consulted at the ICK headquarters, one can find various elements and precise indications from the two directors who helped build this imagery: the book by the Catalan circus company La Fura dels Baus[71], in which the concept and mode of staging the *Comedy* in Florence in 2002 is explained[72]; various essays and articles on the different intersections and clown traditions in literature and cinema; particularly important are post-it notes used as bookmarks and placed next to photos depicting Jacques Lecoq with the neutral mask of Amleto Sartori, and other photos depicting mime Marcel Marceau, Jean-Baptiste Déburau, Angelo

[71] Images related to the production can be found within the company's official website, La Fura dels Baus. See also LA FURA DELS BAUS, *La Divina Commedia secondo/by La Fura dels Baus*: Piazza Pitti, Firenze, 19giugno/june 2002/ uno spettacolo di/a presentation of Classico Italia, in collaborazione con/in collaboration with Bienal de Valencia, un progetto di/a project by Luigi Settembrini, Milano, Charta, 2003.

[72] See ROBERTO SERAFIDE FRATINI, *Quasi una catabasi. La Divina Commedia nella danza degli ultimi 200 anni. Parte II*, cit., pp. 281-282.

Musco, with the names of the dancers to whom these should correspond[73] (*Figures 220-221*). The compositional and research mode adopted by the Scholten-Greco artistic duo involves several stages of conception, which, in addition to involving the body, also includes many moments of collective reflection and dialogue. In one of the correspondences dedicated to *La Commedia*, Scholten writes to the entire crew:

A request; could you create (first in words): the rules of comedy. So to make a sort of dogma, list of conditions that a good comedy should comply. Of course with (physical and mental) examples![74]

As Francesca Magnini pointed out, the ICK group's production mode always starts from Greco's body, to probe through movement the elements to be investigated: «Movement is self-sufficient and able to create time and space»[75]. Within this process of acquiring the gesture and quality of movement, technique and training are put first, taking a cue from Greco's disciplining classical training and his apprenticeship with Fabre, considering the possibility of acquiring a vocabulary, the real key to then being able to convey a message through choreographic writing, as choreographer Anouk Van Dijk states:

The word technique seems to imply a dogmatic restriction, but it's actually the opposite. Technique is something that gives you tools, offers you possibilities. I hear a lot of choreographers say that they denounce technique or don't use technique, but what do they mean by that? The assumption seems to be that technique can only restrict. But technique is something different than kicking your leg up high or holding a shape, so people need to rethink what technique is. Technique encompasses different skills one can learn; these skills will add up to the knowledge of your body, of yourself, and the choices that you make-and will provide you with a range of physical and mental possibilities. So technique is much more than just the aesthetic outcome[76].

Thinking of the body as an organism that can accumulate memory, Greco and Scholten set up the work according to the *Double Skin/Double Mind* method[77], inviting dancers to use pre-

[73] During the residency at ICK in Amsterdam, all texts and preparatory materials for performances on the Comedy could be consulted. Those pertaining to the current research are reported here: ANNETTE LUST, *From the Greek mimes to Marcel Marceau and Beyond. Mimes, Actors, Pierrots, and Clowns: a Chronicle of the Many Visages of Mime in the Theatre*, foreword by Marcel Marceau, London, Scarecrow Press, 2000; SAMUEL H. MILLER, *The Clown in contemporary art*, in «Theology today», n. 24, 1967, pp. 318-328; ADRIANE L. DESPOT, *Some principles of clowning*, in «The Massachussets Review», vol. 22, n. winter, 1981, pp. 661-678; WILLIAM J. FREE, *Fellini's "I Clowns" and the Grotesque*, in «Journal of Modern Literature», vol. 3, n. 2 (*Film as Literature and Language*), april 1973, pp. 214-227; a translation of the Italian book of Alessandro Baricco is present in the archive, *De barbaren*, ALESSANDRO BARICCO, *I Barbari. Saggio sulla mutazione*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 2022 [2006].

[74] «Zondag Apr 3, 2011, 12:38»/«Sunday Apr 3, 2011, 12:38», Email from Pieter Scholten to the crew.

[75] FRANCESCA MAGNINI, *Inspiration Emio Greco-Pieter C. Scholten. The multiplicity of dance. Dissemination of knowledge. Contamination of cultures. Food for thought*, cit.

[76] ANOUK VAN DIJK, *Practical Tools for a Demanding Profession interview with Edith Boxberger*, in INGO DIHEL, FRIEDERIKE LAMPERT (edited by), *Dance Techniques 2010. Tanzplan Germany*, Leipzig, Henschel Verlag, 2011, pp. 62-65, quotation at p. 63.

[77] The words that form the *DS|DM kit* are: *Abracadabra*, *bridging*, *leaving aura*, *mapping, rhythm on, undulation* and *vacuum*. See FRANCESCA MAGNINI, *Pre-Choreographic Elements. Alla sorgente delle energie corporee e dei materiali di movimento*, in VITO DI BERNARDI, LETIZIA GIOIA MONDA (a cura di), *Immaginare la danza. Corpi e visioni nell'era digitale*, cit.; BERTHA BERMÚDEZ, SCOTT DELAHUNTA, FRANCESCA MAGNINI (edited by), *Emio Greco and Pieter C. Scholten*, in JO BUTTERWORTH, LORNA SANDERS (edited by), *Fifty Contemporary Choreographers*, Routledge, 2021, third edition, pp. 108-116, reference p. 113.

choreographic elements, such as «hooks, transits, action that give, receive and let the energy of the movement pass through»[78], to activate the body to the possibility of evoking and enunciating a non-narrative intention, but giving the dancer a way to open up to the future choreographic track: «the content is being created, shaped and tested but not yet part of the selection and ordering process choreography implies»[79].

The technique of capturing intentions follows this first ideational phase, the second step formalized by the ICK as a methodology for composing choreography, again, reasoning from the body, with the body, about the body as an *intuitive body*[80], the centre of accumulation and reworking of broadly understood movement:

> In a rational world, making room for intuition is a form of revolt in its own right. Intuitive connection creates freedom in any kind of creative process. Promoting the intuitive body means to enforce time, to invest in time and in sustainability, not in fast making and fast selling. Things need time to become and to be, enforcing time as a method for making new creations and for building repertoire.
>
> The intuitive bodies of the dancers of ICK are asked to be alert with regard to the dimension of time - where are they coming from and where are they going? To *be* in time rather than measuring time, playing with the rhythm of time. The audience becomes conscious of this rhythm, this kind of being in time.
>
> To cultivate the intuitive body, one has to constantly work to bring consciousness into the body. The body stores memories, thoughts and feelings and conglomerates them in the form of muscle tensions or other blind spots. Bringing consciousness into the body also means expanding the places in the body that have ossified, hardened or contracted- often unconsciously. By consciously bringing breath, awareness, space and receptivity to the entire body, it lights up from the inside. It can then come easier into communion and communication with the space and with the audience. When one is fully present and aware within the body, communication can be very subtle, honest and complex. Collaboration and non-verbal communication can become very sophisticated.
>
> The intuitive body is not there yet, and it has been there all the time[81].

This compositional process is the pivot on which the ICK company is formed and used in the journey through the *Commedia*. Ten years after the last performance in 2011, in the show *We want it all* (2021) the company not only re-proposed elements of choreography, such as the sequences, here organized in oppositional pairs, that were created in *La commedia*, but also annexed in the cast performers who physically resembled those of the original cast[82]; moreover they wore on stage clownesque costumes and chose iconic songs as in the case of the mash up between Benny Goodman's swing standard *Sing sing sing (with a swing)* as performed by the Andrews Sisters (1936), and the *shock rock* song *The beautiful people* by Marilyn Manson (1996).

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[78] Emio Greco cited in FRANCESCA MAGNINI, *Pre-Choreographic Elements. Alla sorgente delle energie corporee e dei materiali di movimento*, in VITO DI BERNARDI, LETIZIA GIOIA MONDA (a cura di), *Immaginare la danza. Corpi e visioni nell'era digitale*, cit., p. 131.

[79] SCOTT DELAHUNTA, BERTHA BERMÚDEZ (edited by), *Pre-Choreographic Elements: Scott deLahunta in conversation with Bertha Bermúdez*, in «International Journal of Performance Art & Digital Media», vol. 9, n. 1 January, 2013, pp. 51-59, quotation at pp. 52-53.

[80] CORINNE JOLA, *Movement intention. Dialectic of internal and external movements*, in SCOTT DELAHUNTA (edited by), *Capturing intention. Documentation, analysis and notation based on the work of Emio Greco | PC*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam School the Arts, 2007, pp. 62-67, cited on p. 66.

[81] From the material available within the ICK website for the various workshops dedicated to updating dancers/choreographers.

[82] The only exception to this almost 1:1 replacement is with Susan Tunca, the Turkish-born dancer particularly recognizable by her height, longish form and voluminous hair, now part of the ICK company's training staff.

The example and scope of the Dante experience of the ICK company directed by Greco and Scholten as a whole not only constitutes a relevant example in the international choreographic scene but is also the meeting point, both physical and ideal, for soliciting conversations about Dante for other and new artists (*Figure 222*). As we shall see in subsequent analyses, the ICK company has several points of contact with many of the companies that chose at the same time or later to bring their personal vision of Dante's *Commedia* to the stage.

On the English scene, friend and choreographer Wayne McGregor decided to stage Dante in 2021, and particularly relevant in this regard is the artistic and personal relationship with Greco and Scholten, which is invariably reflected in productions related to the *Divina Commedia* as well. In the German context, Ballett Dortmund, which began its own Dante trilogy in 2018, had hosted Greco and Scholten's own ICK in residence still in the early ideational processes of *Double Point: Hell* in 2004. With the Italian scene, Greco maintains even closer relations precisely by virtue of his Apulian origins and constant frequentations with contemporary dance hubs, such as the Cango artistic residency in Florence, directed by Virgilio Sieni in 2008, for the preparation of *Purgatorio*, determining new Dantean intersections in Italy. Finally, in the last example that will be presented, Greco and Scholten hosted the Viennese artist Florentina Holzinger in residence in Amsterdam from 2015-17, the very years in which they brought *Paradiso* back to the stage and revived some *La Commedia* modules for *We want it all*.

5.2. Dante and dance in Italy: preludes to the 2021 centenary and two case studies

Ogni scoperta ne comporta un'altra senza abolire il passato […] Non esiste un grande periodo artistico che non si rifaccia al meticciato, tra un passato ritrovato e un nuovo orizzonte svelato, tra un paese scoperto e un passato riattualizzato, tra culture e tecniche in apparenza antagoniste, ma in realtà complementari. […] Sono contemporaneo, post-africano, pseudo-classico, minimal-giapponese, moderno-argentino, folklorico-rétro e indo-petipaista[83].

Each discovery entails another without abolishing the past [...] There is no great artistic period that does not refer back to mestizaje, between a rediscovered past and a new unveiled horizon, between a discovered country and a re-actualized past, between cultures and techniques that are seemingly antagonistic, but actually complementary. [...] I am contemporary, post-African, pseudo-classical, minimal-Japanese, modern-Argentine, folkloric-Retro, and Indo-Petipal.

So wrote the dancer and choreographer Maurice Béjart, summing up in a few lines the complexity of the universe being created in the twentieth-century choreographic panorama, of which he is a great

[83] MAURICE BÉJART, *Lettere a un giovane danzatore*, tradotto da Irène Berruyer, Torino, Lindau, 2011, pp. 47-48 [ed. or. *Lettres à un jeune danseur*, Paris, Actes Sud, 2001]. The quote is taken from the broader passage of the book ELENA RANDI, *Il corpo pensato. Teorie della danza nel Novecento*, cit., p. 23.

protagonist; a panorama of mixture of styles and schools, of academic dance, classical dance, and new dance forms leading to the great pool of "contemporary."

The Italian dance scene participates with curiosity and enthusiasm in the multiplication of new modalities and styles, which in the case of contemporary dance are connoted as art dance and *dance d'auteur*, while always maintaining a special interest in classical dance, even though it does not enjoy congruous support from institutions, often crushed by the great machine of Opera[84].

In the face of what has already been written previously, we would like to highlight here, through the analysis of two different case studies, how 2021 is the year in which the Italian dance world, in its different declinations, has matured personal and diverse artistic paths to stage its own vision of Dante's *Comedy*, in close relation to the historical moment of the global pandemic from COVID-19. As already noted in the work of Greco and Scholten's ICK, we observe a particular revival of the matrices of circus and circus disciplines by the choreographers in the transition to the New Millennium, providing suggestions and practices to be integrated with the various styles of dance brought forth by the different masters. Not surprisingly, scholar Elena Randi points out:

Se il XX secolo […] spesso ribadisce la natura ibrida dell'evento scenico, rimarcando le contaminazioni tra un genere artistico e l'altro, i tentativi occidentali di fusione si riscontrano in maniera particolarmente insistita in alcune esperienze della seconda metà del Novecento: le sequenze motorie del corpo, comunemente ritenute il linguaggio più tipico dello spettacolo di danza, si trasformano, si contaminano o sono addirittura sostituite dal parlato, dalla vocalità, dall'acrobatica di tradizione circense o da altro ancora[85].

If the twentieth century [...] often reiterates the hybrid nature of the stage event, emphasizing the contaminations between one artistic genre and another, Western attempts at fusion are found particularly insistently in some experiences of the second half of the twentieth century: the motor sequences of the body, commonly considered the most typical language of dance performance, are transformed, contaminated or even replaced by speech, vocality, acrobatics of circus tradition or something else.

To trace the events that pre-date the 2021 centennial in Italy, it is useful to recall an early event that inextricably links Dante to circus practice and dance more broadly. The eccentric *en plein air* show put on by the Catalan company Fura del Baus in Florence's Piazza Pitti on June 19, 2002 (*Figures 223-224*), proposed to the public an acrobatic, muscular and "marvelous" spectacle applied to Dante, which later determined the flowering of many other examples of this type of performance.

[84] «I problemi di inizio Novecento si trascinano fino ai nostri giorni: condizioni inadeguate alla formazione seria dei danzatori, alla ricerca, alla creazione artistica e al confronto con la critica e con gli spettatori, parte fondamentale del processo di comunicazione teatrale»/«The problems of the early twentieth century drag on to the present day: inadequate conditions for serious training of dancers, research, artistic creation and confrontation with critics and spectators, a fundamental part of the process of theatrical communication», AMBRA SENATORE, *La danza d'autore. Vent'anni di danza contemporanea in Italia*, cit., p. 45.
[85] ELENA RANDI, *Il corpo pensato. Teorie della danza nel Novecento*, cit., p. 127.

Direct heir of this outdoor circus concept remodelled for the indoor spatiality of theatres is the series of performances conceived for the No Gravity Company by choreographer Emiliano Pellisari[86].

Since 2007 with the first *Hell*, Pellisari has been proposing a new dance mode to Italian audiences, choosing the company's dancers for their ability to combine a certain classical technique with great acrobatic skill. The first study dedicated to *Hell* was followed by others centred on the next two canticles, until the show was defined in the *Divine Comedy* format (2014), in which all the best scenes made up to that time for individual performances find their place. *Divine Comedy* is revived ahead of Dante's centennial in 2021, in a version titled *Divine Comedy Reloaded* (*Figure 225*). Pellisari's setting of the scene revolves around the decision to interpret the poetics of the marvellous and the extravagant in a contemporary key, conjoined with machineries and scenic instruments taken from the Renaissance and Baroque theatrical traditions. The presence of the dancers' bodies is conceived within a stage box composed of mirrors, which create illusory games and *tableaux vivants* that enchant the audience (*Figures 226-227*):

La tecnica coreografica Nogravity si svolge in uno spazio scenico che ho ideato nel 2005. Si tratta di un gioco di anamorfosi che riprende la tradizione delle macchinerie teatrali illusionistiche rinascimentali (Leonardo da Vinci) e Barocche (Kircher). I danzatori si muovono sul piano orizzontale del palcoscenico per mezzo di una tecnica coreografica unica nel suo genere e vengono nel medesimo tempo riflessi da un grande specchio creando un secondo piano di azione che appare di fronte al pubblico. I due piani, orizzontale e verticale, coreograficamente congiunti insieme, si presentano nel medesimo istante alla visione dello spettatore. L'immagine teatrale finale è incredibilmente ampia e articolata, affollata di corpi, reali e riflessi. Lo spazio Nogravity crea un solo ed unico spazio teatrale che riempie la scena fino al soffitto, dove i danzatori possono camminare a testa in giù o volare, dove le regole della fisica vengono invertite[87].

The choreographic technique Nogravity takes place in a stage space that I devised in 2005. It is a game of anamorphosis in the tradition of Renaissance (Leonardo da Vinci) and Baroque (Kircher) illusionistic theatrical machineries. The dancers move on the horizontal plane of the stage by means of a unique choreographic technique and are at the same time reflected by a large mirror, creating a second plane of action that appears in front of the audience. The two planes, horizontal and vertical, choreographically joined together, appear at the same instant to the viewer's vision. The final theatrical image is incredibly wide and articulated, crowded with bodies, real and reflected. The Nogravity space creates one and only one theatrical space that fills the stage to the ceiling, where dancers can walk upside down or fly, where the rules of physics are reversed.

Optical illusion applied to the virtuosity of the dancers constitutes the stylistic signature of the show created by Pellisari with NoGravity and fellow co-author Mariana Porceddu. In Pellisari's ideal, the artists' movement on stage is connoted by marked and geometric gestures to form pictures supported by a powerful lighting and scenic apparatus, and, as he reports, is meant to recall Gordon Craig's mythical *Übermarionette*. The dancers therefore are nothing more than «actors who create

[86] See ROBERTO SERAFIDE FRATINI, *Quasi una catabasi. La Divina Commedia nella danza degli ultimi 200 anni. Parte II*, cit., pp. 289-297. See also the No Gravity Company website: https://www.nogravitytheatre.com/ (accessed 10/03/2022).

[87] See the choreographer's statements and director's notes given within the article, REDAZIONE GAZZETTA DI MILANO, *Divina Commedia Reloaded, NoGravity al Teatro Menotti da martedì 18*, in «Gazzetta di Milano.it», 23 Novembre 2023, available online at: https://www.gazzettadimilano.it/cultura/divina-commedia-reloaded-nogravity-al-teatro-menotti-da-martedi-18/ (last accessed 23/05/2025).

the space in which they act: there is no set design or words that can tell you who they are, what they are, where they are. They themselves construct the world they animate»[88].

Pellisari's decades-long association with Dante is articulated on his personal vision of dance, providing for each canticle a presentation of suggestive figures and pictures in transition, rather than an actual underlying dramaturgy. The construction of the moving images is realized from the bodies of the performers, who sometimes also use decor tools and components to enrich the final rendering, as in the case of ladders, geometric elements, spheres and feathers. The inspiration for this contamination between "dance of images" and "dancing images" comes from the strong figurative references to abstract and surreal art, by artists such as Vasily Vasil'evič Kandinsky, René Magritte, Salvador Dali and Piet Mondrian[89]. The damnation and chaotic organicity of the bodies in *Inferno* are replaced by a broader use of chairs and stairs, symbols of ascent and sincere repentance in *Purgatorio*, to finally result in an evocative wave of references to the suspension and ethereal context of the souls in *Paradiso* (*Figure 228*). Alongside this, there are also several repetitions of verses from Dante's text spoken by voiceovers. Scholar Fratini has spoken of a phantasmagoria reminiscent of a computer screensaver, a splendid but superficial interpretation of the complexity of Dante's *Comedy:*

la *Commedia* di Pellisari, superficiale come uno schermo, astratta come uno screensaver, è la trasfigurazione consensuale e la messinscena *sub specie aeternitatis* della taumaturgia ipnotica che promana dalle tecnologie leggere di oggigiorno, fatta di virtualizzazione o automazione, di *computer art* e astrazioni a buon mercato[90].

Pellisari's *Comedy*, as superficial as a screen, as abstract as a screensaver, is the consensual transfiguration and staging *sub specie aeternitatis* of the hypnotic thaumaturgy emanating from today's lightweight technologies of virtualization or automation, *computer art* and cheap abstractions.

A company from Ravenna renewed the connotations of Dante's word, dematerializing its language in the codes of contemporary dance, with special attention to the elements of image, sound, light and time of action. If Teatro delle Albe paved the way for bringing the entire Ravenna community closer to the living presence of the Poet in its identity, cultural and artistic character, the nanou group decided to embark on its own path in the *Comedy* a few years later, making use of circus language and flanking it with that of dance in the scenic realization of its own Dantean journey to focus its work on the last and dizzying cantica, *Paradiso*. Born in 2004 in Ravenna, Italy, the nanou group was born from the encounter between dancer-choreographer Marco Valerio Amico, and dancer Rhuena Bracci and sound producer and musician Roberto Rettura, setting their common work on

[88] «attori che creano lo spazio in cui agiscono: non c'è una scenografia né una parola che possano indicarti chi sono, cosa sono, dove sono. Loro stessi costruiscono il mondo che animano», see No Gravity company website.
[89] See RAVENNA TODAY REDAZIONE, *Teatro Alighieri, dall'Inferno al Paradiso con la "NoGravity Dance Company"*, in «Ravenna Today», 5 gennaio 2015, available at: https://www.ravennatoday.it/eventi/teatro/teatro-alighieri-dall-inferno-al-paradiso-con-la-nogravity-dance-company.html (last accessed 23/05/2025).
[90] ROBERTO SERAFIDE FRATINI, *Almost a Catabasis. The Divine Comedy in the Dance of the Last 200 Years. Part II*, cit., p. 296.

investigating the modes of expression found in performance through image, sound, light and time in relation to the human figure. For the work on *Paradiso*, visual artist Alfredo Pirri also collaborated with them. As Sergio Lo Gatto recalls about the group's creative and collegial *modus operandi*, «the choreographic writing is analysed in relation to the space and the objects it contains, used as individual dramaturgical cells that are activated the moment they come into contact with the performer, understood as a "sign among signs"»[91].

Choreography is understood as a common concert practice, within which they wish to decline the concept of the body through different stage elements, thus defining a sound body, a body/object, a body/light[92]. In their performances, the artists of the nanou group also want to offer the spectator an active position, allowing him or her to get in touch with a psychological dimension of the diffuse performance, in which light design and soundscape merge with the corporeity of the dancers to create a new sensitive surface to be experienced together.

The nanou group's encounter with Dante occurs during the Dante Centennial 2021 and after the strict pandemic restrictions. These artists decided to define a space within to favour encounters among people, to stimulate a co-presence of bodies and spirits that may allow artists, as well as spectators, to formulate new relationships with each other. An antidote or, rather, a line to follow, in the wake of Dante, to build together new viable paradises in times of division and loneliness. Conceived through a long production path between 2019 and 2022, and realized with different artistic residencies to conceive the final version[93], *Paradiso* is a research, a laboratory in Grotowksian terms

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[91] «la scrittura coreografica viene analizzata in rapporto allo spazio e agli oggetti che contiene, utilizzati come singole cellule drammaturgiche che si azionano nel momento in cui entrano in contatto con il performer, inteso in quanto "segno tra i segni"», SERGIO LO GATTO, MARCO VALERIO AMICO (a cura di), *Gruppo Nanou - note biografiche*, in «Sciami», 2016, available online at: https://nuovoteatromadeinitaly.sciami.com/gruppo-nanou-biografia-opere/gruppo-nanou-bio-segio-lo-gatto-marco-valerio-amico-2015/ (last accessed 25/05/2025). See also SILVIA MEI, *Gli anni Dieci della nuova scena italiana. Un tracciato in dieci punti*, cit.; MAURO PETRUZZIELLO, *Attore, performer, recitazione nel nuovo teatro italiano degli anni Zero*, cit.; VALERIA SCREPIS, *I teatri degli anni Duemila. Rinnovamento estetico e nuove esigenze economico-organizzative in Babilonia Teatri, Fibre Parallele, Menoventi, TeatrInGestAzione*, cit.; LORENZO DONATI, JENNIFER MALVEZZI, *Videointervista a gruppo nanou*, in «Arabeschi», n. 6, luglio-dicembre 2015, open access.

[92] See the theatrical program available at the Ravenna Festival website.

[93] The different moments of preparation and first presentation to the public include *Paradiso [Bozzetto SN - 001]* in July 2021 at Artificerie Almagià in Ravenna, *PARADISO [Bozzetto SN - 002]* in September 2021at Spazio Rossellini in Rome, *Paradiso [Bozzetto SN - 003]* in October 2021 at Umbria Factory Festival - Auditorium Santa Caterina in Foligno, before the *premiere* in June 2022 in Ravenna. The versions of this particular artistic project also include a short film *PARADISO [VIDEO Bozzetto]* presented at the Torino Film Festival 2021 thanks to the collaboration with Giulio Boato and 313 film production. All stages of the elaboration, materials, interviews and published articles about the show can be found on the company's website, in the *News* section. Also see STEFANO TOMMASINI, *Sempre in piedi: Dante e la danza*, in ANTONIO ATTISANI, STEFANO TOMASSINI, *L'umanità mancata. Dante e la scena*, cit., pp. 85-87; LORENZO DONATI, *Paradiso. Spettacolo di danza del gruppo nanou, 17 giugno – 2 luglio 2022, Ravenna*, in «Dante e l'arte», n. 9, 2022, pp. 239-242; See WALTER PORCEDDA, *Danzando sul tappeto d'oro del Paradiso*, in «gliStatiGenerali», 18 agosto 2021, available at: https://www.glistatigenerali.com/cultura/teatro/danzando-sul-tappeto-doro-del-paradiso/ ; SIMONE AZZONI, *Il Paradiso secondo Alfredo Pirri e gruppo Nanou. L'artista Alfredo Pirri e i coreografi Marco Valerio Amico e Rhuena Bracci hanno collaborato al progetto teatrale "Paradiso" in programma al Ravenna Festival*, in «Artribune», 04 luglio 2021, disponibile online: https://www.artribune.com/arti-performative/teatro-danza/2021/07/intervista-alfredo-pirri-gruppo-

rather than an actual performance, as it takes the form of a continuous-flowing performance lasting more than three hours, operating inside the Artificerie Almagià in Ravenna, between June 17 and July 2, 2022[94] (*Figure 229*):

La sala prove: un luogo. Un problema di tempo e di spazio.
«La pittura è divenuta una forma architettonica, spaziale, di cui lo spettatore faceva esperienza percorrendola fisicamente. La concezione più antica di un'architettura d'immagine e d'idea, di un "luogo" di memoria come i templi mnemonici dei greci, perdura nelle grandi cattedrali e nei palazzi europei, così come la relazione tra la memoria, il movimento spaziale e l'immagazzinamento (la registrazione) delle idee»[95].

The rehearsal room: a place. A problem of time and space.
«Painting has become an architectural, spatial form, which the viewer experienced by physically walking through it. The older conception of architecture of image and idea, of a "place" of memory like the mnemonic temples of the Greeks, persists in the great cathedrals and palaces of Europe, as does the relationship between memory, spatial movement and the storage (recording) of ideas».

The stage space, conceived by Alfredo Pirri, is a huge reflective box traversable by the audience and the performers. Wide and long mirrored PVC strips are stretched across the centre of the Almagià's long rectangular hall, decorated with large globes reminiscent of the planets in *Paradiso* (*Figure 230*). Marco Valerio Amico's light design creates, together with Bruno Dorella's music, a rarefied atmosphere, favouring a constant bath of light on the reflective and curved surfaces, which refracts suggestively on the bare brick walls of the building. In this dreamlike, enveloping atmosphere the different dancers appear on stage. The choreography is conceived by Marco Valerio Amico and Rhuena Bracci, and consists of individual actions offered as a *continuum* in space. Each dancer is a universe in his or her own right:

Ruotano sul loro asse. Eseguono rivoluzioni attorno a un centro che si sposta, i cerchi divengono ellissi, le circonferenze si spezzano e poi tornano in traiettoria. Sondano l'influenza della presenza propria e altrui, si aggregano in duetti, sono a terra carponi e circoscrivono lo spazio, avanzano e retrocedono, tastano il terreno, si alzano e torcono il tronco. Tornano con le mani a terra, slanciando un solo arto inferiore che si eleva come il braccio di una gru. Un refolo sonoro accompagna l'ondeggiare sinuoso di un corpo che diviene foglia, piuma, pulviscolo rarefatto appena visibile in controluce[96].

They rotate on their axis. They perform revolutions around a shifting centre, circles become ellipses, circumferences break and then return to trajectory. They probe the influence of their own and others' presence, join in duets, are on the ground on all fours circumscribe the space, advance and retreat, feel the ground, stand up and twist their torso. They return with their hands to the ground, thrusting out a single lower limb that rises like the arm of a crane. A sonorous puff accompanies the sinuous sway of a body that becomes leaf, feather, rarefied dust barely visible against the light.

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nanou/ ; WALTER PORCEDDA, *Ravenna Festival, le visioni di Fanny & Alexander e dei Nanou*, in «gliStatigenerali», 18 luglio 2022, available at: https://www.glistatigenerali.com/cultura/teatro/ravenna-festival-le-visioni-di-fannyalexander-e-dei-nanou/ (last accessed 23/05/2025); Ravenna Festival, theater program of the show 2022. The show was seen by the writer on June 22, 2022 in Ravenna.

[94] We recall again that the Almagia space had been inaugurated by the Teatro delle Albe's *Aristophane all'Inferno* (1996), confirming how this Dantean imagery is also inherent to the redeveloped multipurpose space.

[95] These reflections come from director Marco Valerio Amico's notebooks and are available within the company's website, under *A Problem of Space*, available at: https://www.grupponanou.it/un-problema-di-spazio/ (last accessed 23/05/2025). The internal quotation is taken from BILL VIOLA, *Testi e conversazioni 1976-2014*, a cura di Valentina Valentini, Teramo, Sciami, 2020, p. 58.

[96] LORENZO DONATI, *Paradiso. Spettacolo di danza del gruppo nanou, 17 giugno – 2 luglio 2022, Ravenna*, cit., quotation at p. 239.

The movements, performed within the long exposure time of the performance are the result of the preparatory work conceived during the COVID distancing period and determined by the non-contact between the performers. All the dancers may appear together on stage or alone, usually always divided, and they continue to produce a sequence of gestures and movements that sometimes mirror each other, in other moments treading personal and different paths. The stage, conceived in a very large space, also includes a refreshment area, where refreshment and the possibility of dialogue are offered to the spectators, extending the performance space and promoting a circularity between the stage and the space of reality (*Figures 231-232*).

In the authors' decision to develop in this particular work on Dante a conversation about the work of the dancer, the spaces that pertain to contemporary dance, and the audience's processing and understanding of what unfolds onstage, one recognises the legacy of Dante's lesson by Greco and Scholten's ICK. Again, as in *La Commedia* (2011), the stage is offered open and inclusive, although no master of ceremonies acts as an intermediary and advisor between performers and the audience. Even in the choice of costumes, the influence of ICK can be recognised when space is given to sportswear, such as boxer shorts, T-shirts and hot pants, embellished by the common denominator of brilliance, achieved through sequins and luminous details. In addition, a mask of iridescent tulle is provided on the dancers' faces, completely covering their features.

To complete this picture, a dancer appears on stage in swimming gear, with goggles, a (red) bathrobe and fins on his feet (*Figure 233*). The sporting, working component of elaboration on the ethics of work in dance, of the effort and discipline required, clashes with the comical appearance of a "Dante" swimmer, as if to remind us of the different ontology between the souls of *Paradiso* and the still intact mortality of Dante *agens*, who shares space with them, but remains profoundly other, different.

Scholar Lorenzo Donati suggests how the perception of the audience is to find themselves experiencing *becoming Beatrice*, that is, to be themselves the proponent of defining the terms of the relational, spatial and temporal dynamics of the performance, being the leading actor in the dynamic, giving meaning and offering a foothold to Dante in the process of «trasumanar»[97], in the transition from one state to another[98].

In the light of the line connecting the production of the gruppo nanou to the now "classic" production of the ICK, one can read the show created and produced by the Ravenna-based company as akin to the circus tradition, and to the more idiosyncratic idea of the camera obscura: the muffled

[97] *Pd*. I, v. 70.
[98] LORENZO DONATI, *Paradiso. Spettacolo di danza del gruppo nanou, 17 giugno – 2 luglio 2022, Ravenna*, cit., quotation at p. 239.

environment that offers the viewer's eye a chance to observe, on the one hand, the transformation of the dancers' bodily matter, and on the other the play of light and music becoming a living image, is similar to the chemical reaction set in motion by the reagents that allow the image to imprint itself and make itself evident on photographic film, in the dimness of the reddish light of the developing chamber. Through the dialogue between the scenic elements, with the wide and changing space also defined by the presence and movement of the audience, a collage of different changing and constantly becoming snapshots thus emerges, produced in the long exposure time of the hours of performance. This allows the audience to construct its own very personal vision: the remembered dream dimension, the basis of Alighieri's artistic awareness, especially in the last *cantica*, is thus investigated in the group's performance through a collective play in the contemplative dimension, actively recreated in the spectacular dynamic.

The memory of unrealizable perfection, of the tension toward an idea that platonically recedes but leaves a trace of itself in memory, is interrogated through the slowness, the isolation of the dancers and the gestures they make, in the flicker of music, through an unchanging and constant cadence and rhythm, the refraction of colours on the multiple curved surfaces of the spheres and in the reflective prisms of the costumes. In this way, the spectator is offered the opportunity to meditate on what he or she is seeing being accomplished, to be present, to be part of it or to abstract from it, tuning in to a common frequency and breathing in unison with this all-encompassing sound box. Once again, the audience does not assume the position of the celestial guide but of the traveller, the pilgrim Dante (*Figure 234*).

The gruppo nanou's journey with Dante was not limited to this one production but transported from inside to outside this interrogation of the concept of *Paradise*, declining it into its new bucolic variant. *Paradiso [giardino]* rewrites what had already been conceived for the interior environment of the Almagià by seeking new possibilities for articulating the theatrical ritual through the body. The decision to bring Dante's investigation into nature, encountering the changing and unpredictable space of the chosen location, allows the creation of a new resonance with both the more earthly and humanly appreciable concept of Dante's Earthly Paradise and the concept of *locus amoenus*, the real and unreal space where the author's creativity finds its way to become poetic form.

The shared experience of the theatrical ritual understood as a celebration, a constant of artistic research that goes back as far as the early 20th century D'Annunzio, remains present even in the new Millennium, leading to an unrelenting interest on the part of artists in constructing an immersive environment, capable of intercepting the collective need for community, for sharing, for being part of a ritual: «a higher value is placed on continuous research than on the result, the final product; there is

a belief in shared creation between two or more people as a micro-model of a democratic, non-hierarchical society; there is an insistence on the importance of community»[99].

The choreographic object expressed by the gruppo nanou in the sign of *Paradise*, in both solutions, offers the audience the opportunity to confront the processes that determine the performance, not only its outcomes, remaining akin to Dante's path in its search for truth through Art (*Figures 235-236*). Therefore, especially this last outcome that establishes a different relationship between performance, space and audience is part of the trajectory that will be investigated in the production of choreographer Virgilio Sieni, which is also rooted in the definition of new boundaries within which contemporary dance can operate in order to be back at the basis of the in-depth quest of each individual for his or her own mode of being a presence in space.

Along with Sieni's long Dantesque journey, which also outlines a particular tradition of contemporary dance history in Italy in relation to Dante and his works, a case study pertaining to classical dance will first be analysed, again proposing a version of it that is particularly receptive to new technologies in the field of set design[100].

5.2.1. Sergei Polunin

Sergei Polunin (1989) is a multifaceted Ukrainian dancer with great strength and stage presence, who made his debut at a very young age on the most prestigious stages, soon becoming a freelance dancer and founding his own company[101]. In the international dance scene, he became a sensation: he was a hit on Russian television programs and was later immortalized as the lead in the video clip *Take me to church*, directed by David LaChapelle[102].

[99] «si attribuisce un valore più elevato alla ricerca continua piuttosto che al risultato, al prodotto finale; si crede nella creazione condivisa tra due o più persone in quanto micro-modello di una società democratica, non gerarchizzata; si insiste sull'importanza della comunità», ELENA RANDI, *Il corpo pensato. Teorie della danza nel Novecento*, cit., p. 37.
[100] It was decided here not to analyse the artistic operations of Michela Lucenti and Maurizio Camilli, for Balletto Civile, who produced *Nell'aere - Inferno #5* in 2017, treated instead by STEFANO TOMMASINI, *Sempre in piedi: Dante e la danza*, in ANTONIO ATTISANI, STEFANO TOMASSINI, *L'umanità mancata. Dante e la scena*, cit., pp. 81-82. The subsequent work *INFERNO* by the Aldes company with choreography, direction and video project Roberto Castello in collaboration with Alessandra Moretti (2021) is a further confirmation of the predominance of the circus lesson, not unlike that of ICK, which re-proposes the chaotic hell of modern life in a danced key. For more information, please refer to the company's website, where there are various materials along with shots of the show: https://www.aldesweb.org/produzioni/inferno/ (last accessed 23/05/2025).
[101] See the official website of the Polunin Ink company: https://polunininк.com/ (last accessed 23/05/2025).
[102] Video particularly significant for the consecration of the dancer in the eyes of the general international public: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ozs_f4ZT9sw&ab_channel=EscuelaTerpsicore (last accessed 23/05/2025).

It was decided to analyse one of his performances here because Ravenna Festival commissioned him to create a performance for the Autumn Trilogy in 2020, in preparation for the extensive Dante programming planned for 2021, the seventh centenary of the Poet's death. Postponed to the following year due to the continuing global pandemic, the opera created by Polunin in three movements, *Dante Metànoia*[103], is an example of his artist's new life. Alone on stage with the only exceptions being Soprano Andjela Ninkovic and the pianists who take turns at the large grand piano placed at the side of the stage[104], Polunin performs three choreographies, one for each *cantica* (*Figure 237*). There are also three composers, Miroslav Bako, Kemal Gekic, and Kirill Richter, and there are only two choreographers. The choreography of *Inferno* is entrusted to choreographer Ross Freddie Ray, and that of *Paradiso* to Jiří Bubeníček, while he himself signs that of *Purgatorio*. A central element for this solo performance is the presence of three mega-screens mounted as wings and backdrop to the stage, a multi-media effort designed for an international audience. The supervision of these digital technologies and scenarios made with video-design animation is also divided and conceived by different artists for the three canticles: Yan Yanko for *Inferno*, Marcella Grimaux, Aaron Kaufman, and Daniel Faubert of Noisy Head Studio for *Purgatorio*, and finally Otto Bubeníček for *Paradiso*.

The nature of this adaptation of Dante's work, entrusted in Italy to a foreign artist and interpreter, who approaches Alighieri's text and its universe for the first time to derive his own vision, reveals, once again, how the figurative tradition associated with Dante is necessary to bring medieval culture closer to contemporary sensibilities and the different cultures from which these artists are moving. The motif of figurative reception is especially evident in the scenic choices, which, in this case, are rendered in a digital environment. *Inferno*, for example, involves considerable use of digital content: a hooded Polunin comes onstage passing from the stalls and is immediately captured by the dark forest that unfolds around him thanks to lighting curated by Konstantin Binkin, which creates a dark, looming, dense atmosphere of smoke, and Yanko's graphics, which echo Gustave Dorè's famous romantic illustrations[105]. On the central screen that doubles as a backdrop, Polunin's face appears in a black field in the very foreground, captured in all his fragility.

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[103] See *DANTE METÀNOIA by and with Sergei Polunin*, play debuted in world Premiere at Teatro Alighieri on September 1st 2021. You can find the main information on the Ravenna Festival website and download the theatre program. The writer saw the performance on September 4, 2021.

[104] Within the artist's YouTube channel, see the film regarding the making of the opera *Dante Metànoia* (2021), where there are some clips from the performance offered at the Alighieri Theater in Ravenna.

[105] DANTE ALIGHIERI, *L'Enfer*, avec les dessins de Gustave Doré, traduction française de Pier-Angelo Fiorentino, accompagnée du texte italien, Paris, L. Hachette et Cie, 1861; DANTE ALIGHIERI, *Le purgatoire et le Paradis*, avec les dessins de Gustave Doré, traduction française de Pier-Angelo Fiorentino, accompagnée du texte italien, Paris, L. Hachette et Cie, 1868; DANTE ALIGHIERI, *La Divina Commedia*, illustrata da Gustavo Doré e dichiarata con note tratte dai migliori commenti per cura di Eugenio Camerini, Milano, Sonzogno, 1868; DANTE ALIGHIERI, *The Divine Comedy*, translated by

At least in the first part of the performance, it is immediately apparent how much use is made of the combination of the reality of the stage (which remains to all intents and purposes a fiction) and the reality on the screen, which is digital and offers the dancer the possibility of confronting avatars of himself and other creatures devised from Dante's imagery.

In *Inferno*, Yan Yanko[106] creates a *kitschy*, sensual*, fantasy* environment, sometimes exaggerated, to support the dancer's disturbing journey into the darkness of sin, a journey that is remarked upon by choreography full of pathetic gestures, frequent power-filled leaps and a narrative pantomime, including the use of ropes, chains and fake blood, to flaunt the protagonist Dante's struggle against the monsters of the underworld. The monsters and visions that populate the screens, starting with the demon Charon and a few other hellish souls, seem to be inspired by the animations created for the video game *Dante's Inferno*[107].

The virtuosic fury of the dancer culminates in a confrontation with a four-legged monster, which begins to approach from the screen backdrop. Thanks to the imperceptible descent of a transparent cloth in front of the proscenium and lighting design, a *duel/pas de deux* between Dante and the monster begins. For a moment, the audience forgets the focus on the here and now and finds itself projected into another horizon where a human being can fight a disturbing monster with *arabesques*, as will also happen in the decisive duel with Lucifer, which Dante/Polunin survives thanks to the timely advent of Beatrice (*Figures 238-239-240*).

The choice of not proposing the presence of Virgil in this danced transposition is intentional to offer Beatrice's love, soprano Andjela Ninkovic, a greater space, diaphanous and musical, apt to guide and lead Dante to safety. Dante/Polunin never meets a guide, only monsters with whom to

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Herny Francis Cary, with 136 illustrations by Gustave Dorè, Ware, Omega Books, 1984. See DEBORAH PARKER, *Dorè's Dante: Influence, Transformation, and Reinvention*, in FRANCESCO CIABATTONI, SIMONE MARCHESI (edited by), *Dante Alive. Essays on a cultural icon*, cit., pp. 3-21; MANUELA PISCITELLI, *Real Visions of Imaginary Worlds in the Illustrations of Gustave Doré*, in «diségno», n. 9, 2021, pp. 109-120; ADRIAN LA SALVIA, *Dante e Doré. L'aura della Divina Commedia nell'arte moderna*, in MARIA ANTONIETTA TERZOLI, SEBASTIAN SCHÜTZE (Heraugegeben), *Dante und die bildenden Künste*, Berlin/Boston, De Gruyter, 2016, pp. 281-302; ILEANA MARIN, *Dante's Hell envisioned by Gustav Doré: An overlooked opening to modernity*, in «Dante IJCCSEC», vol. 4, n. 1, 2015, pp. 17-30; AIDA AUDEH, *Gustave Doré's Illustrations for Dante's Divine Comedy: Innovation, Influence and Reception*, in «Studies in Medievalism», vol. XVIII, 2010, pp. 125-164. All the illustration by Dorè are available inside the *World of Dante* website, under the supervision of Prof. Aida Audeh: https://www.worldofdante.org/gallery_dore.html (last accessed 23/05/2025).

[106] See the Instagram profile of video maker Yan Yanko, where content related to the *Dante Metànoia* show can be traced: https://www.instagram.com/yancinema/ (accessed on 10/03/2022).

[107] Refer to the video game *Dante's Inferno*, designed and created for EA in 2010 by developers Visceral Games, Electronic Arts, Behaviour Interactive: https://www.ea.com/it-it/games/dantes-inferno (accessed 10/03/2022). See BRANDON ESSARY, *From Poem to PlayStation 3: Teaching Dante with Video Games*, in CHRISTOPHER KLEINHENZ E KRISTINA OLSON (a cura di), *Approaches to teaching Dante's Divine Comedy*, New York, The Modern Language Association of America, 2020, pp. 192-199; BRANDON ESSARY, *"De Vulgari 'ludo-quentia'": Dante, Games, and Pop Culture*, in FRANCESCO CIABATTONI, SIMONE MARCHESI (edited by), *Dante Alive. Essays on a cultural icon*, cit., pp. 180-194; SIMONE PETTINE, *Dante (video)ludico: la narrazione della Commedia tra Realtà Virtuale, GDR e librigame*, in MARIO CIMINI (a cura di), *L'altro Dante. Processi di attualizzazione della Commedia*, cit., pp. 115-135.

develop choreographic altercations. The real spark of hope comes from the voice and presence of the young woman dressed in white, who shows Dante the straight path[108].

In *Purgatorio*, choreographed by Polunin, the dancer wears a cream-coloured tunic and matching *fuseaux.* The soundscape consists of a vibrant psalmodic gong, with a constant gurgling of waters, that encourages the dancer's immersion in the new penitential journey of the second *cantica*. A soft bluish light colours the scene and also finds space in the artificial architectures presented on the screens, which transport dancer and audience to a palace with a wide staircase in perpetual ascent, and recall the rigour and commitment characterizing the souls in *Purgatorio* described in the *Commedia* (*Figure 241*).

Although this is the temporally shortest choreography, Polunin enriches it with his own personal evolution as a man and artist. The steps danced are more posed, less extroverted, and more intimate but no less dense with magnetism. The muscular quality emphasises a different energy from that expressed in the previous *cantica*, a new awareness. As a final pantomimic sequence, the dancer seems to be holding an infant, a metaphor for the reborn self, characterizing this episode with a certain tenderness, the same tenderness that recalls Virgil's last words to the disciple Dante, in encouraging him to follow his own path, with a new awareness of himself and his own worth:

> Non aspettar mio dir più né mio cenno;
> libero, dritto e sano è tuo arbitrio,
> e fallo fora non fare a suo senno:
>
> per ch'io te sovra te corono e mitrio[109].

Lying on all fours, Polunin glides into the last canticle, which will be distinguished by the minimalism of colour, geometricity of video content and the presence of installations on stage. To adapt to the high flight, Polunin wears a snow-white suit with wide pants, emphasising the *pirouettes, fouettes* and broad gestures inspired by the celestial spheres. *Paradiso* is a solid succession of digital planes, pantomime moments interspersed with great virtuosity, expertly underscored by the lighting design that creates a backdrop of spheres and geometric solids in black and white. Projected in hypnotic sequences, these shapes generate a loop on the screens and create directional lines that are also intentionally developed three-dimensionally by the dancer's body, with lunges, leaps and turns.

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[108] See ANNA BANDETTINI, *Sergei Polunin nel nome di Dante Alighieri, il danzatore porta il Sommo Poeta al 'Ravenna Festival'*, in «La Repubblica», 2 settembre 2021, available at: https://www.repubblica.it/spettacoli/teatro-danza/2021/09/02/news/sergei_polunin-316238046/ (last accessed 23/05/2025); GIUSEPPE DISTEFANO, *Il Dante fantasy della star Sergei Polunin*, in «Artribune», 09 settembre 2021, available at: https://www.artribune.com/performing-arts/theater-dance/2021/09/spectacle-sergei-polunin-dante-ravenna/ (last accessed 23/05/2025); GABRIELLA GORI, *La metànoia dantesca di Sergei Polunin*, in «Drammaturgia», 21 settembre 2021, available at: https://drammaturgia.fupress.net/recensioni/recensione1.php?id=8217 (last accessed 23/05/2025).

[109] *Pg. XXVII*, 139-142.

The sensation offered to the audience by the digital set design is to optically expand the space occupied onstage by the dancer, managing to make the lines created by the light coincide with those of the body, the acute angles of the arms or the horizontal lines given by leaps, as in the case of *grand jeté*, building a continuity between artist and space, which once again refers to the creator/creature tension emphasised in Dante's *Commedia.*

From the darkness of the backdrop, the light of a follow-spot cast beams lights that contrast with the stage installations and Polunin's body, generating shadows and creeping up to the audience in hallucinatory bursts. Nine pillars placed on the stage are thus revealed, with at their apex as many empty masks, between which Polunin twirls and turns, recalling Dante's triplets:

> Ciò che non more e ciò che può morire
> non è se non splendor di quella idea
> che partorisce, amando, il nostro Sire;
>
> ché quella viva luce che sì mea
> dal suo lucente, che non si disuna
> da lui né da l'amor ch'a lor s'intrea,
>
> per sua bontate il suo raggiare aduna,
> quasi specchiato, in nove sussistenze,
> etternalmente rimanendosi una[110].

Music composed *ad hoc*, along with recorded elements intoning *Spiritus* and *Dominum*[111], supports this apotheosis of increasing illumination. During this sequence, the dancer runs across the stage, picks up the pillars and begins aligning the nine pillars provided with masks, thus creating a row of masks, of faces, in superimposition, in the centre of the stage. As happens at the beginning of the performance, Polunin's face is projected again on the screen backdrop; in the process, he advances toward the audience and then turns to gaze at himself in the riot of light (*Figures 242-243*).

The coincidence of work and creator in the image of the face is condensed into a point of light, which becomes more and more all-encompassing to the sound of the music and culminates by investing the entire audience and hall with a loud sound and a final blinding flash that runs through the stalls. In this work, Polunin travels together with Dante into the depths of the human soul, between the abysses of sin and guilt, until the realization through the effort of the ultimate delight of blissful fullness:

"Metanoia" is a Greek word, in theology it means conversion, a complete reversal of thoughts, words and actions, which can happen to the greatest sinners, to those who have never followed a spiritual path, or even to fallen souls, who remember the light, but have lost their faith along the way. In Jungian psychology, metanoia is the spontaneous self-healing of the soul, ie the establishment of a balance through one's own crisis. So this work is Polunin's halfnoia, the

[110] *Pd.* XIII, 52-60.
[111] Having no definite word from the Company at the moment, it is reported how these elements echoing Gregorian musicals are part of the composition created *ad hoc* for the *Paradiso* choreography by young composer Kirill Richter.

story of Polunin, of his journey from hell to heaven, through which Dante leads him. By transforming his vision and experiencing metanoia, he reaches the spark of the divine in himself, to inspire others to change as well[112].

The three-movement play, *Dante Metànoia*, made for an international audience and to be transported and staged nimbly, revealed its nature even more in the pandemic context. On the one hand, it confirmed international audiences' well-established taste for the pyrotechnic rendering of the first canticle, and on the other hand, despite an exaggerated use of video-game imagery, it unexpectedly gave prominence to deep and spiritual elements of the salvation canticles, hinting at an awareness of and interest in the heart of Alighieri's message.

Once again, the artistic uniqueness of the performer on which the entire operation is based is enriched by the study of set design, which, in this case, consists of digital animations. The scene is filled with Polunin's charismatic presence and bravura, but what makes this Dantesque crossing effective is the use of an iconography that draws on the imagery of historical iconography related to the *Comedy*, which reworks its connotations following the medievalist and fantasy *vulgata*, at times kitschy, and then lands on a more minimal and geometric set design. In this work Polunin does not make deliberate references to other works or artistic contexts but wants to gradually give more and more prominence to the body, to its potential in dialogue with the set design and with the other performers, to build a progressive identification of himself with Dante, juxtaposing his own artistic research and the solid example of the poet and operating a very personal approach that recalls what has already been accomplished by the Russian poets of the early 20th century. Like Mandelstam or Akhmatova before him, Polunin lives and embodies Dante's thought within his own art, following a principle of identification and search for truth inherent in Alighieri's poetry, which is reflected in a didactic and pointed approach to certain passages of the *Commedia*.

5.2.2. Virgilio Sieni

A trailblazer in the Italian context of the Dantesque reworking proposed by contemporary dance is Florentine artist Virgilio Sieni (1957)[113], to date director of the Company Virgilio Sieni, as

[112] The project summary words are in the official website, describing *the Dante Metànoia* project.
[113] For a profile of the artist, see: ALESSANDRO PONTREMOLI, *Virgilio Sieni o la sapienza della grafia*, in ALESSANDRO PONTREMOLI (a cura di), *Drammaturgia della danza*, Milano, Euresis, 1997, pp. 81-81; ANDREA NANNI (a cura di), *Anatomia della fiaba. Virgilio Sieni tra teatro e danza*, Milano, Ubulibri, 2002; VITO DI BERNARDI, *Virgilio Sieni*, Palermo, L'Epos, 2011; ROSSELLA MAZZAGLIA, *La danza delle lucciole. Oralità e trasmissione nell'opera di Virgilio Sieni*, in «Danza e Ricerca», 2011, pp. 91-120; ROSSELLA MAZZAGLIA, *Danza e Immagine. La dimensione performativa in Bambino Manifesto di Virgilio Sieni*, in «Mantichora. Italian Journal of Performance Studies», vol. 1, 2011, pp. 481-499; VITO DI BERNARDI, *Corpi sospesi e risonanti. Su Virgilio Sieni*, in VITO DI BERNARDI, *Cosa può la danza. Saggio sul corpo*, Roma, Bulzoni, 2012, pp. 133-170; ROSSELLA MAZZAGLIA, *Virgilio Sieni. Archeologia di un pensiero*

well as creator of the Academy on the Art of Gesture and Cango, a hub for research, transmission, residency and home of the National Production Centre he directs[114].

Trained between visual arts and architectural studies in Florence, he bases his research path of movement language on the archaeology of gesture, an omnivorous attitude that feeds on different disciplines, martial arts and sports, investigating the universal nature of movement to refer it to the personal history of the dancer. Associating this path of research also with the concept of *polis* and democracy, he centres his activity as a dancer, choreographer and artist on these directions, for various national and international institutions[115]:

L'arte del gesto ci rende consapevoli del corpo, della sua trasparenza, leggerezza e gravità.
Un corpo che accoglie e forma le declinazioni del movimento attraverso gli incontri e le esperienze. Un corpo che stimola la capacità cognitiva di porsi domande ed elaborare risposte. Un corpo artigianale che ricerca l'infinito nei suoi limiti[116].

The art of gesture makes us aware of the body, its transparency, lightness and gravity.
A body that welcomes and forms the declinations of movement through encounters and experiences. A body that stimulates the cognitive capacity to ask questions and develop answers. A craft body that searches for the infinite in its limits.

To understand his approach to Dante and the mode of work he undertook, it seems necessary to recall some of the stages of his training. In addition to classical dance, oriental practices, yoga and Aikido techniques, which he learned and perfected in Japan, fundamental is his contact with various contemporary dance styles that influenced dance in Italy between the 1970s and 1980s, such as those of Merce Cunningham (1919-2009), who was also strongly influenced by Zen Buddhist and I'ching oriental practices. Cunningham applied a casual, combinatorial approach to postmodern dance, isolating the various parts of the body, and devising choreographies independent of music and surroundings. The last choreographer central to Sieni's training is Steve Paxton (1939-2024), the master of "walking" and contact improvisation (along with Nancy Stark Smith), who offers a new

coreografico, Spoleto, Editoria&Spettacolo, 2015.We also recommend reading the entry *Virgilio Sieni*, edited by Rossella Mazzaglia, in A.M.At.I.

[114] We recommend an overall view of the artist's official website and the projects he directs at: https://www.virgiliosieni.it/ (last accessed 23/05/2025).

[115] Published works by the artist or in which he actively participated in the writing with his own materials and interventions are: VIRGILIO SIENI, *Il fiato della follia*, in ALESSANDRO PONTREMOLI (a cura di), *Drammaturgia della danza*, Milano, Euresis, 1997, pp. 123-149; VIRGILIO SIENI, *Manifesto per una giovane rivoluzione*, Firenze, Maschietto, 2007; VIRGILIO SIENI, *La natura delle cose*, Firenze, Maschietto, 2008; VIRGILIO SIENI, *La sospensione del gesto. Opere 2005-2008*, Firenze, Maschietto, 2008; VIRGILIO SIENI, *Osso*, Firenze, Maschietto, 2008; VIRGILIO SIENI, *La trasmissione del gesto*, Firenze, Maschietto, 2009; VIRGILIO SIENI (a cura di), *Commedia del corpo e della luce. Interrogazioni alle vertebre*, Firenze, Maschietto, 2009; FRANCESCA PEDRONI (a cura di), *Dialogo, Emio Greco e Virgilio Sieni*, Pontedera, Artout-Maschietto Editore, 2009; VIRGILIO SIENI, *Tristi Tropici*, Firenze, Maschietto, 2010; VIRGILIO SIENI, *Dignità del gesto. L'Oro di Scampia*, Firenze, Maschietto, 2010; MATTIA PALMA, ARIANNA VAIRO, VIRGILIO SIENI (a cura di), *Dizionario minimo del gesto. Corpo, movimento, comunità nella danza di Virgilio Sieni*, Milano, Fondazione Giacomo Feltrinelli, 2019; VITO DI BERNARDI, *Ossatura. Mimmo Cuticchio e Virgilio Sieni: marionette e danza in «Nudità»*, Roma, Bulzoni, 2020; VIRGILIO SIENI, *Progettare scalzi. Il corpo come laboratorio del gesto e dell'abitare*, a cura di Delfina Stella, Firenze, Maschietto, 2021.

[116] VIRGILIO SIENI, *Progettare scalzi. Il corpo come laboratorio del gesto e dell'abitare*, cit., p. 17.

look at the body and in its possibilities, working on the gravity of bodies, listening to community, and the possibilities of everyday movement within staging. Finally, Alwin Nikolais (1910-1993), promoter of abstract, totalizing and multimedia dance-theatre, where the the concepts of movement and motion, that is the quality of movement, are differentiated and an objective, universal value of movement in space is sought[117]. These elements would later be enriched and implemented with the enhancement of subjectivity and inner reality by his student, Carolyn Carlson (1943), the artist of visual poetry, who engaged in many fruitful tours and collaborations in Italy[118].

Sieni has been an active part of the Italian Art Dance movement at different stages of his career, and still is. His direct collaboration and friendship with exponents of Nuovo Teatro and his focus on body art performances and action painting are also particularly significant[119]. In 1989, he was called by Federico Tiezzi to the Teatro Fabbricone in Prato (FI) as a consultant to support the choreographic actions of the actors in training for the show *Commedia dell'Inferno*. Here Sieni first met artists and scholars eager to confront Dante from a performative perspective[120]. His consultancy came in the wake of previous works with the same company[121], refining the relationship of understanding and collaboration between the artists and subsequently marking Sieni's transition from

[117] See FRANCESCA PEDRONI, *Drammaturgia dell'astratto: un percorso del '900 da Alwin Nikolais ai Sosta Palmizi*, in ALESSANDRO PONTREMOLI (a cura di), *Drammaturgia della danza*, cit., pp. 51-73; VITO DI BERNARDI, *Corpi sospesi e risonanti. Su Virgilio Sieni*, in VITO DI BERNARDI, *Cosa può la danza. Saggio sul corpo*, cit., pp. 137-138; ROSSELLA MAZZAGLIA, *Virgilio Sieni. Archeologia di un pensiero coreografico*, cit.; ELENA RANDI, *Il corpo pensato. Teorie della danza nel Novecento*, cit., pp. 45-48.

[118] We would like to recall here how, from Carlson's long presence in Italy, especially through the formation of the Teatrodanza project at the Teatro La Fenice in Venice (1980-1984), we owe the choreographer's great impulse to contemporary dance in Italy, with the consequent formation of the Sosta Palmizi company. Present in the original lineup, Carlson's students and heirs to her lesson are Michele Abbondanza of the Abbondanza Bertoni and the aforementioned Roberto Castello of the Aldes. Michele Abbondanza, together with Antonella Bertoni, also later creates a short Dante-inspired piece. The video-dance work on Canto V of *Inferno* follows a more articulated project funded by the Region of Lombardy and selected for several international video-dance Festivals. *'l vento come fa ci tace* sees the direction of Marco Civinelli, choreography by Michele Abbondanza and Antonella Bertoni, with also Tommaso Monza (produced by Regione Lombardia - Istruzione, Formazione, Lavoro; PerformingArts; ART4; Limina) made in 2008 in the evocative *setting of* the 31st floor of Palazzo Pirelli, unfolds in 16 minutes among light, glass and metal, dominating the skies of Milan. See *Michele Abbondanza and Antonella Bertone dance Dante on the top floor of Palazzo Pirelli*, press release in "Corriere del Web," Thursday, July 17, 2008, available at: https://ilcorrieredelweb.blogspot.com/2008/07/danza-michele-abbondanza-e-antonella.html (lasta ccessed 25/05/2025). A video of the performance, along with an interview conducted by Attilio Scarpellini, can be viewed at: https://www.tbqvoices.com/attilio-scarpellini-incontra-michele-abbondanza-e-antonella-bertoni/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAAR1qHL52GAkJqpzN4iggsaJhFN4h-tUvnyyShkR_Y9kWEvWJaW2IgsWVfk0_aem_NKRs1CyKsqgfuqUKbVaJUQ (lasta accessed 25/05/2025).

[119] See ROSSELLA MAZZAGLIA, *Virgilio Sieni. Archeologia di un pensiero coreografico*, cit., pp. 36-37.

[120] See ANDREA DELLAI, *COMMEDIA DELL'INFERNO: travestimento teatrale di Edoardo Sanguineti tradotto in scena da I Magazzini*, cit., p. 201.

[121] The first collaboration between Virgilio Sieni and the Lombardi-Tiezzi Company was in the show *Vita immaginaria di Paolo Uccello* in 1985 in Venice and later in the show *Artaud* in 1987 in Kassel (DE), with choreography created by Sieni, as is also reported on the Lombardi-Tiezzi Company website.

dancer to choreographer and company director, as well as offering him also an approach toward the practices of anthroposophy, *Gestalt* and Rudolf Steiner's eurythmy[122].

Necessary in this sense is to point out his presence in the already mentioned 2008 Avignon Festival billboard with the show he performed with his father Fosco, *Osso* (*Figure 244*). With Greco and Scholten of ICK, he wrote about and questioned the role of contemporary dance and its transmission. Following Greco and Scholten's residency with the show *Purgatorio* at Cango in 2008, it is safe to assume that the Dantean seed has worked its way into Sieni's choreographic practice through a long gestation.

As Rossella Mazzaglia observes, Sieni's production is prompted by the international artistic context, but also relevantly by his friendship and frequentation with scholars and philosophers who become interlocutors and sometimes dramaturgs of his productions. For example, dear to Sieni's heart is the thought of Georges Didi-Huberman's fireflies, the small entities that can remind our blind contemporaneity of the beauty and importance of fragility, of the fleetingness of the moment to be cherished and shared, as well as the political significance of small gestures of sharing[123]. A central figure for Sieni's mature thought and his interlocutor in dialogues and texts is the philosopher Giorgio Agamben, with whom he has frequent exchanges: «The collaboration with Agamben is direct; it concerns the drafting of the dramaturgical notes of certain choreographies and the theoretical confrontation, vital in some cases in the identification of the themes of the performances»[124].

The approach to Dante, then, occurs in stages, as Sieni's stage practice proceeds by constant incorporation of signs and studies with patient rigour. In the performance *SPRING EXERCISES* (2013), the artist takes his cue from a lecture given on Oct. 6, 1951, at the Bühlerhöhe by Martin Heidegger, entitled *"...dichterisch wohnet der Mensch..."* [*Poetically inhabits man, a reflection on a late poem by Hölderlin*][125]. The performance moves from an interrogation of disappeared, crushed

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[122] Mazzaglia reports in her teatrography her participation in a *Globe Theatre* performance with the Rudolf Steiner Schule in Bielefeld, Germany in 1990, the year the Lombardi-Tiezzi Company studied *Paradiso*, a performance in which references to the philosopher and artist Steiner are fully active, see ROSSELLA MAZZAGLIA, *Virgilio Sieni. Archeologia di un pensiero coreografico*, cit., p. 327.

[123] GEORGES DIDI-HUBERMAN, *Come le lucciole*, Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 2010 [ed. or. *Survivance des lucioles*, Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit, 2009].

[124] «La collaborazione con Agamben è diretta; concerne la stesura delle note drammaturgiche di determinate coreografie e il confronto teorico, vitale in alcuni casi nell'individuazione dei temi degli spettacoli», ROSSELLA MAZZAGLIA, *The Dance of the Fireflies. Orality and transmission in the work of Virgilio Sieni*, cit., p. 93, note 2. See also GIORGIO AGAMBEN, *Che cos'è il contemporaneo?*, cit.

[125] MARTIN HEIDEGGER, *Saggi e discorsi*, a cura e traduzione di Gianni Vattimo, Milano, Mursia, 2019 [1980[1]], pp. 125-138; MARTIN HEIDEGGER, *Vorträge und Aufsätze (1936-1953)*, in MARTIN HEIDEGGER, *Gesamtausgabe. 1. Abteilung Veröffentlichte Schriften 1910-1976*, Hrsg. von Friedrich-Wilhelm v. Herrmann, Band 7, Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klosermann, 2000. See MARTIN HEIDEGGER, *(1946) 'A che i poeti?' in Martin Heidegger*, in MARTIN HEIDEGGER, *Holzwege: Sentieri erranti nella selva*, Bompiani, Mondadori 2002, pp. 269-378; MARTIN HEIDEGGER, *La poesia di Hölderlin*, tradizione italiana di Leonardo Amoroso, Adelphi, Milano 1988; MARTA VERO, *Superamento del nazionalismo. Heidegger e Szondi critici della prima lettera di Hölderlin a Böhlendorff*, in «Aesthetica Preprint», n. 118 settembre-

communities, starting precisely with the creation of a small community of dancers on stage. In the search for a shared gesture that can be perceived as home, a space connoted by proximity is created, intercepting through this new language the density of the void. The dancers on stage are beggars, castaways, simply nomads. Communities are constantly created, crumbled and recomposed, through a scanning of time that delimits their sixty stations with cello accompaniment. Worked in semi-darkness, with little light and punctuated by eternal change, this work on the dancers' bodies lays the groundwork for future work on Dante[126].

In 2014, in Brussels, Sieni presented the choreographic project *Vita Nova. 12 dances on the body, gesture and color*, leading a workshop of the gaze and gesture related to the art exhibition *Pittura senese. Ars narrandi in Gothic Europe*, at BOZAR, Centre for Fine Arts, featuring works from the Pinacoteca Nazionale di Siena[127] (*Figure 245*). A performative action is planned in each room of the museum, interpreted by professional dancers from the company and participants in the workshop curated by the choreographer according to the Academy's modalities on the art of gesture[128]:

Sieni proposes a reflection on the biological cycle of the human body, in which the life cycle coincides with that of painting, with its recurrent subjects and themes. [...] animated by bodies of all ages, compelled to pass a test, to sound the limits of their capacities, as habitual postures reflect a specific way of being-in-the-world[129].

The project, included within the framework of the Italian Semester of the Presidency of the European Union, again forms and produces an entirely new collectivity within the context of art, taking its cue from the canvases on display to create a dialogue between contemporary gestures and the standardized gestures of medieval prayer found in the Catholic liturgy. As in the lessons of Nikolais and Wilson, the gestures are not illustrative, nor is the dynamic between works of art and dancers (both professionals and amateurs) meant to be narrative, or didactic, but rather to create a tension and a flow of energy between works, using the image (in this case not a reproduction, but the work of art itself) as a *medium*; in Sieni's case to build a conversation between epochs, between communities convened in a designated place (first the church, now secularly the museum):

They don't explain the paintings, or create *tableaux vivants*, but give a physical representation of how life is lived. The common ground is the metamorphosis that takes place in the painting from Siena: the divine presentation, which descends

dicembre, 2021, pp. 27-44; MARCO CARMELLO, *Heidegger come lettore. Note sulla polemica con Emil Staiger riguardo all'arte dell'interpretazione*, in «Comparatismi», n. 6, 2021, pp. 288-307. Moreover, it is not surprising that philosopher Giorgio Agamben has recently published a text on this topic: GIORGIO AGAMBEN, *La follia di Hölderlin. Cronaca di una follia abitante (1806-1843)*, Torino, Einaudi, 2021.

[126] See ROSSELLA MAZZAGLIA, *Virgilio Sieni. Archeologia di un pensiero coreografico*, cit., pp. 259-261.

[127] VIRGILIO SIENI, *Vita Nova. Bozar/Brussels. 12 dances on the body, the gesture and color*, Firenze, Maschietto, 2014.

[128] See GAIA GERMANÀ, *In ascolto, verso un Atlante del bianco. Nuovi danzatori sulle scene dello spettacolo contemporaneo*, in «Danza e Ricerca», a. IV, n. 1, 2012, pp. 121-152; ELISA GUZZO, *Vivere la danza, danzare la vita. Danze partecipate, danze esposte*, in «Danza e Ricerca. Laboratorio di Studi, Scritture, Visioni», vol. 10, 2018, pp. 371-395.

[129] STEFANIA DI PAOLO, *Memories are bodies*, in VIRGILIO SIENI, *Vita Nova. Bozar/Brussels. 12 dances on the body, the gesture and color*, cit., p. 8.

from the heavenly throne to create earthly representations of flesh and blood people. Here we see humanity: vulnerable, loving, mortal[130].

From this long incubation emerges the first Dante performance. *Divina Commedia – Ballo 1265* marks a milestone in the choreographer's long personal association with the Dante theme, following a request from the committee for the 2015 centennial celebrations. In the Salone dei Cinquecento in Florence, a choreographic action takes place in which twelve professional dancers move together with one hundred and fifty amateurs of different ages, abilities and presences in the space, to create a new way of civically approaching Dante's tercets. The audience sits along the sides of the perimeter of the Hall, the scene unfolding among them, bordered in turn by a rectangular perimeter of performers on top of sheets and blankets. Music composed for the performance by Michele Rabbia is performed live by the artist (*Figures 246-247*):

Le tre Cantiche dantesche *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* e *Paradiso* diventano le stazioni di un viaggio iniziatico scandito dalla misura della terzina dantesca dispersa nelle articolazioni del corpo. Il Salone dei Cinquecento si trasforma in una selva umana di oltre cento interpreti. Danzatori e cittadini di ogni età – in cammino tra le epoche con passo dolente, sospeso e rivelatore – tracciano un itinerario spirituale in cui la danza spoglia l'uomo dalla materia vestendolo di forma[131].

Dante's three Cantiche *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* become the stations of an initiatory journey marked by the measure of Dante's triplet dispersed in the body's articulations. The Salone dei Cinquecento is transformed into a human forest of more than 100 performers. Dancers and citizens of all ages - walking between the ages with sorrowful, suspended and revelatory steps - trace a spiritual itinerary in which dance strips man of matter by dressing him in form.

Inferno begins with the human wilderness: the one hundred and fifty performers are all lying or sitting on the ground, on clothes, blankets and rugs. They all wear comfortable clothing and shoes of different colours, creating a particularly vivid human landscape[132]. At the sound of the gong, they begin to get up and compose themselves, carrying their blankets and clothes on their hands or shoulders. They all arrange themselves in a large cluster at one side of the room and, at a given moment, begin to create banks punctuated time by time by a counting voice-over: it is Sieni himself who indicates for the first canticle sixty choreographic actions for thirty-three "banks"[133], that is, the action punctuated in time and space, relentless, to cross the delimited area from one side to the other delimited by the bodies, giving the idea of the infernal machine, the place of carnal bestiality. Amid this mass of bodies moving relentlessly, like water on a bounded surface, a first figure on all fours

[130] PAUL DUJARDIN, *Staged moments*, in VIRGILIO SIENI, *Vita Nova. Bozar/Brussels. 12 dances on the body, the gesture and color*, cit., p. 5. See anche NATALIA GOZZANO, *Vedere con il corpo. Spunti sull'apporto del neurocognitivismo all'insegnamento della storia dell'arte nell'Accademia nazionale di danza*, in «Recherche en danse», n. 5 (*Ramifications. Méthodologies dans les études en danse (France-Italie)*, sous la direction de Federica Fratagnoli, Marina Nordera, Patrizia Veroli), 2016, open access.

[131] The above is presented in the performance's file on the Compagnia Virgilio Sieni website under *Divina Commedia - Ballo 1265*. The performance was filmed and is currently available within the RAIPlay portal: https://www.raiplay.it/programmi/divinacommediaballo1265 (last accessed 25/05/2025).

[132] This particular vision of a colourful mass of bodies that then shifts, always maintaining its volume on the scene, is also vaguely reminiscent of the setting of some scenes from Romeo Castellucci's *Inferno.*

[133] Sieni himself highlights these directorial notes in the introduction to *Divina Commedia - Ballo 1265* performance.

stands out, constantly in danger of being trampled. Then, dancers also come forward, who, from time to time, in the free space left by the mass, begin to weave episodes of contact and exercises of tactility typical of Sieni's academy.

At the thirty-third bank, the dancers seated along the perimeter also crawl into the mass, and the now assembled ensemble runs to the opposite bank and then crawls back again in the same direction. From here, moments of contact and ascending development are offered, with some dancers raising their arms and others grasping bodies for display, thus finding a new verticality in the mass, which should hypothetically find itself at last «to see again the stars»[134]. The only figure remaining in the room, alone, is the man, reminiscent of the appearance of Sieni, who had confronted the mass for the duration of the action, also performing the banks outward and returning, on all four at his own pace.

In *Purgatorio*, the perimeter of the stage is crossed by the dancers to go and collect the new props that will connote the second *cantica*: the "trovarobato," random and discarded objects (*Figure 248*). Underscoring this change is Michele Rabbia's soundscape, woven of sounds with repeated echoes, converging and refracting like waves, those of the initial panorama that stands before the poet Dante's eyes as he emerges from the infernal cavity, on the quiet beach of Antipurgatory[135]. Back on the stage, the dancers, divided into fifteen groups, begin to build agglomerations, creating huts and shelters where they give place and space to a new way of being together: with the laborious and precise scanning of time, the moments of construction are interspersed with rituals, such as small "games" and collective applause, to pay homage and support the action in progress. With each repetition, the pace is increased and urged, recalling the Poet's increasing fatigue in climbing the sacred mountain, even recalling, at times, the crackling of a fire or the sound of rain. In this canticle, the humanitarian value of mutual aid, community, and sharing inherent in prayer is re-proposed even in brief phonatory sequences, which are nothing but complete and renewed extrinsications of the free and joy-filled potentialities of the souls of *Purgatorio*. The community finally comes together, again one and to the sound of screeching cymbals, again flaunts its house objects and thus exits the stage.

Paradiso opens again on the "dancer-*alter* Sieni" alone in the middle of the stage. To the hypnotic sound produced by the strings urged by the musician Rabbia, all the dancers begin to return to the stage, arranged in two opposing double ranks. As Sieni declares, *Paradiso* is a single gesture explored in multiple forms, the encounter in tactility, the choreography based on interlocking, absorption, crossing, and horizontality. In Dante's words, the play of mirroring and full co-responsibility between creator and creature, work and artist, non-duality between body and mind:

[134] *If*. XXXIV, v. 139.
[135] See *Pg*. I.

«There is another kind of resonance, which has to do with the encounter between people. It comes back to the concept of tactile space. What is tactile space if not that space in which people are in continuous resonance with each other? As if a third thing is created: not just me and the other, but the space that encompasses us, which manifests itself only if we move about the other»[136].

The two rows converge in a dance toward the centre, in an oceanic eternal return of elements that recall the respect of bodies, the grace of touch, the gentleness of embrace and welcoming caress. Thanks to the choice of arranging the dancers in two rows facing each other, the audience can see in slow-motion the full range of movements that precede and follow a given gesture, replayed from different angles in the myriads of possible facets, as many as the one hundred and fifty performers who stage it.

Even in terms of the composed soundscape, this is the only *cantica* of the three to offer music not made of noise, but characterized by sound, pitch and tonality, unlike the detached rhythm and atmospheric beat of the previous two. Returning to be a great mass, a new and renewed whole, from the back the dancers start out divided into two parallel rows to create a human corridor that runs across the stage from one bank to the other. Here, facing the audience, they bow respectfully.

After this first performance, through other participatory action projects aimed at citizens, Sieni refines his own vision of Dante's *Commedia*. In fact, the artist reflects on his own relationship with Dante's text, which since his youth he has «mumbled»[137] in the countryside together with the sounds of Tuscan nature, making the first canto of the *Inferno* an indispensable text in teaching the excavation in the parcelling and vision of the gesture either with ordinary citizens, in the various workshops in Florence, in the Accademia del Gesto (2007), and in various other cities, or with professionals[138]. Sieni, in interviews and dialogues, carried out during the long time of pandemic, describes his way of proceeding in approaching Dante's work: the metaphor of Dante's dark forest, as well as of the earthly paradise, offers an interesting horizon from which to imagine Dante and bring him closer to

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[136] «Esiste un altro tipo di risonanza, che ha a che fare con l'incontro tra le persone. Si torna al concetto di spazio tattile. Che cos'è lo spazio tattile se non quello spazio in cui le persone sono in continua risonanza l'una con l'altra? Come se si creasse una terza cosa: non soltanto io e l'altro, ma lo spazio che ci comprende, che si manifesta solo se ci muoviamo in riferimento all'altro», VIRGILIO SIENI (a cura di), *Dizionario minimo del gesto. Corpo, movimento, comunità nella danza di Virgilio Sieni*, cit., p. 117.

[137] «mugugnato», below are some terms used by the artist, released during the lecture *Corpo, gesto, tattilità* together with Sabrina Tosi Cambini, for the webinar series *Il Corpo Espressivo. Performatività, Embodiment, Neuroscienze* (26/11/2021, online at the Teams platform of the NEUROSCIENCE & HUMANITIES LAB, Centre for Advanced Studies in Cognitive Neuroscience & the Humanities at the University of Parma), available online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YhW0sGKHTI0&ab_channel=Neuroscience%26Humanities (last accessed 23/05/2025) and in the lecture *Dante e il corpo danzante* with Renzo Guardenti and Caterina Pagnini in the Conference organized by the SAGAS Department of the University of Florence, *Dante Storie Immagini e Paesaggi* (9-13/11/2020), available online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S_TMTosOSBw&ab_channel=SagasUniFi (last accessed 23/05/2025).

[138] See VIRGILIO SIENI, *La città nuova. Elementi, documenti e riflessioni per una pratica artistica sul corpo e il territorio*, Firenze, Maschietto, 2016.

our reality: How did Dante walk? How many encounters did he have and how many presences did he feel in the *Comedy*.

Sieni focus his works on the concepts of presence, trace and encounter, all reflecting Walter Benjamin's concept of aura: «Aura is the manifestation of a distance, however close it may be»[139]. For the choreographer, movement originates by creating a listening and soliciting perception of the space around us, a space connoted by tactility, that is, the ability to imagine and perceive all that the spatial context might be, empty as well as full of particles, ghosts, dense: «a whole community inhabiting that space. The body is never alone»[140].

Picking up on Sieni's thoughts, to give voice to his way of composing and managing work with professionals and amateurs, it is clear that in his dance he aims at constructing an atlas where he can insert and map not only a gesture, but an attitude toward movement, which confronts dancers like all people with the need to question their own ability to carry forward memories of places, of encounters, which are part of everyone, and he does so by inserting, for example, the central element of walking in *Divina Commedia-Ballo 1265.* Walking is in fact that human gesture, which each subject performs automatically, and in which he or she gives proof of his or her strength to counter gravity, proceeding and carrying his or her own weight in space, producing memory and thus a layering of the experience of the individual within a larger context, which passes through him or her, and becomes part of a history, of a collectivity:

Mi sono reso conto che la qualità della danza si gioca necessariamente attraverso un percorso di conoscenza totale: l'attenzione verso l'energia, le forze interne e la dinamicità delle articolazioni non può essere separata dalla coscienza delle emozioni che nascono in rapporto a un tema o a un personaggio. La necessità della definizione, del dettaglio, dell'interstizio mi appartiene profondamente, ma sento il bisogno di raggiungerla attraverso una diversa condizione interiore: sono convinto che la tecnica non possa svilupparsi a fondo se rimane separata dall'elemento emotivo[141].

I have come to realize that the quality of dance necessarily plays itself out through a path of total knowledge: the focus on energy, internal forces and the dynamism of articulations cannot be separated from the awareness of the emotions that arise in relation to a theme or character. The need for definition, for detail, for the interstice belongs to me deeply, but I feel the need to achieve it through a different inner condition: I am convinced that technique cannot develop thoroughly if it remains separated from the emotional element.

Through these exercises, which are very simple at the start and acquire another aspect each time, Sieni weaves the pedantic exercise on Dante's triplet: starting from the numerical matrix that is extrinsic in the graphic hendecasyllable and in the vibration that the pronounced verse produces in the body, Sieni begins to abstract the numerical component into gestures and choreographic

[139] «L'aura è il manifestarsi di una lontananza, per quanto vicina essa sia», WALTER BENJAMIN, *Charles Baudelaire. Un poeta lirico nell'età del capitalismo avanzato*, a cura di G. Agamben, B. Chitussi e C. Härle, Vicenza, Neri Pozza, 2012, p. 25.
[140] Elements extracted from the dialogue with the choreographer during the *Corpo, gesto, tattilità* conference together with Sabrina Tosi Cambini.
[141] Quoted by Virgilio Sieni in ANDREA NANNI (a cura di), *Anatomia della fiaba. Virgilio Sieni tra teatro e danza*, cit., p. 32.

sequences, thus arriving at giving it a nonverbal, new form through the action of the body. The intense work done by the different listening bodies, open to a new form, was condensed into hours and hours of work and workshops that led to the creation of *Paradiso*[142], a performance that was born precisely in the difficult period of the Covid-19 pandemic and takes shape according to the new possibilities of work and contact thought up by the artist: «Dante's Paradiso gives us a glimpse of the displacements necessary for man to survive through the practice of love and friendship. Thus, Dante identifies going toward the other as a gesture of survival»[143].

The performance, promoted and proposed within the playbill for the 2021 Florentine Dante Celebrations, before debuting on stage at the Politeama Theatre in Naples on Sept. 25, 2021, has seen several start-up steps within the shared practices with citizen volunteers. First five choral actions in five different squares in Florence titled *Agorà_Paradiso – Ballo 1321* (June 21-25, 2021)[144] (*Figures 249-250*), then a *preview* as a shared rite in Prato, at the Centro per l'arte contemporanea Luigi Pecci's open-air theatre (July 23, 2021), *PARADISE NOW#PRATO*, with «the construction of a garden through a continuous exchange of gestures and plants. A research process on new forms of closeness with nature and with others»[145]. Designed to be a moment of new closeness, of action that searches for a different quality of attention, one that transcends notions of species, *Paradiso* is an exercise in crossing the forest, the forest of the senses, no longer hellish but heavenly. In this case, the preparatory practices and actions are designed to support a new rapprochement between people, a new way of inhabiting after months, years, of confinement and solitude, once again trying to work on the *polis*, through public calls that have much in common with the practices of the Teatro delle Albe. The actual performance on this second date has only the company's dancers as performers.

The stage opens onto a clear, black backdrop. The action begins with the faint manifestation of two rows of parallel projectors in the background, from which a gentle, soft mist of water pours out, revealing below a forest, a flourishing garden made up of countless potted plants from tall, spindly palms to fleshy pothos. Five bare-chested dancers appear, slowly walking towards the proscenium in a constant state of resonance of bodies that leads them to move organically as a group, each maintaining their individuality and quality of movement (*Figures 251-252-253*). The exercise

[142] Within the company's website, one can find information about the show *Paradiso* and the video trailer for it. The writer saw the show at the Politeama Theater in Naples on September 25, 2021.
[143] «Il Paradiso dantesco ci lascia intravedere gli spostamenti necessari all'uomo per sopravvivere attraverso la pratica dell'amore e dell'amicizia. Così Dante individua nell'andare verso l'altro il gesto della sopravvivenza», these self-produced captions by the Virgilio Sieni Company are available and help to better understand the intention with which the whole process of constructing the final performance was articulated over time and different practices, at: http://www.virgiliosieni.it/gibellina-paradise-nowgibellina/ (last accessed 23/05/2025).
[144] See the section dedicated to this project on the company's official website.
[145] «la costruzione di un giardino attraverso un continuo scambiarsi gesti e piante. Un processo di ricerca su nuove forme di vicinanza con la natura e con gli altri», see the Pecci Centre page: https://centropecci.it/en/events/paradise-now-prato_1 (last accessed 23/05/2025).

on gesture and crossing proposed is based on the careful study of manipulation, which Sieni himself describes thus:

L'oggetto, come può essere un foglio di carta, una pianta, un libro, è originariamente lì, presente. In fase di prova, viene prima manipolato e usato per imparare il movimento, dunque viene tolto, e al suo posto viene messa in campo la memoria del corpo, che porterà l'interprete a fare un movimento qualitativamente diverso dal precedente, ma che ne terrà traccia, diventando una nuova possibilità di movimento insperata e mai provata prima. La parola dantesca come fonte ispiratrice dello spettacolo è stata usata come l'oggetto poc'anzi descritto: pur non essendo presente, ne rimane traccia[146].

The object, which may be a sheet of paper, a plant, or a book, is originally there, present. In rehearsal, it is first manipulated and used to learn movement, therefore it is taken away, and in its place the memory of the body is brought into play, which will lead the performer to make a movement that is qualitatively different from the previous one, but which will keep track of it, becoming a new possibility of movement unhoped for and never tried before. Dante's word as the inspirational source of the performance was used like the object just described: although it is not present, a trace of it remains.

Through breath, tactility and interrelation, a complex dynamic, a sensory interconnection, is created between dancers and nature. The imperceptible movement of the plants is associated with the constant, continuous motion of the dancers, always attentive to each other, in resonance, in an incessant shift of weight and support, creating a field of forces, waves on the stage, which provide for the need for mirroring and connecting between dancers and dancers and plants, straining the joint "bubbles," arriving at poses stretched to the limit (sometimes similar to break dance, others recalling particular postures of martial practices) and then abandoned, again relaxing the structure, still recalling the impermanence of puppet movement[147]. Concatenated pulses and protracted suspensions along with plant manipulation go to bring the plants from the back toward the proscenium, making the garden that was distant, close, and almost olfactorily perceptible to the audience, as if recalling Dante's passage:

> […] Le cose tutte quante
> hanno ordine tra loro, e questo è forma
> che l'universo a Dio fa simigliante[148].

A circular, undulating, pulsating movement comes from the choreographic action of the dancers, who meanwhile also engage in running in circles, making the movements frenetic and pressing. The memory of celestial wheels, the movement inherent in the motionless mobility of the

[146] «La parola ti rammenta il gesto e il gesto ti rammenta la parola, una furbata!»/«The word reminds you of the gesture and the gesture reminds you of the word, a sly one!», See *Corpo, gesto, tattilità*, cit.
[147] See *Dante e il corpo danzante* with Renzo Guardenti and Caterina Pagnini, cit. This particular elaboration on the dancer's body and the puppet's body is made after the development and staging of the show *Nudità* (2018), where Sieni dialogues with a puppet by Mimmo Cuticchio, a figure-theatre director. Analysis of the performance and this encounter between two Masters of Art is offered by the text VITO DI BERNARDI, *Ossatura. Mimmo Cuticchio e Virgilio Sieni: marionette e danza in «Nudità»*, Roma, Bulzoni, 2020. See also GABRIELE BRANDSTETTER, GERKO EGERT, SABINE ZUBARIK (a cura di), *Touching and Being Touched: Kinesthesia and Empathy in Dance and Movement*, Berlin-Boston, De Gruyter, 2013, pp. 211-212; SUSANNE FRANCO, MARINA NORDERA (a cura di), *Ricordanze: memoria in movimento e coreografie della storia*, Torino, Utet, 2010.
[148] *Pd*. I, vv. 103-105.

whole that together binds and holds, is recalled kinetically. Again, in the interviews he has given, Sieni tries to imagine Dante's posture, in life as well as in his otherworldly journey, and he perceives it as something "unearthly," again comparing it to the puppet, which can maintain its posture in making contact with the ground at a single point, where its weight does not weigh down on its structure. This is how he imagines Dante, vertical, in a constant quest that is transmuted in his striding through space, but urged on by the horizontal solids, which trigger turns and changes in the limbs. The vertical planes, the "bubbles" of the joints, are used plastically by the dancers to give rise to changes to the forces that converge weight and gravity downward into the whirlwind. In the show, Sieni uses elements of reflection and movement taken from his confrontation with puppetry on stage, in *Nudità* (2018), together with figure theatre artist Mimmo Cuticchio, extruding his interest in volume, density and weight.

The perfect symbiosis between bodies and space is further emphasized by the lighting design, which creates shadows and lets the bodies (of the dancers, as well as of the biome) appear softly throughout the performance. The music, persistent and dreamlike, reverberates in the bodies and along the surfaces, gives voice to the mute presence of plants, and finally articulates in the voice, an internal instrument, of the dancers, to generate a chord not based on harmony, disjointed as well, creating a new sense of participatory sensory resonance. In the finale, the light circumscribes the circular perimeter formed by the dancers, standing in the middle of the stage, surrounded by many plants, culminating in a point that encloses everything, in a final pulsating glow.

In this work, Sieni reflects on the concept of *Paradiso*, on the very relationship between humanity and the Earth system, emphasising the quality of our living and affecting the planet, stating, «The body does not describe, it must be listened to. We must glimpse in us the inexhaustibility of our possibilities»[149]. This statement by the artist can subsist on stage through a performance laden with colours and shapes that brings back an unusual *Paradiso*, relying once again on the exercise of gesture with an object: «It is not boring to do the same exercise, it is boring to think it is the same exercise. We are always moving and changing. In this we perceive the sense of the infinite»[150].

Sieni's response, then, to the isolation and difficulty of approaching Dante's text through the language of dance is a humble and disciplined return, with renewed eyes and renewed intention, to gesture, contact and tactility, through a gesture that makes the soul resonate with the universe once again.

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[149] «Il corpo non descrive, va ascoltato. Dobbiamo scorgere in noi l'inesauribilità delle nostre possibilità», see *Corpo, gesto, tattilità*, cit.

[150] «Non è noioso fare lo stesso esercizio, è noioso pensare che sia lo stesso esercizio. Noi ci muoviamo e cambiamo sempre. In questo percepiamo il senso dell'infinito», See *Dante e il corpo danzante* with Renzo Guardenti and Caterina Pagnini, cit.

5.3. The German season: the Ballett Dortmund

As noted above, Germany, and more generally all German-speaking countries, have a long history of Dante reception that also includes its spectacular variant. Referring to more detailed essays fundamental to Dante's contemporary theatrical reception in this area[151], one can appreciate artists who have hosted or personally staged Dante's *Commedia* as well as performances openly referring to it. Even in the most recent studies published[152], however, there is no mention of the case study that we intend to examine here: a case study that sought to investigate the *Divine Comedy* in its entirety with the codes of ballet. If there is no lack of precedents, such as the case of the recent contemporary dance trilogy, already indicated by Fratini in his study, realised for the Ruhrtriennale Festival der Künste by choreographer Richard Siegal between 2015 and 2017, resulting in an overall performance that grouped together the three versions dedicated to the three canticles (*Three Stages: Model + In Medias Res + El Dorado*)[153], perhaps it is precisely the territorial division of Germany into federated *Bundesländern* that sometimes contributes to the diversification of production processes between the different cities and provinces, sometimes making even important productions less well-known.

This is the case with Ballett Dortmund, which had also hosted ICK Amsterdam in residence with *Double Point: Hell* in 2004. The year of the artistic residency did not constitute a moment of real contact between the Dutch company and the choreographer, who subsequently decided to stage a trilogy of dances dedicated to the *Commedia*, but the spatial concomitance and the receptive capacity of the ample Ballett Dortmund company to set up a training course for its classical dancers

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[151] See THEODOR OSTERMANN, *Dante in Deutschland. Bibliographie der deutschen Dante-Literatur (1416-1929)*, cit.; PETER KUON, *lo mio maestro e 'l mio autore: Die produktive Rezeption der Divina Commedia in der Erzählliteratur der Moderne*, cit.; EVA HÖLTER, *"Der Dichter der Hölle und des Exils". Historische und systematische Profile der deutschsprachigen Dante-Rezeption*, cit.; RITA UNFER LUKOSCHIK, *Rassegna della Ricezione di Dante in area linguistica tedesca*, in «*Dante: Rivista internazionale di studi su Dante Alighieri*», cit.; CHRISTINE MUNDT-ESPÍN, *Von „pulp" bis „postdramatisch": Dante on stage 2008*, in KLAUS LEY (Herausgeber), *Dante Alighieri und sein Werk in Literatur, Musik und Kunst bis zur Postmoderne*, Tübingen, Narr Francke Attempto, 2010, pp. 16-17; DAGMAR REICHARDT, *750 anni dalla nascita di Dante Alighieri e oltre. Zone di contatto poetico e intersezionalità ibrida nelle traduzioni germanofone e neerlandesi della Divina Commedia*, in VIVIANE DESVRIÉSÈRE, MARINA GEAT (sous la direction de), *L'Interculturel: quels défis et probleématiques aux niveaux européen et international?*, Roma, Roma TrE-Press, 2020, pp. 247-266; TABEA KRETSCHMANN, *»Höllenmaschine/Wunschapparat«: Analysen ausgewählter Neubearbeitungen von Dantes Divina Commedia*, cit., pp. 273-276; ROBERTO FRATINI, *Quasi una catabasi. La Divina Commedia nella danza degli ultimi 200 anni. Parte I*, cit.; ROBERTO FRATINI, *Quasi una catabasi. La Divina Commedia nella danza degli ultimi 200 anni. Parte II*, cit.; ROBERTO FRATINI, *Inferni orizzontali o l'improbabile anelito a danzare La Divina Commedia*, cit.

[152] See STEFANO TOMMASINI, *Sempre in piedi: Dante e la danza*, cit.

[153] Since we did not have access to the video and photographic material relating to the danced trilogy due to the pandemic, we preferred to focus the discussion on the trilogy performed by Ballett Dortmund. We refer you to the website of the Ruhrtriennale Festival, where you will find a brief description and some photos relating to the three performances and remember ROBERTO FRATINI, *Quasi una catabasi. La Divina Commedia nella danza degli ultimi 200 anni. Part II*, cit., pp. 276-279.

attentive to new trends in dance and the most innovative choreographers, defined as the «Dortmund miracle»[154], allows us to understand how the Dantean seed has nonetheless found its own way to germinate.

The initiator of the decision to stage Dante is the current *Ballettintendant* Xin Peng Wang[155]. Born in Dalian, China in 1956, where he began his studies, he then went on to study choreography at the Beijing Dance Academy in Beijing and later moved to Europe to study *modern dance* in Germany at the Folkwang Universität der Künste in Essen. During his career as a dancer, he held principal roles for the Peking Central Dance Company and the Aalto Ballett in Essen, where he also gained his first experience as a choreographer. Freelancing since 1996, Wang then danced in various theatres and companies in China, Europe and the United States, to then work permanently alongside Oscar-winning director Yimou Zhang[156], and became director of the Ballett of the Staatstheater Südthüringen in Meiningen until 2003. Since that year, he has been working at the Ballett Dortmund, directing more than forty different productions, ranging from re-propositions of the classical repertoire to genuine original creations.

Among these productions, a prominent role is played by the choreographic adaptations of literary and theatrical classics, which have been staged since his arrival, mainly thanks to his collaboration with Christian Baier[157], chief dramaturg of this and other institutions. Their encounter, together with that with the corps de ballet and theatre professionals, gave rise to a working team that gradually conceived increasingly daring projects from a visual, spatial and scenic point of view. *Krieg und Frieden* (2008)[158], a reworking of the famous novel *War and Peace* by Lev Tolstoy, interspersed with references to the novel by Baier himself[159], and *h.a.m.l.e.t. Die Geburt des Zorns* [*a.m.l.e.t.o. The Birth of Wrath*] (2010)[160], from the Shakespearean play of the same name, earned him immediate

[154] See *Ballett Dortmund*, in «Dance Open Festival», online: https://danceopen.com/en/persons/companies/57-dance-open-persons/dance-open-companies/907-balett-dortmund (last accessed 11/05/2025).
[155] See THEATER DORTMUND (Herausgeber), *Xin Peng Wang*, Bottrop (DE), Druckerei und Verlag Peter Pomp GmbH, 2012. Also, Xin Peng Wang, online: https://www.theaterdo.de/ueber-uns/mitarbeiter-innen/biografie/xin-peng-wang/ (last accessed 11/05/2025).
[156] See MARY FARQUHAR, *Yimou Zhang*, in «Senses of Cinema», May 2002, online: http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2002/great-directors/zhang/ (last accessed 11/05/2025).
[157] See the profile of Christian Baier, online: https://nrw-juniorballett.de/taenzer/dr-christian-baier-2/ (last accessed 11/05/2025).
[158] See the performance *Krieg und Frieden*, by Xin Peng Wang, music by Dmitri Schostakowitsch, adapted from the novel *War and Peace* by Lev Tolstoy and *Panzerschlacht* by Christian Baier, premiered on 8 November 2008 at the Ballett Dortmund, online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NuzmtF9bEBk&ab_channel=TheaterDortmund (last accessed 11/05/2025). In order not to overburden the discussion with excessive multimedia references, we always refer to the official *YouTube* channel of the Dortmund Theatre, which collects videos and other content related to performances produced by the Theatre and Ballet (TD *YouTube*). Only where necessary will the full link be given.
[159] See CHRISTIAN BAIER, *Panzerschlacht*, Fotos von Thomas M. Jauk, Wien, Splitter, 2008.
[160] See *h.a.m.l.e.t.*, by Xin Peng Wang, with music by Arvo Pärt and dramaturgy by Christian Baier, premiered on 6 November 2010 at Ballett Dortmund, TD *YouTube*.

critical and public acclaim[161]. In the following works, the artistic union between Wang and Baier deepened and consolidated, charting a course for future productions.

To celebrate *Jubiläum*, the tenth year of his work at Ballett Dortmund, Wang decided to stage *Der Traum der roten Kammer* [*The Dream of the Red Chamber*] (2012)[162], an adaptation of ballet of a classical Chinese text, which was inspired by a previous experience with director Yimou Zhang[163]. The performance takes up a text from 1792 written by Cao Xueqin[164], presenting one of the cornerstones of Chinese literature to European audiences. In this danced version, a great deal of space is given to political, socio-economic and climate change references, through the extreme care with which not only the choreographies are designed, but above all the scenic elements, as in the case of the traditional costumes, becoming the unmistakable mark of the works curated by the *Ballettintendant*[165].

After *Der Zauberberg [The Magic Mountain*] (2014)[166] by Thomas Mann, Wang, who is required to create two productions per year, chooses to use canonical texts, which are well known to the choreographer and dramaturg, but above all to the audience, as a common basis for his choreographies. Moreover, the diptych, i.e. the production of two interconnected ballets, becomes an effective *modus operandi* for developing one's message through dance. In 2016, for example, it confronts the pivotal text of German literature: *Faust*, the verse drama by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Starting with the question: «Kennst du den Faust?» [«Do you know Faust?»], the adaptation *FAUST I: Gewissen!* [*FAUST I: Consciousness!*][167] is articulated around the theme of the quest for knowledge, longed for and never fully attained by the protagonist. The spectacle is striking not only for the grandeur of the installations, built with self-propelled and practicable structures, or for the

[161] In 2011, the ballet *h.a.m.l.e.t.* won the award for the best production in the NRW region.
[162] *See Der Traum der roten Kammer*, by Xin Peng Wang, TD *YouTube*.
[163] Reference is made to the ballet adaptation of *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991) directed by Yimou Zhang, which premiered on 2 May 2001 with the National Ballet of China at the Tianqiao Theater, online: https://www.nbc.cn/englishwap/content-3448-10675.html (last accessed 11/05/2025). See LI-LING HSIAO, *Dancing the Red Lantern: Zhang Yimou's Fusion of Western Ballet and Peking Opera*, in «Southeast Review of Asian Studies», n. 32 (a cura di Li-Ling Hsiao - David A. Ross), 2010, pp. 129–36, online: https://web.archive.org/web/20150714054120/http://www.uky.edu/Centers/Asia/SECAAS/Seras/2010/14_Hsiao.pdf (last accessed 11/05/2025).
[164] See CAO XUEQIN, *The Story of the Stone, or The Dream of the Red Chamber*, tradotto in inglese da David Hawkes e John Minford, 5 voll., London, Penguin, 1973-1980. On adaptations of the text, see scholar Ann Waltner's digitised project for the University of Minnesota, online: https://open.lib.umn.edu/redchamber/ (last accessed 11/05/2025).
[165] In fact, Wang has special long-sleeved costumes flown in from China together with professionals to teach the German company how best to dance in them. In addition, he entrusts the music to Oscar-winning composer Michael Nyman and harmoniously blends elements of the typically Asian gestural heritage (e.g. those of Tai Chi) with the classical ballet tradition. The production *Der Traum der roten Kammer*, realised with the Hong Kong National Ballet, thus marks a milestone in his *modus operandi*. See the *report* on the performance, online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8UnBd-JUoao&t=445s&ab_channel=TheaterDortmund (last accessed 11/05/2025).
[166] See *Der Zauberberg*, by Xin Peng Wang, adaptation of Thomas Mann's novel, with music by Lepo Sumera and dramaturgy by Christian Baier, TD *YouTube*.
[167] See *FAUST I - GEWISSEN!*, by Xin Peng Wang, with music by Henryk Mikołaj Górecki, Michael Daugherty, Superflu, Rammstein u.a., and dramaturgy by Christian Baier, premiered on 13 February 2016 at Ballett Dortmund, TD *YouTube*.

costumes adopted, which emphatically underline the gap between dream and reality but also for the lighting design and the powerful projections, which succeed in increasing the astonishing and grotesque effect of the otherworldly journey undertaken by the protagonist[168].

This first venture was followed by *FAUST II: Erlösung!* [*FAUST II: Redemption!*] (2016)[169], which is different in terms of plot and performers. In an interview, Wang openly declared how the themes of Goethe's work were too captivating to be exhausted in a single performance and how, in this second work, he wanted to create something totally different from the first, above all from the usual way of conceiving an adaptation, i.e. to slavishly reproduce the story in relation to the reference text. To accomplish this, he engaged the Chinese artist Li Hui (1977-2020)[170], the author of installations with laser and light effects aimed at developing the mystical concept of otherness[171], a presence-absence that alienates the consciousness. Together with this "other" space, surrounded and inhabited by light effects, Wang conceived the choreographies especially for the *étoiles* Lucia Lacarra and Marlon Dino, partners in life as well as in art, to give even more emotional depth to the love story between Helena and Faust[172]. The two international stars, then on staff at the Bayerisches Staatsballett in Munich, enrich with their technical qualities the proposed danced version that, by upsetting Goethe's drama, proposes to link the attempt at redemption of the protagonist's soul that has now become diabolical with the need to listen to and embrace all humanity in its fragilities. In the second part of the ballet, in fact, Faust is "saved" by Helena's love, and witnessing this, even more tenderly, is the woman's adoption of the son he abandoned, in the play a refugee whose poses are very reminiscent of the drama of the refugees who died in the Mediterranean[173].

From the above, it is easy to understand how Wang and Baier often intersect the planes and themes of the story with references to contemporary issues, in this case, represented by immigration

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[168] *Ibid*, at min. 1:26 ff.

[169] See *FAUST II - ERLÖSUNG!*, by Xin Peng Wang, with music by Hans Abrahamsen, Louis Andriessen, Luciano Berio, Michael Gordon, David Lang und Peteris, dramaturgy by Christian Baier, premiered on 29 October 2016 at Ballett Dortmund, TD *YouTube*.

[170] See Li Hui, available online: http://www.huiuh.com/#/ (last accessed 11/05/2025).

[171] See ALEX GREENBERGER, *Li Hui, Rising Star at Forefront of China's Art Scene, Has Died at 43*, in «ARTnews», 5 maggio 2020, available online: https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/li-hui-artist-dead-1202685954/ (last accessed 11/05/2025).

[172] See further video on *FAUST II - ERLÖSUNG!*, available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vWPAEWHOW40&ab_channel=ballettdortmund (last accessed 11/05/2025).

[173] See FRANKA MARIA SELZ, GISELA SONNENBURG, *Von den Warteschleifen des Glücks. Xin Peng Wang stellt mit Faust II- Erlösung! Einen großen Coup beim Ballett Dortmund vor: mit Lucia Lacarra, Dann Wilkinson, Giacomo Altovino und Marlon Dino – und aktuellem Bezug zur Flüchtigsthematik*, in «Ballettt-Journal. Magazin für Ballett», 30 ottobre 2016, available online: https://ballett-journal.de/ballett-dortmund-faust-ii-xin-peng-wang-ua/ (last accessed 11/05/2025); ASHLEY FANTZ, CATHERINE E. SHOICHET, *Drowned Syrian boy's dad: Everything is gone*, in «CNN», 4 settembre 2015, available online: https://edition.cnn.com/2015/09/03/europe/migration-crisis-aylan-kurdi-turkey-canada/index.html (last accessed 11/05/2025).

and the need to listen and care for the suffering of others[174]. Starting from these premises, the artistic duo Wang and Baier decided to confront an even more articulated idea of adaptation. In 2018, they announced that they had conceived a *Tanzmonument*, which initially envisaged the staging of the three canticles of Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* in three consecutive years, and then the entire work in a single performance. The Faustian experience had left an indelible trace in them, which they wanted to continue to deepen in the universal themes of the search for truth, of the conflict between the personal and the universal, between love and hate, between the real and the otherworldly. In addition to the frequent association between Dante's and Goethe's cues, in this case, they decided to follow a line of reworking of the classics with a more international scope.

Only a few years earlier, the theatre production *Die Borderline Prozession* was presented at Theater Dortmund. *Ein Loop um das, was uns trennt [The Borderline Procession. A loop around what separates us*] (2016) by Kay Voges, Dirk Baumann and Alexander Kerlin[175], a staging that had proposed a reading of Dante's *Inferno*, along with other classics and reference texts, in a staging that combined «poetry and literature with music, art, theatre, cinema, photography, mobile cameras, stage situations and new media [...] between performance and installation»[176]. Specifically, the spectator followed a procession of actors through a structure consisting of ten rooms in a constant overlapping of different viewpoints[177]; an all-encompassing theatrical dimension so convincing that it was invited to the Berliner Theatertreffen 2017[178]. Within this receptive horizon, the Theater Dortmund, in its different meanings of Theatre and Ballet, has since 2016 been attesting to a decisive focus on Dante's reinterpretation, culminating precisely in Xin Peng Wang's choreographic project.

There are many reasons that led Wang and Baier to adapt the *Divine Comedy*. If, as we have said, it is easy to verify that the German reception of Dante is strong and consolidated, the Chinese

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[174] See FRANKA MARIA SELZ, GISELA SONNENBURG, *Von den Warteschleifen des Glücks. Xin Peng Wang stellt mit Faust II- Erlösung! Einen großen Coup beim Ballett Dortmund vor: mit Lucia Lacarra, Dann Wilkinson, Giacomo Altovino und Marlon Dino - und aktuellem Bezug zur Flüchtigsthematik*, cit.

[175] See *Die Borderline Prozession*, by Kay Voges, Dirk Baumann and Alexander Kerlin, premiered on 15 April 2016 at the Schauspiel Dortmund, TD *YouTube*.

[176] «poesia e letteratura con musica, arte, teatro, cinema, fotografia, videocamere mobili, situazioni sceniche e i nuovi media […] tra performance e installazione», see DAGMAR REICHARDT, *750 anni dalla nascita di Dante Alighieri e oltre. Zone di contatto poetico e intersezionalità ibrida nelle traduzioni germanofone e neerlandesi della Divina Commedia*, in VIVIANE DESVRIÉSÈRE, MARINA GEAT (sous la direction de), *L'Interculturel: quels défis et probleématiques aux niveaux européen et international?*, cit., pp. 250-251.

[177] See DOROTHEA MARCUS, *Villa Weltenwust. Die Borderline Prozession - Im Megastore in Dortmund kreiert Kay Voges eine fazsinierende und überfordernde Gesamtkunstwerkwelt*, in «nachtkritik.de», 15 aprile 2016, online: https://www.nachtkritik.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=12409:die-borderline-prozession-im-megastore-in-dortmund-kreiert-kay-voges-eine-netzhaut-wie-videokamera-ueberfordernde-gesamtkunstwerkwelt&catid=38:die-nachtkritik-k&Itemid=40 (last accessed 11/05/2025).

[178] See *Die Borderline Prozession (The Borderline Procession). Ein Loop um das, was uns trennt (A loop on what divides us)*, in the TheaterTreffen website, online: https://www.berlinerfestspiele.de/en/theatertreffen/programm/2017/10-inszenierungen/die-borderline-prozession (last accessed 11/05/2025).

one behaves differently, being relatively young and in the process of being deepened[179]. *Ballettintendant* himself declared how indispensable it was for him to have recourse to various editions of the *Commedia*, accompanied by an important critical apparatus and substantial preliminary essays[180], as approaching Alighieri's work requires a confrontation with Western, classical and Christian cultural background, not always easily accessible. Speaking of his own background, the Chinese choreographer has often emphasised how Dante's poem is perceived in the East Asian context mainly as being linked to the musical sphere, to the idea of divine harmony, without giving due space to the typological value of the text[181]. For Wang, «wie Dante mit Silben und Wörten, rede ich mit Schritten und Gesten»[182]: the moment of transposition from the written word to gesture and body language is a delicate passage, in which it would be useless to think of reproducing Dante's text word for word (which would not even fulfil the real purpose of adaptation), desiring instead an «organische Verbindung von Literatur und Tanz»[183].

Wang's reworking of Dante's Commedia aims at arousing in the audience the kind of thoughts and emotions that may later be elaborated into a «Gedanken» and successively develop into a «Nachdenken», a reflection afterwards. In this case, Wang stated that for him, the key concepts are: in *Inferno*, *ewiges Feuer* [eternal fire], in *Purgatorio*, *Heilung* [refinement/healing], and finally, in *Paradiso*, *Befreihung* [freedom/liberation]. The approach, therefore, is to offer a satisfactory range of feelings on stage, so that the spectator can construct his/her own thought, his/her own idea at the end of the performance. This work on emotions and the reactions they provoke is used extensively in the creative phase in conjunction with the corps de ballet, with which the choreographer constantly questions himself. Even though the style of Wang and his *ensemble* is supported by a matrix of

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[179] For an overview of Dante's reception in Cina see: *Cina*, a cura di Giuliano Bertuccioli, in ED; LAURENCE K. P. WONG, *Translating the Divina Commedia for the Chinese Reading Public in the Twenty-First Century*, in «TTR/ Traduction, terminologie, rédaction», n. 21/2 (sous la direction de Marco A. Fiola - Georges L. Bastinvol), 2008, pp. 191-220; ALESSANDRA BREZZI, *Il Novecento cinese di Dante*, in «Critica del testo. Dante, oggi/3. Nel mondo», n. 14/3, 2011, pp. 415-438; VALENTINA PAGNANINI, *I «transmutati» versi*, in «Treccani magazine», online: https://www.treccani.it/magazine/chiasmo/lettere_e_arti/Oriente/sssgl.oriente_i_transmutati_versi.html (last accessed 11/05/2025); ERIC SALERNO, *Dante in Cina. La rocambolesca storia della 'Commedia' nell'Estremo Oriente*, Milano, Il Saggiatore, 2018; ZHEN WEN, *Lao She e Dante: ricezione ed "emulazione"*, in «Lea: Lingue e Letterature d'Oriente e d'Occidente», n. 8, 2019, pp. 87-103.

[180] From an interview by the author of this thesis with Xin Peng Wang, it emerges that the Chinese edition of the *Comedy* he adopted for his study of the work is WENJIE HUANG 黄文捷 (trans.) *Shenqu神曲 'La Divina Commedia'. By Dante Alighieri. vol. 1: Diyupian 地獄篇 'Inferno'; vol. 2: Lianyupian 煉獄篇 'Purgatorio'; vol. 3: Tiantangpian 天堂篇 'Paradiso'*, Guangzhou, Huacheng Chubanshe 2000. In addition, see LI BINGKUI李丙奎 CHEN YING陈英 SUN AO孙傲, *Dante and the Divine Comedy*, Beijing, 商务印书馆, 2016 (ed. it. RAFFAELE CAMPANELLA, *Dante e la Commedia*, Città di Castello, Edimond, 2011).

[181] See PIERMARIO VESCOVO*, Dante and the 'dramatic genre'*, cit.

[182] «come Dante opera attraverso sillabe e parole, così io lavoro attraverso passi e gesti»/«as Dante works through syllables and words, so I work through steps and gestures», documentary *The Divine Comedy - World literature as ballet* (2021), henceforth abbreviated TDC; made available shortly before the online *prèmiere* of *Paradiso*, it is currently no longer viewable. The translation from German, as in the other parts of the work, is by the writer.

[183] «una organica relazione tra letteratura e danza»/«an organic relationship between literature and dance», *ibidem*.

predominantly classical training, there is frequent experimentation and crossing over of different techniques and gestures taken from modern dance and contemporary dance[184], but which cannot be traced back to a univocal and declared stylistic choice.

Was ist Hölle? Ich müsste mir bei der Arbeit an Inferno klar werden: was ist Hölle? Ich müsste diesen Punkten in Dantes Fantasie suchen, um meine eigene Antworten zu finden. Ich stellte mir einen Menschen vor, der ohne Seele durch die Dunkelheit läuft. Das ist Hölle: ohne Seele, keine Hoffnung. Man verliert die Orientierung. Hölle ist ein Gefühl[185].

What is hell? While working on Inferno, I had to ask myself: what is hell? I had to look for these points in Dante's imagination to find my own answers. I imagined a person running through the darkness without a soul. That is hell: no soul, no hope. You lose your bearings. Hell is a feeling.

Die göttliche Komödie I: Inferno[186] debuted on 3 November 2018. At first, the curtain opens in the centre only briefly, allowing a glimpse of a reduced proscenium space in which the performer impersonating Dante lies stretched out, constrained by chains dangling above him. As the curtains of the curtain gradually open, a sombre cello *refrain* sustains the protagonist's attempt to find his way through what appears to be a forest of steel chains (*Figure 254*), from which he will emerge only after gaining courage, thanks to a *pas de deux* with Beatrice and the advent of Virgil. It is evident how these first scenes of the ballet faithfully follow the layout of the incipit cantos[187], in which Dante experiences total bewilderment. The dancer playing Virgil enters the stage hieratically, covered by a vermilion velvet cloak (*Figure 255*).

The essential contact of bodies, required in the choreographic setting, collides with Dante's text, which instead reports Dante's initial astonishment in wondering whether what he sees is only a shadow or a real presence. The text's ecdotal *impasse* is, however, dissolved in a quick pantomimic sequence, in which Dante attempts to touch Virgil's arms, feigning a pristine astonishment only to succeed in approaching him and building a diagonal dynamic together. Just as within the *Commedia* Dante needs the admonition of a guide to understand the infernal world, so in the adaptation for dance Virgil stands solemn, in profile, extending his left arm forward and his right arm to the side, from which, Dante protrudes, thus iconically emphasising the *puer et magister* dynamic.

> Ed ecco verso noi venir per nave
> un vecchio, bianco per antico pelo,
> gridando: «Guai a voi, anime prave!

[184] One should bear in mind how the choreographer's own training plays an important role here, and how, as *Ballettintendant*, he has gone to great lengths to bring internationally renowned choreographers and dancers to Dortmund to support an ongoing study of the corps de ballet and founded the NRW Juniorballett in 2004, tirelessly cultivating the education of new talent.

[185] «Che cos'è l'Inferno? Dovevo capire come affrontare al meglio l'Inferno, e capire che cos'è. Ho dovuto cercare questi punti nell'immaginazione di Dante per trovare le mie risposte. Ho immaginato una persona che cammina nell'oscurità senza un'anima. Questo è l'Inferno: nessuna speranza senza la coscienza. Si perde completamente l'orientamento. L'Inferno è questo tipo di sentimento di smarrimento», see TDC.

[186] See *Die göttliche Komödie I: Inferno*, TD *YouTube*. From now on we will adopt the abbreviation DGK to refer to the common part of the ballet title in the three performances.

[187] Reference is made here mainly to the first cantos of the first canticle, *If.* I-II-III.

Non isperate mai veder lo cielo:
i' vegno per menarvi a l'altra riva
ne le tenebre etterne, in caldo e 'n gelo[188].

Keeping well in mind the diabolical cries with which Dante brings out the character of the helmsman of Acheronte, the choreographer then makes Charon, with his characteristic beard, appear on stage from the back of the stage, wielding a metonymic oar. The entrance of the damned then takes place abruptly, inspired by Dante's verses describing Antinferno as a place of unending damnation, where the sloths chase the banner «that ran so fast»[189]. The kinetic panorama described by the verses refers to an imperious and exhausting dynamism of bodies shattered by the attack of beasts and vermin, forgotten by divine judgement because they are incapable of taking a stand in life and now grains of sand in the tumult, «as sand is swirled in a whirlwind»[190].

Next, some damned arrive on stage crawling from the orchestra pit to the proscenium, covered by long velvet cloaks. Led by «Charon the demon»[191], they gradually take their places on the stage, standing with their backs turned, stooped, as if oppressed. During this performance, several life-size statues of the damned descend from the trellis, bathed sideways in eerie reddish light. The attitudes reproduced by these figures are reminiscent of the cycles of medieval frescos, in which the various punishments inflicted are depicted in detail in the tortured bodies, an illustrative mode that served as an inspiration for the Romantic art of Gustave Dorè[192] (*Figures 256-257*).

As in the *FAUST* project, the technical possibilities offered by the large stage in Dortmund make it possible to visually divide the floor into two horizontal sections in relation to the spectator: in the first, closer to the proscenium, Dante, Virgil and the damned dance; in the second, closer to the backdrop, the sculptures sink into a deep chamber, from which a dense smoke emerges. The image thus created, which seems to allude to the sinking of souls following the judgement of Minos, introduces the opening of the gates of *Hell* accompanied by the music of Michael Gordon and Kate Moore[193]. For this context, the two composers created an eerie score in which an obsessive cello *refrain*, at once dark and bewitching, mingles with trumpet blasts, brass crashes and waves of timpani, at times verging on the deafening. In a moment's pause in the "sonorous noise", the damned on stage,

[188] *If.* III, vv. 82-87.
[189] «tanto ratta», *If.* III, v. 53.
[190] «come la rena quando turbo spira», ivi, v. 30.
[191] «Caron dimonio», ivi, v. 109.
[192] Baier and Wang themselves reported how the visual and illustrated tradition referring to Dante and his Works had been a great inspiration for them in conceiving a staged imagery of the different otherworlds.
[193] See further *teaser* of *DGK I: Inferno*, by Xin Peng Wang, available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ITGfkLKLTmU&ab_channel=TheaterDortmund (last accessed 11/05/2025).

uttering a chilling, almost feral cry, drop the heavy dark cloaks in which they are wrapped and slump on the stage, writhing wildly.

The scenes that follow are conceived as a series of tableaux aimed at conveying strong emotions to the audience: one successively witnesses group compositions, peculiar pas de threes, or fours, with a few but intense solos, in which the quality of movement sought is above all acrobatic, animal and wild in the frequent leaps, in the poses and in the way of articulating hands and joints in an ungainly way, with inhuman angles, staging spasms and movements in canon. Clearly intentional is the contrast between the elegant movements performed by the main roles, with airy *saut de basque* and *sauté fouetté*, fast *temps de flèche* and *enveloppé/développé* sequences, and the sclerotic panting of the damned. Among the various scenes offered, it is possible to discern a reference to the fifth *canto* of *Inferno*, when a woman's soul, sinuously wiggling in the foreground, is contrasted with a linear formation of souls standing in the background, while the infernal storm, a sound *topos* dedicated to the song of Paolo and Francesca, resounds loudly in the theatre.

Again, in a later scene, in a deliberate wave-like movement made by Virgil's hands, struck by a burning red light, one can detect a hint of the ancient forked flame of Ulysses and Diomedes, but for an audience less familiar with the contents of the *Comedy*, the motif might pass almost unnoticed.

Arbitrary and personal, then, seem to be Wang's dramaturgical and directorial choices made on Dante's text for this first cantica, which sees, for example, Charon (played by Cyril Pierre) return on stage several times as the King of Demons. Beatrice, who is not supposed to appear in the story except at the beginning, enters the stage several times, always to perform languid and intense *pas de deux* with Dante: the reason for this, as well as constructing a continuous reference to Beatrice's role as Dante's celestial guide, is probably also to be found in the performer*,* the *étoile* Lucia Lacarra, a dancer of exceptional talents, at that time on the Ballett Dortmund. Dante is the young Javier Cacheiro Alemán who, in the development of the trilogy, will see personal artistic growth, while Virgil is Dustin True[194].

Following the layout already found in Wang's previous adaptations, various scenic elements are used extensively in the first cantica. Since Dante's *Inferno* is a grotesque place of perennial flames, these motifs are essentially developed through set design and costumes. Many effects, such as smoke and incandescence, together with a purposeful use of lighting, accentuate the frenzied movements of the damned. Projections of tangled and thorny thickets, on the other hand, form an ideal carpet for the movements of the group scenes, visually recalling the landscapes of the Dark Forest and the

[194] See FRANKA MARIA SELZ, GISELA SONNENBURG, *Ein Bilderreigen von Höllischer Kraft. Xin Peng Wang fasziniert beim Ballett Dortmund mit seiner neuen Kreation „Die göttliche Komödie I: Inferno"*, in «Ballett Journal», 4 novembre 2018, available online: https://ballett-journal.de/ballett-dortmund-die-goettliche-komoedie-inferno-wang-lacarra/ (last accessed 11/05/2025).

Suicide Forest. Nevertheless, in a scene with Dante and Virgil on stage, a tongue of red light is projected at their feet, ideally depicting the rivers of hell, if not the sanguine Flegetonte. Again, a double conical metal spiral is constructed, in the guise of an infernal cavity structured in nine circles, which will be used during the performance as a practicable chute for the souls of the damned to enter on stage, or as a *mise en abyme* of the very idea of *Hell*, a place of eternal damnation.

Together with the costumes of the main performers, great attention is paid to the design of the full-body suits (Trikot) of the damned, which reproduce in print the anatomy of human muscles: combined with unpointed ballet shoes and dishevelled loose hair, these costumes emphasise even more the message of the soul's perversion, incapable of transcending low human impulses (*Figure 258*). Subservient to disharmony, the different scenic elements adopted, gloomy lights, chilling, shrill and whistling sounds, Dionysian gestures and scenic elements devoted to disquiet immerse the audience in a spiral of perdition, from which it will only be able to exit, like Dante, by crossing it to «riveder le stelle»[195].

Moving from a different angle, *Die Göttliche Komödie II: Purgatorio* by Ballett Dortmund debuted on 2 November 2019[196]. On that occasion, before entering the auditorium, Christian Baier gave a brief introduction in the *foyer*, in which he reminded the largely German audience of what had happened in the previous performance, taking up some elements of Dante's life and the *Comedy* and then describing an unusual scene: a middle-aged woman stands quietly on the *promenade* by Hong Kong Bay at sunset; she gently and expertly pats her body to activate its circulation and then returns home. This last description will later prove particularly useful in understanding the new installation.

Purgatorio begins with an *ekphrasis*, a quotation from Marina Abramovic's performance *Balkan Baroque* (1997)[197], in which the performer, seated on one thousand five hundred cattle bones, cleansed them of rotting flesh and cartilage, a metaphor for the ethnic cleansing that had taken place shortly before in the Balkans. Using stage elements to further elaborate on Dante's message, Ballett Dortmund decided to take up and re-propose Abramovic's ritual because they wanted to bring to the forefront the theme of climate change and the responsibility of individuals in preserving the planet, creating a parallelism between indifference towards the victims of conflict and indifference towards the constant squandering of resources. On stage, mezzo-soprano Clara Pertuy impersonates the Serbian artist, carrying out her cleansing actions, and sings the cello *refrain* of the first song, turning

[195] *If.* XXXIV, v. 139.
[196] *See DGK II: Purgatory*, by Xin Peng Wang, TD *YouTube*.
[197] *Balkan Baroque* is the performance proposed by the artist at the 1997 Venice Biennale, which won her the Golden Lion, online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gbswpr7ibBA&t=90s&ab_channel=HendrikMeyer (last accessed 11/05/2025).

it into a heartbreaking dirge, and adding breaths and subdued «oui», «oui», «oui», to insinuate humanity's constant assent to the sin committed (*Figures 259-260*).

The Canticle of *Purgatorio* is marked by an awareness of sin in order to atone for one's guilt. Wang and Baier propose a reflection on environmental issues and human responsibility throughout the performance, which is not by chance staged in the year in which student protests for the climate and environmental protection are raging, thanks to the numerous demonstrations promoted by the young Swede Greta Thunberg[198]. The elements of fire and water are prevalent in the scenic solutions adopted for *Purgatorio*, starting with the choice of John Luther Adams' orchestral *Become ocean*[199] as the music for the ballet, largely reverberating the sounds of the ocean. Wang explains this choice in relation to the key theme of the cantica, identified for the staging with *Reinigung*, [purification]: the ocean, interpreted in this case by the music, will exert a purifying action on the audience for the soul, «Ozean als Seelenbad» [«ocean as bath for the soul»], as «Purgatorio ist Befreiung von Irrtümern und ein Erkennen, dass ich Fehler habe»[200]. Therefore the mountain of bones staged as the first image reminds the spectator how the mountain of *Purgatory* requires from Dante, and from every penitent soul, active participation and an attitude of sincere contrition in order to reach the garden of delights and thus the realm of beatitude.

Even in this adaptation, Alighieri's text remains a trace from which Wang and Baier operate operate freely. Dante, Virgil and the new interpreter of Beatrice (Daria Suzi) remain the main figures who carry on the transcendent story. New and with catalysing movements is the *Erzengel* interpreted by the dancer Guillem Rojo-i Galiego[201], who constitutes a parallel with the transversal figure of Charon in *Inferno*, in that it is he who will ferry the events from the performance by the mezzo-soprano "back to Dante", and guide the host of purgatory souls to the end[202] (*Figure 261*). Precisely in relation to the host of souls, it is necessary to introduce a reflection on lighting design and costumes, once again indispensable to refer to the "refining" elements of water and fire.

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[198] If Wang in *Purgatory* does not make a clear reference to *Fridays for the future*, in the subsequent performance *Abstand [Distancing*] (2020), the girl with braids and yellow mackintosh stands out clearly as a programmatic reference, see *Abstand*, by Xin Peng Wang, with dramaturgy by Christian Baier, premiered on 17 October 2020 at the Ballett Dortmund, TD *YouTube*.

[199] The opera *Become Ocean* recorded by the Seattle Symphony Orchestra and conducted by Ludovic Morlot, online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGva1NVWRXk&t=2121s&ab_channel=JohnLutherAdams-Topic (last accessed 11/05/2025).

[200] «Purgatory represents an enfranchisement and an admission of the conscience of the errors committed»/«Il Purgatorio rappresenta un affrancamento e l'ammissione della coscienza degli errori commessi», see TDC.

[201] See pre *trailer III* of *DGK II: Purgatory*, by Xin Peng Wang, at min. 0:04 ff., online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ovU9cGCI9I&ab_channel=ballettdortmund (last accessed 11/05/2025).

[202] See FRANKA MARIA SELZ, GISELA SONNENBURG, *Furioser Sühnetanz. „Die göttliche Komödie II: Purgatorio" von Xin Peng Wang wurde beim Ballett Dortmund unter grossem Jubel uraufgeführt*, in «Ballett Journal», 3 novembre 2019, available online: https://ballett-journal.de/ballett-dortmund-goettliche-komoedie-ii-purgatorio-xin-peng-wang/ (last accessed 11/05/2025).

On the anatomically shaped Trikot, already seen in *Inferno*, a soft cream-coloured tunic is now placed, which matches the sadness and humility of the penitent souls. In this performance, the dancers wear pointed shoes as a sign of renewed tension towards the High/the Divine and wear their hair up. Alongside the fluidity of the movements and the ocean-inspired music, the idea of purification is rendered with powerful projections, which envelop the dancers in turquoise waves. Thanks to the descent along the proscenium of special transparent sheets, images of sea currents are projected onto the stage[203]. The same technical expedient is taken up again in the second part of the ballet, as the episodes dedicated to the souls of the lustful approach, while the Garden of Eden is nearer; in this case, flaming souls are projected in different poses, or while performing small movements, superimposed on the real dancing souls on stage. These solutions effectively support the subsequent encounter with Matelda, danced in a *pas de deux* with Dante; the arrival of the three theological virtues, wrapped in iridescent drag, with whom the Poet engages in a stormy group dance; finally, the majestic appearance of Beatrice.

Virgil's farewell[204] is also even more heartbreaking thanks, on the one hand, to a scenographic solution that re-proposes the chains of sin, descending for the last time from the trellis to symbolise the intrinsic diversity between the two poets; on the other, to a choreographic sequence of great emotional impact, in which the hands and outstretched arms of the two dancers can no longer touch, ending in a solo by Virgil and his final run backstage.

Next to water and fire, the physical contact between souls, proposed from the very beginning in an action dense with sadness, is the key motif of the "canticle of friendship"[205]: in addition to proposing many more dance steps with "holds" and moments of contact between the dancers, the choreography of *Purgatorio* uses references to a particular gesture taken from Chinese medicine, the Bodhi Qi Gong, which Wang makes his dancers learn. The healing practice of traditional Chinese medicine used to re-harmonise the vital flow of energy that stagnates and generates pain is taught and included in the choreography to resonate with Dante's verses of healing, mutual humanity and forbearance, the full and kinetic expression of purgatorial souls[206] (*Figure 262*). These are light rhythmic percussions performed along the body by the dancers on themselves and their colleagues.

Even this production, which wanted to present one canticle per year, fatally collided with an unpredictable adversary: the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic. During 2020, *Die Göttliche Komödie*

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[203] See *DGK II: Purgatory*, by Xin Peng Wang, at min. 1:25 ff, TD *YouTube*.
[204] See *Pg*. XXVII, vv. 127-142.
[205] See LUCA AZZETTA, *Purgatorio Canto XXIII. Memoria, amicizia e poesia nell'incontro con Forese*, in ENRICO MALATO, ANDREA MAZZUCCHI (a cura di), *Lectura Dantis Romana. Cento canti per cento anni, II. Purgatorio, 2. Canti XVIII-XXXIII*, Roma, Salerno, 2014, pp. 687-711.
[206] See pre *trailer DGK II: Purgatory*, by Xin Peng Wang, online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Tf-iH0Qnmg&ab_channel=ballettdortmund (last accessed 11/05/2025).

III: Paradiso suffered a setback due to the forced closure of theatres and the distancing required by pandemic prevention regulations. However, this unforeseen event did not stop the artistic machine of the Dortmund Theatre, which nevertheless continued to prepare the show and deployed all the technological tools at its disposal to support its timely release, especially by exploiting social networks. In the year of *impasse*, a documentary dedicated to the entire trilogy was completed[207]. On 7 February 2021, a *matinee*[208] was broadcast remotely, using the *#tdoDigital* streaming platform[209].

Due to force majeure, the third performance of Ballett Dortmund *Paradiso* premiered in a hybrid manner, twice. In fact, a *premiere* took place "remotely" online, on 8 May 2021, via the same *streaming* platform as the *matinee*[210], while the actual in-person theatre *premiere* did not take place until the following 29 October[211].

«Paradiso ist unglaublich zu glauben, unmöglich zu tun. Desto ist Tanz pur, befreit von allen Zwängen. Pure Lust!»[212]. The fact that he was able to work on *Paradiso* beyond the set deadlines also allowed Wang to include his own vision of dance as a choreographer and artist in this last canticle: the importance of working on the concrete future of dance and the joy one encounters in practising it.

From the documentary, as from the ballet itself, emerges a renewed energy infused into this latest chapter of the trilogy, which, as never before, focuses on choreography and certain specific gestures all the desire to make art through this language. The two proposed versions of *Paradiso* necessarily involved two different directorial concepts. The realisation transmitted online, in particular, makes it possible to capture minimal aspects and hints that are difficult to intercept in the theatre. *Paradiso* being the ethereal place of «high flight»[213], Dante's body, but also those of the blessed souls are required to have a superhuman, joyful, shining quality of movement. This production plays on unbalance, the dancers' bodies stretch out in search of a new balance with stretched legs and arms stretched to the limit, ideally producing new possible lines of the body in extension[214].

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[207] TDC was made available on Ballet Dortmund's streaming platform on 27 March 2021.
[208] See GISELA SONNENBURG, *Eintritt in das Paradies. Xin Peng Wang und das Ballett Dortmund locken mit der Erfindung der Online-Matinee zur "Die göttliche Komödie III: Paradiso"*, in "Ballett Journal", 7 February 2021, online: https://ballett-journal.de/ballett-dortmund-die-goettliche-komoedie-iii-paradiso-xin-peng-wang-online-matinee/ (last accessed 11/05/2025).
[209] See Theater Dortmund, online: https://www.theaterdo.de/digital/ (last accessed 11/05/2025).
[210] For *DGK III: Paradise*, by Xin Peng Wang, see the published images and videos, online: https://www.instagram.com/p/COnt4TKAyLz/ (last accessed 11/05/2025).
[211] *See DGK III: Paradise,* by Xin Peng Wang, TD *YouTube*.
[212] «Paradise is believing the unbelievable, doing the impossible. Therefore it is pure dance, free from all constraints. Pure joy!», see TDC.
[213] «alto volo», *Pd. XV*, v. 54.
[214] *See DGK III: Paradise,* by Xin Peng Wang, TD *YouTube*.

Although Dante and Beatrice, together and solo, once again play the main roles, more attention is given to the corps de ballet as a whole, the group scenes and once again the angel played by Guillem Rojo-i Galiego . The Italian light designer Carlo Cerri, who conceived a lighting system based on the sketches designed for the *Commedia* by Sandro Botticelli, is the main contributor: «Light must constantly and materially envelop the work»[215]. To this end, a moving device of concentric circles is constructed to support the projectors, in imitation of the system of the heavens and the *Himmelrose* of the Empyrean. The celestial spheres are sometimes lowered until they are all around the protagonist Dante, succeeding, especially in the video rendering, in proposing the idea of the living presence of the inexpressible around him.

> E' mi ricorda ch'io fui più ardito
> per questo a sostener, tanto ch'i' giunsi
> l'aspetto mio col valore infinito.
>
> Oh abbondante grazia ond'io presunsi
> ficcar lo viso per la luce etterna,
> tanto che la veduta vi consunsi![216]

A reflecting circle is inserted in the circular light structure, where Dante is mirrored, a circumstance made even more intense in the video, in which the spectator can catch a glimpse of the dancer's ardent facial expressions, involved in fully rendering this mystical encounter. Indispensable and more emphatic in the performance in presence are the costumes, conceived as a true extension of the body lines created by the dancers. Wrapped in iridescent drapes, they wear a golden triangle painted on their foreheads; their movements, bathed in the beams of light from the lighting system and encircled by the impalpability of smoke, literally radiate glow, in a multiplication of reflective surfaces (*Figures 263-264-265-266-267-268-269-270*).

As costume designer Bernd Skodzig reports, a theory of overlapping costumes was conceived for the three different canticles, symbolising Dante's journey from the vivid features of *Inferno*, to the more muted ones of *Purgatorio*, to the additional iridescent drapes in the guise of the wings of *Paradiso*, thus establishing a symbiosis with the *Grundtrikot*, the anatomical full-body suit, and concretely realising a metaphor for the complexity of life[217]. In *Paradise*, Wang desires a respect for being an artist *hic et nunc*, a «Tanz bewusst», a conscious dance that will awaken the spirit of each dancer to bring out their true nature, which can only be expressed in a new quality of movement. The electronic work *48° Nord* by Ulrich Müller and Siegfried Rössert was chosen as music, giving the

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[215] «La luce deve avvolgere costantemente e materialmente il lavoro», the style and construction methods, which led Carlo Cerri (the company's *light designer*) to choose Botticelli's sketches together with Wang and Baier, are explained in this way in the documentary; see TDC.
[216] *Pd. XXXIII*, vv. 79-84.
[217] See TDC.

song an otherworldly dimension[218]. In this last work, the Ballett Dortmund succeeds in transporting the spectator into that dimension of dream, of vision, that pervades the *Commedia* in Dante's journey into the three otherworldly realms.

Though maintaining a substantial fidelity to the reference text, the three parts of *Die Göttliche Komödie* conceived by the Ballett Dortmund propose a deviation and a personal stance on universal messages, articulated through the quality and creativity of the scenic elements, on the strength of the different cultures from which they depart. In Wang's elaborations and in his attention to detail, one finds in all three canticles the ability to touch on the key passages of the *Comedy* and to make them have a dialogue with topical elements through the language of dance. As was the case with the Albe trilogy, there is currently no indication as to whether the entire *Tanzmonument* will ever be staged in its complete version, but the production that has been carried out has resulted in a brilliant revival of Dante's *Comedy*.

5.4. The English panorama: *The Dante Project* by Wayne McGregor

Misbehave more beautifully, more often.
Wayne McGregor

Together with Germany, home of the first Dante society[219], another nation stands out historically in the international Dante reception, both in the literary and in the more markedly artistic sphere. As we have seen above, after the example of Frederick Ashton's *Dante sonata* of 1940, British artists focused mainly on a reception more related to the illustrative and figurative sphere of the *Commedia*, throughout the 20th century[220].

Crossing the threshold of the New Millennium, a new adaptation for dance is presented on the occasion of the seventh centenary of Alighieri's death. The ballet *The Dante Project* was conceived by choreographer Wayne McGregor (1970). His background does not come from the academic world of ballet, into which he landed as a resident choreographer at the Royal Ballet of London in 2006, but from a promising and meteoric career in contemporary dance and after founding his own company

[218] See project *48° North* by Ulrich Müller and Siegfried Rössert, online: https://www.48nord.de/ (last accessed 11/05/2025).
[219] The Deutsche Dante Gesellschaft is, to all intents and purposes, the world's first Dante society, founded in the year of Dante's centenary, 13 September 1865, in Dresden by Karl Witte and a circle of other German patrons and scholars. Further information at the DDG website: https://dante-gesellschaft.de/geschichte/ (last accessed 23/05/2025).
[220] In this sense, consider Rachel Owen's recent illustrations for *Inferno*, or Hunt Emerson's graphic novel version, see RACHEL OWEN, *Illustrations for Dante's Inferno*, Oxford, Bodleian Library, 2021; HUNT EMERSON, *Dante's 'Inferno'*, with Kevin Jackson, London, Knockabout, 2012.

(formerly Random Dance - 1992, today Wayne McGregor Company)[221]. His collaborations range from renowned artists from various specific fields (including the visual arts and even the world of fashion[222]) to scientific contexts, where McGregor began to experiment, together with neuroscience departments and various scientists, with the implications and possibilities existing between dance and technology, in order to explore a broader concept of corporeity and perception[223]. Applying these new technologies to dance, both to increase the archival and transmission possibilities of art in the future and as a new frontier to offer new forms of training to dancers, as well as in the artistic experimentation and support for the choreographer in the composition phase, has enabled McGregor to enrich his own creations with new elements with which to expand his approach to contemporary dance. After having tried his hand at creating hybrid neoclassical works based on literary texts, as in the case of *Raven Girl* (2013) *and Woolf Works* (2015), McGregor approaches the *Divine Comedy* with both interest and awe, seeking to bring out a new reading through the narrative modes of dance.

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[221] WAYNE MCGREGOR, *Wayne McGregor | Random Dance. La grammatica del corpo: un incontro tra danza, tecnologia e architettura-the grammar of the body: an encounter between dance, technology and architecture*, Cinisello Balsamo, Silvana, 2014. See HELENA HAMMOND, *Wayne McGregor*, in MARTHA BREMSER, LORNA SANDERS (edited by), *Fifty Contemporary Choreographers*, with an introduction of Deborah Jowitt, second edition, London/New York, Routledge, 2011, pp. 254-263; JO BUTTERWORTH, *Wayne McGregor*, in JO BUTTERWORTH, LORNA SANDERS (edited by), *Fifty Contemporary Choreographers*, third edition, London/New York, Routledge, 2021, pp. 162-171; JO BUTTERWORTH, *Wayne McGregor in conversation with Jo Butterworth*, in JO BUTTERWORTH, GILL CLARKE (edited by), *Dance Makers Portfolio: Conversations with Choreographers*, Bretton Hall, Centre for Dance and Theatre Studies, 1998, pp. 103-114; JACKIE SMART, *The technology of the real: Wayne McGregor's Nemesis and the ecology of perception*, in GAVIN CARVER, COLIN BEARDON (edited by), *New Visions in Performance: the impact of digital technologies*, Lisse, Swets & Zeitlinger, 2004, pp. 41-54; STEVE DIXON, *Random Dance Company*, in STEVE DIXON, *Digital Performance: a history of new media in theatre, dance, performance art and installation*, with contributions of Barry Smith, Cambridge, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007, pp. 233-234; JO BUTTERWORTH, LIESBETH WILDSCHUT, *Contemporary Choreography: a critical reader*, Oxfordshire, Abingdon, 2009; SCOTT DELAHUNTA, PHILIP BARNARD, *Seeing the "choreographic mind": three analytic lens to probe and notate creative thinking in dance*, in BETTINA BLÄSING, MARTIN PUTTKE, THOMAS SCHACK (edited by), *The Neurocognition of Dance: mind, movement and motor skills*, London/New York, Routledge, 2018, pp. 88-114; MAKEDA EASTER, *Can artificial intelligence become a choreographer? Wayne McGregor brings AI to L.A.*, in «Los Angeles Times», 18 maggio 2018; TANYA JAYANI FERNANDO, *The Ekphrastic Body: Wayne McGregor's Woolf Works*, in «Dance Chronicle», vol. 42, n. 2, 2019, pp. 143-169; JO BUTTERWORTH, WAYNE MCGREGOR, *Wayne McGregor: Thwarting Expectation at The Royal Ballet*, in KATHRINA FARRUGIA-KRIEL, JILL NUNES JENSEN (edited by), *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Ballet*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2021, pp. 107-125. Si rimanda anche al sito ufficiale della compagnia Wayne McGregor: https://waynemcgregor.com/ (last accessed 23/05/2025).

[222] See JO BUTTERWORTH, WAYNE MCGREGOR, *Wayne McGregor: Thwarting Expectation at The Royal Ballet*, in KATHRINA FARRUGIA-KRIEL, JILL NUNES JENSEN (edited by), *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Ballet*, cit; BARRY PIERCE, *"I don't wanna be bored!". Wayne McGregor on remixing the classics and his latest physical epic, The Dante Project*, cit.

[223] See ROSALEEN MCCARTHY, ALAN BLACKWELL, SCOTT DELAHUNTA, ALAN WING, KRISTEN HOLLANDS, PHILIP BARNARD, IAN NIMMO-SMITH, ANTHONY MARCEL, *Bodies Meet Minds: Choreography and Cognition*, in «Leonardo», vol. 39, n. 5, 2006, pp. 475-477; JON MAY, BEATRIZ CALVO-MERINO, SCOTT DELAHUNTA, WAYNE MCGREGOR, RHODRI CUSACK, ADRIAN M. OWEN, MICHELE VELDSMAN, CRISTINA RAMPONI, PHILIP BARNARD, *Points in Mental Space: an Interdisciplinary Study of Imagery in Movement Creation*, in «Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research», vol. 29, Special On-line Supplement on Dance and Neuroscience, November 2011, pp. 404-432; ENRICO PITOZZI, *Body soundscape. Perception, movement and audiovisual developments in contemporary dance*, in Yael Kaduri (a cura di), *The Oxford Handbook of Music, Sound and Image in the Fine Arts*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 256-288; ENRICO PITOZZI, *Dissectio: anatomie del corpo sonoro*, in VALENTINA VALENTINI (a cura di), *Drammaturgie sonore. Teatri del secondo Novecento*, cit., pp. 285-314; GIUSEPPE BURIGHEL, *"Scene ibride". I livelli d'ibridazione nella danza tra innovazione e tradizione*, in «Danza e Ricerca. Laboratorio Di Studi, Scritture, Visioni», vol. 8, 2016, pp. 63-75.

The artistic operation *The Dante Project* is particularly articulate, as it sees the collaboration between the Royal Ballet of London, the Opéra National de Paris and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Gustavo Dudamel (1981) was expressly chosen as music director by the composer Thomas Adès (1971)[224], at that time based at the LA Philharmonic, to conduct the new symphonic work he created, *Dante*. Adès had long wanted to write an opera related to Dante's *Comedy*, and choreographer McGregor, who had previously collaborated with him[225], wanted to be able to work with him on a new ballet work that would be staged together later (*Figure 271*):

I was checking my email; it was 2014 when I asked Thomas to write a full score. We wanted Thomas to write a full orchestral piece for the Royal Ballett, and that time commitment is absolutely huge. And so, I've always loved his music, I've felt connected to his music, and I've choreographed many of his pieces before, and I was very looking forward to how it could be the three of us. Tom did have the *Comedy* in mind, so we played around with a lot of different ideas and I realised that, in a collaborative process, people work in very different rhythms. So typically, the choreographer works much closer to the premiere day, and in writing a big orchestral piece, you have to write it years in advance to assemble all the parts, and the design is somewhere in the middle. [...] And because of COVID, the collaborative time has had a totally weird rhythm[226].

In the interview during the open rehearsal of *The Dante Project*, McGregor not only refers to the importance of the endeavour that led him to conceive this work with the composer but also to the visual component that he had long wanted to entrust to the artist Tacita Dean (1965), the third and indispensable component of this production. For the first time in her career as a visual artist, photographer and filmmaker, Dean found herself conceiving the set design, concept and costumes for a ballet at McGregor's express request. The choreographer particularly esteemed the artist for her approach of investigating the analogue component in the digital age, resistant and dissident in wanting to keep a certain craftsmanship component in her approach to the mechanics of the impression on film, offering new insights into contemporary art by resorting to old media, defining a new resistant

[224] As will be explained later, the production expected for 2020/21, around the time of Dante's centenary, was fatally halted by the global pandemic. The theatre premiere took place at The Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, on 14 October 2021, while a first streaming version premiere of the complete ballet was offered online on the Royal Ballet London website on 20 December 2021. The author of this thesis saw the ballet first in the streaming version, then live in London on 2 December 2023.

[225] Previously McGregor choreographed two pieces by the English composer: *Outlier* (2010) on the composition *Concerto for Violin - Concentric Paths, for violin and chamber orchestra, Op. 23* by Adès and *Living Archive: an AI performance experiment* (2019) on the piece *In Seven Days* by Adès.

[226] All reported elements and quotations are *verbatim* transcripts taken from the *live streaming The Royal* Ballet *rehearses The Dante Project*, produced by the Royal Ballett London, directed and moderated by Sarah Crompton, in which the dancers Edward Watson, Sarah Lamb, Francesca Hayward and Matthew Ball, directed by choreographer Wayne McGregor, are seen at work. A panel discussion with the choreographer, artist Tacita Dean and ROH conductor Koen Kessels is also shown, and is therefore made available on the company's YT channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YxC9f_NZT7M&t=84s&ab_channel=RoyalBalletandOpera (last accessed 23/05/2025).

artistic matter of the surrealist *objective chance*[227]. In an interview, McGregor emphasises Dean's decisive contribution to the choice of *Commedia*:

> We batted back and forth a couple of ideas and it was actually him (Adès) who suggested doing *The Divine Comedy*. At first I was like, oh gosh, OK, we'll see. But then I sort of thought my way into it. We had some good ideas about how we might work on the music. Then with Tacita Dean, who I had always wanted to work with (I actually originally asked her for *Woolf Works*), I thought *The Divine Comedy* would be a perfect project for her because it speaks to many of the ways she works in her practice. So it was the team that drove the idea, in a way[228].

Central, therefore, in defining the work of this exceptional artistic trio is the adjective *collaborative*. It is no coincidence that, during the round table for the presentation of the new production of the Royal Opera House[229], interspersed with some pieces choreographed and commented live by the choreographer with the principal dancers of the opera, together with Tacita Dean and Koen Kessels, the conductor who will be in charge of the London performances, McGregor emphasises the crucial role that the collaborative approach played in the planning and construction of the shared artistic project. In this way, they were able to conceive an organic vision of the work as a whole and to maintain for each stage element (or associated artist) the peculiar imprint of each. On the stage, the specific instances of the three artists come together in a single grandiose work in the form of a ballet, with different co-present levels of meaning and a revival of the preceding heritage of Dante's reception, which come together in an organic framework. According to McGregor, in the choral and cooperative work carried out by the three main artists, it was crucial not to think of the work as a narrative and slavish adaptation of the text of the *Commedia*.

The title chosen for this Dante adaptation identifies the nature of the relationship that characterised the subsequent phases of devising and accomplishing phase: *The Dante Project* is, in fact, a project, a reflection on Dante's masterpiece, but also on his production in a broader sense and on his life, as an artist and as a man of his time. In the three-act structure, not only is the canonical division of the three canticles for Dante's three otherworldly realms resumed, but, in *Purgatorio*, a reflection on the man Dante is also inserted, linked to the *Vita Nova* and the outbreak of love for Beatrice, muse and beloved[230].

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[227] See JOHANNA MALT, *The Surrealist Object in Theory*, in JOHANNA MALT, *Obscure Objects of Desire Surrealism, Fetishism, and Politics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 76-112.

[228] Response by Wayne McGregor in BARRY PIERCE, *"I don't wanna be bored!". Wayne McGregor on remixing the classics and his latest physical epic, The Dante Project*, in «Hero», 24 novembre 2023, available at: https://hero-magazine.com/article/244846/wayne-mcgregor-the-dante-project (last accessed 23/05/2025).

[229] Henceforth abbreviated ROH.

[230] See *[INTERVIEW] Wayne McGregor about THE DANTE PROJECT*, interview available on the official Opèra National de Paris channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tVxw8bDV1MI&ab_channel=Op%C3%A9ranationaldeParis (last accessed 23/05/2025). Further reviews and comments on the ballet can be found in: SARAH CROMPTON, *The Dante Project review – bold, beautiful and utterly engaging*, in «The Guardian», 24 ottobre 2021, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2021/oct/24/the-dante-project-royal-ballet-review-wayne-mcgregor-thomas-ades-tacita-dean-edward-watson; JANE ROSENBERG, *Adès and McGregor Create a Story Ballet for the Twenty-First Century*,

The first act is named *Inferno*, and the subtitle *Pilgrim* is proposed alongside the title of Dante's cantica, as the intention is to emphasise the nature of the inner and outer journey experienced by the Florentine poet in the realm of eternal damnation, with the evocative encounters, episodes and stories that the cantica offers. The second act*, Purgatorio*, focuses instead on Dante's process of purgation, dwelling on the different stages of his growth as a person, and re-elaborating the moment of his reunion with his beloved Beatrice in the Garden of Eden to offer an insight into the prodromes of their love story. Taking its cue from the youthful work *Vita Nova*, it proposes a doubling of the couples Dante and Beatrice as adults and children, at the time of their first glance at nine years of age and in their early adolescence. This is why the subtitle in this case is Love, the love that passes from the juvenile, immature and naive stage to a more adult and conscious one, capable of developing into a poem that leads to the universal, to the creation of a masterpiece. This dramaturgical structure of the second act is developed by dividing it into three oppositional passages, called *Remembrance* and *Ritual*, in which the love of the young Dante and that of the adult Dante are contrasted, until the final meeting, *Beatrice*. Finally, the third act, the shortest, is dedicated to *Paradiso*, whose subtitle becomes *Poema Sacro (Continuous and Planetary)*. In this final, luminous and abstract section, souls are also referred to as celestial bodies, capturing the essentially new and unrepeatable nature of *Paradiso* and the blessed souls that dwell there for eternity. The vision of God is at the centre of an artistic investigation into the possibilities granted to the human body, as an entity that experiences through every sense and that succeeds, finally, through art, in creating a new life.

Also in this ballet, the visual element constitutes a decisive factor in conveying the chosen themes of Dante's work: as before, the scenography is the fundamental element in which the interpretative and analytical keys of the performance are placed. For this reason, our analysis will be proposed through a ternary progression, act by act, in which we will begin by analysing the scenic space, then the music and finally the choreographic choices, dwelling on the elements and specificities linked to the three different artists that determine these choices.

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in «Seen and Heard International», 16 luglio 2019, available at: https://seenandheard-international.com/2019/07/ades-and-mcgregor-create-a-story-ballet-for-the-twenty-first-century/ ; DAVID NICE, *The Dante Project, Royal Ballet review - brave but flawed take on the Divine Comedy returns. Hell and Purgatory get vivid if diffuse music from Thomas Adès, but Heaven is pallid*, in «the*arts*desk.com», 27 novembre 2023, available at: https://theartsdesk.com/dance/dante-project-royal-ballet-review-brave-flawed-take-divine-comedy-returns ; DEBRA CRAINE, *The Dante Project- Thomas Adès score is the triumph of Royal Ballet premiere*, in «The Times», 15 ottobre 2021, available at: https://www.thetimes.com/article/the-dante-project-review-thomas-ades-score-is-the-triumph-of-royal-ballet-premiere-2ttkwdgfx ; G. J. DOWLER, *The Royal Ballet – Wayne McGregor's The Dante Project*, in «The Classical Source», 14 ottobre 2021, available at: https://www.classicalsource.com/concert/the-royal-ballet-wayne-mcgregors-the-dante-project/; FRANCESCA PEDRONI, *Wayne McGregor e la metamorfosi del Sommo Poeta*, in «il Manifesto», 8 gennaio 2022, available at: https://ilmanifesto.it/wayne-mcgregor-e-le-metamorfosi-del-sommo-poeta ; GERALD DOWLER, *McGregor, lontano dal Paradiso*, «Ballet2000», n. 290, 2022, p. 29.

McGregor and Adès also support this choice at the level of analysis and agree in reporting how the figurative inputs presented by Dean in the initial phase of elaboration were decisive for a further deepening of their respective compositions. In her role as stage designer and creator of the costumes, the artist started precisely from the study of the great illustrators of the *Commedia*, such as William Blake, Gustave Dorè and Salvador Dalì, not forgetting the drawings of Sandro Botticelli and various medieval frescoes. In his eclectic work as a figurative artist, Dean has also created biographical documentaries on artists past and present, from the Italian painter Giotto, with the documentary *Buon Fresco* in 2014, to contemporary artists, such as dancer and choreographer Merce Cunningham, in *For Merce Cunningham performs STILLNESS* in 2007 and the subsequent 2009 *Craneway Event*[231]. Reflecting on some of the greatest examples of Dante's depictions and illustrations, she intersected them with her visual elaborations of the contemporary, identifying nature as her favourite subject. In order to conceive Dante's journey from *Hell* to *Paradise*, these elements are grafted onto a thread that focuses essentially on oppositional poles ranging from negative to positive, from monochrome to polychrome, and from representation to abstract art.

Inferno is realised from the idea of the negative expressed by Tacita Dean. The great chasm caused by Lucifer's fall offers Dean the perspective from which to rework her own artwork. Starting in 2015, but particularly in 2017 and 2018, Dean has been producing huge canvases that have landscapes or natural elements as their subject, in order to construct a debate on the impact of human actions on the planet. The artist's reference is not only to the phenomenon of climate change, but also, on a social and political level, to the mounting inability to cope with the nationalistic drifts implemented by the extreme right-wingers, who in those years were increasingly present and popular (think of Brexit and Donald Trump's first victory in the US elections). Starting from a contemporary reinterpretation of the romantic Wilderness and *Sehnsucht*, referring to the uncontaminated nature, iconic presences in the paintings of the famous German artist Caspar David Friedrich, Dean creates on monumental canvases (up to three metres by seven) naturalistic subjects starting from an initial black layer of «blackboard paint», on which she draws with white chalk. *The Montafon Letter* (2017),

[231] See TACITA DEAN, *The Dante Project*, edited and with contributions of Briony Fer and Jennifer King, Graphic Design of Martyn Ridgewell, Cologne, Mudam, Luxembourg and Walther König, 2022. See also TACITA DEAN, *Seven Books*, Göttingen/Paris, Steidl/Paris Musées, 2004; ALEXANDRA HARRIS, ALAN HOLLINGSHURST, ALI SMITH (a cura di), *Tacita Dean: landscape portrait still life*, London, Royal Academy of Arts, 2018; TACITA DEAN, *Selected Writing (1992-2018)*, vol. 1, London, Royal Academy of Arts, 2018; TACITA DEAN, *Complete Works & Filmography: Writing and Filmography*, vol. 2, London, Royal Academy of Arts, 2018; EMANUELA DE CECCO (a cura di), *Tacita Dean*, Milano, postmedia, 2004; JEAN-CHRISTOPHE ROYOUX, MARINA WARNER, GERMAINE GREER, *Tacita Dean*, London, Phaidon, 2006. For a brief background on the artist Tacita Dean, please refer to her profile in the Marian Goodman gallery that curates, among many others, the exhibition of works inspired by Dante created by the artist: https://www.mariangoodman.com/artists/39-tacita-dean/ (last accessed 23/05/2025).

Chalk Fall (2018) and the subsequent *The Wreck of Hope* (2022)[232] are the foundations on which Dean elaborates her concepts for *Inferno* (*Figure 272*):

«I wanted to make the drawing a negative, which would make the ice black. Hell is cold». […] Using chalk on blackboard, making the light areas dark and the dark light, reversing all the tonal relationships, Dean discovered that it is incredibly hard to do. Dean's drawing for *Inferno* is the longest she has ever made. It runs the length of the Royal Opera House stage, at an angle. «There's a skewed black circle on a mirrored floor, as a circle of Hell, with another mirror on the black ceiling, and you see the mountains reflected, the right way up, and you have the sense that the world is above you, the world righted»[233].

The various layers of white plaster that make up the imposing backdrop *Inferno* (2019, 244 x 1220 cm) reflect the majesty of Dante's work as a whole. Just as the *Commedia* allows for different levels of interpretation, Dean's canvas allows the different elements that compose it to interweave and pile up on each other: on a macroscopic level there are upturned mountains, so similar to the infernal funnel, an ideal foreshadowing of the subsequent inverted mount of *Purgatorio*; on a microscopic level, on the canvas, as if woven between warp and weft, there are elements, numbers, quotations and names taken from Dante's *Inferno*, juxtaposed with names, places and references to contemporary events. Forever connected, they leave a tangible sign of the artist's stance in wanting to continue to propose an art that dialogues with life, that is a vehicle for thought and change.

Following her own poetics of reuse and re-elaboration, Dean offers the public the possibility of approaching her work in the wake of Dante's, projecting into the present, but also into the future, the universal questions and themes that the Florentine artist shares with the humanity of the new millennium. Dean's set design is a grandiose work, but just as ephemeral as the ballet in which it is presented. In fact, the layers of plaster on the painted canvas are as fragile, potentially delicate and exposed to the action of time as Dante's work was and as the world is in relation to the work of humanity. The inverted horizon of the Infernal Canticle, whose choreographic setting we will comment on later, is particularly striking when observed together with the stage costumes.

A tight-fitting full-body suit is also chosen for this ballet, which is the basic recurring garment for the souls that make up the corps de ballet in the three otherworldly realms. For the first cantica, the suits take up the negative/positive concept with the opposition of black and white proposed in the backdrop. The suits are charcoal-black, mottled, over which, before entering the scene, white chalk

[232] *The* work *The Montafon Letter* is in the Glenstone Museum, Potomac, Maryland. The work *Chalk Fall* is now in the Queensland Gallery of Modern art. See DONNA WEST BRETT, *How the poetically-charged art of Tacita Dean gives its audience a moment for stillness and time*, in «The Conversation. Academic rigour, journalistic flair», 11 dicembre 2023, available at: https://theconversation.com/how-the-poetically-charged-art-of-tacita-dean-gives-its-audience-a-moment-for-stillness-and-time-219485 (last accessed 23/05/2025). Please also refer to the video interview in which Dean herself describes the artistic operation undertaken for the work *Chalk Fall*, in the video *Tacita Dean discusses the monumental chalk drawing 'Chalk Fall'* available at the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art Trustees YT channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6yniwuIDGU&ab_channel=QAGOMA (last accessed 23/05/2025).

[233] Tacita Dean quotes in ADRIAN SEARLE, *A journey through mediums. Interview about the designs for the ballet*, in ROYAL OPERA HOUSE (edited by), *The Dante Project-Programme*, 2023, pp. 60-61, quotation on p. 60.

marks are affixed or sprayed corresponding to the region of the body to which the soul's pain most corresponds. For example, «the thieves' hands are chalked, Satan is completely chalked, Paolo and Francesca's genitals and bums are chalked»[234]. This decision, again in line with the subversion and reversal as the basic approach for the cantica, allows the bodies on stage to constitute a further surface of the picture, an element that moves, inherent and integral to the sin that pervades the infernal funnel. The "chalked" souls, dancing and touching each other, constantly produce further chalk marks and clouds of dust, recalling an artistic contrapasso in which the production of the sign becomes collective; in this way, the choreography of the souls in *Inferno* tangibly duplicates the previous invisible dance performed by Dean on the canvas with her material art (*Figure 273*).

Special attention is paid to the costumes of the protagonists: Dante and the guide Virgil. To create their costumes, Dean relies on the iconography and colours that characterised Dante and Virgil in Botticelli's and Blake's drawings (*Figure 274-275*), inverting them from the usual ones: «Dante in red, Virgil in blue»[235]. The most recent iconography is based on the oldest manuscript tradition, where Dante and Virgil are often illuminated and identified by the colours red and blue and the headgear they wear[236] (*Figure 276*). The two principal dancers in the play, however, in the first act wear short long-sleeved tunics, where the colours that characterise them, a Tiffany blue for Dante and a mustard yellow for Virgil, are the complementary variant of the fundamental colours (red and blue) that will only occur in the fullness of *Paradise*, using the pattern of the negative of the entire cantica of *Inferno* (*Figure 277*). In the transitions from cantica to cantica, therefore, the evolution of the tunics of the protagonist offers, on a visual level, a clear perception for the audience of the change taking place on the stage and in the character's psychology.

The composer Thomas Adès, like Dean, also decides to set his score in relation to a reference artist. In the case of the composition *Dante*, Adès openly declares how his work is a very personal form of homage to the 19th century Hungarian composer Franz Liszt, who had written the *Dante-Symphonie (Eine Symphonie zu Dantes Divina Commedia)* (S. 109) and the *Après une lecture du*

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[234] ADRIAN SEARLE, *A journey through mediums. Interview about the designs for the ballet*, in ROYAL OPERA HOUSE (edited by), *The Dante Project-Programme*, cit., quotation at p. 60.
[235] *Ibidem*.
[236] One can get an overview of Dante's manuscript tradition and the miniatures dedicated to the *Commedia* by consulting the *Illuminated Dante Project* website, a research project that later merged into the *Naples Dante Project*, where it is possible to consult the ancient manuscripts of *the Commedia* provided with images through the online archive and codicological and iconographic database: https://www.dante.unina.it/idp/public/frontend/index (last accessed 23/05/2025). See also LUCIA BATTAGLIA RICCI, *Ai margini del testo: considerazioni sulla tradizione del 'Dante illustrato'*, in «Italianistica: Rivista di letteratura italiana», vol. 38, n. 2, maggio/agosto 2009, pp. 39-58; LUCIA BATTAGLIA RICCI, *Dante per immagini. Dalle miniature trecentesche ai giorni nostri*, cit.; MARIANNA VILLA, *Dal testo all'immagine: Blake in dialogo con Dant*e, in «Dante e l'arte», n. 7, 2020, pp. 29-58.

Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata[237], and who for him plays the role that Virgil had for Dante, «lo mio maestro e 'l mio autore»[238]:

«I abducted Liszt for the weekend - I thought he would be my Virgil, and we had a good time together! Inferno moves from 100% Liszt orchestrated by me to 100% me, and it moves very freely between them». There are recognizably direct orchestral transcriptions of the *Bagatelle sans tonalité* and the *Grand Galop Chromatique* alongside more elliptical references to the choral cycle *Via Crucis* and - perhaps inevitably - the *Dante Symphony* and *Dante Sonata* which became the artistic summations of Liszt's own lifelong love-affair with *The Divine Comedy*. […] «The ideas in his music are live cultures. You sit down and there's something about this chord or that moment that were new. In Liszt, you are always confronted with essential cells at a very microscopic, primal level. Once I'd finished working on *Inferno*, it became hard to tell which of us the DNA came from. To take one example, literally the way in, the portal: Liszt described that so exactly in the music at the start of the *Dante Sonata* - but it's such a primal cell, just falling tritones, so I refracted it on itself many times and made it spiral upward, so it feels like plunging down a cliff face»[239].

A premiere performance of the first act*, Inferno*, took place in 2019, just as the Royal Ballet was on an American tour, giving international audiences a first taste of the production in progress. The premiere was scheduled at the Walt Disney Concert Hall on 10 May 2019, with the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Gustavo Dudamel. It was a music-only performance[240]. As McGregor recalls, this first version was still ideally set at around twenty-five minutes per cantica. However, Adès soon provided the choreographer with a new forty-five-minute version, and this remained the official version. The first canticle, *Inferno*, in the choreographed version, premiered in Los Angeles on 12 and 13 July 2019 at the Music Center Dorothy Chandler Pavillon, in the presence of Tacita Dean, as part of a mixed programme that featured the new production alongside the previous collaborations between Adès and McGregor.

According to music critics, *Inferno* is the longest composition with the most brilliant music. It is the part most faithful to the composer's polychromatic nature and most capable of continuously capturing the attention of the audience[241]. For the creation of *The Dante Project*, Adès and McGregor

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[237] See ALESSANDRO AVALLONE, *Franz Liszt e la «Dante Symphony»: frammenti e simboli per una nuova musica «umanitaria»*, in «Dante e l'arte», vol. 2, 2015, pp. 127-142; IDA ZICARI, *"Après une lecture du Dante. Fantasia quasi Sonata" di Franz Liszt*, in «Il Corriere Musicale», 2017; MARIA TERESA ARFINI, «*Après une lecture du Dante»*, in MARIA TERESA ARFINI, ALBERTO RIZZUTI (a cura di), *«AnDante». Dante e la musica: riflessioni interdisciplinari*, cit., pp. 44-55; MARIATERESA STORINO, *Il soggetto o i soggetti? La Dante-Symphonie di Franz Liszt*, in MARIA TERESA ARFINI, ALBERTO RIZZUTI (a cura di), *«AnDante». Dante e la musica: riflessioni interdisciplinari*, cit., pp. 56-85.

[238] *If*. I, v. 85.

[239] Quotations from Thomas Adès taken from the illustrative material on *The Dante Project* on the LA Philharmonic's website and in the Hall Programme, see PETER QUANTRILL, *Composing*, in ROYAL OPERA HOUSE (edited by), *The Dante Project-Programme*, cit., quotation at p. 57.

[240] See LAURENCE VITTES, *Thomas Adés' new ballet score debuts in LA... without dancers*, in «backtrack», 13 maggio 2019, available at: https://bachtrack.com/review-ades-inferno-dudamel-barenboim-los-angeles-philharmonic-may-2019 (last accessed 23/05/2025).

[241] See PETER QUANTRILL, *Thomas Adès interview: 'I do like things to be shocking and transcendent'*, in «Gramophone. World best classic music review», 18 maggio 2020, available at: https://www.gramophone.co.uk/features/article/thomas-ades-interview-i-do-like-things-to-be-shocking-and-transcendent; LAURENCE VITTES, *Thomas Adés' new ballet score debuts in LA... without dancers*, cit.; DEBRA CRAINE, *Thomas Adès: My journey to Hell and back for The Dante Project. The composer tells Debra Craine about his Royal Ballet collaboration*, in «The Times», 11 ottobre 2021, available at: https://www.thetimes.com/article/thomas-ades-interview-dante-project-88nc96h8n (last accessed 23/05/2025).

decided to approach the reading of *Commedia* by frequently comparing significant passages and episodes, to give an organic dimension to their mutual creative role. Especially regarding the first cantica, one perceives, both for the music and the choreography, how certain episodes and characters are expressly brought to the stage:

> Adès and McGregor began by making a list of the scenes they wanted from Dante's vision of *Hell*. «Here we're going to have the deviants, here the suicides, the thieves, the hypocrites». He makes an unsettling comparison with the *Dances of the Sweets* sequence in the Second Act of *The Nutcracker*. «I thought that the most exciting thing for a ballet would be the eerie sense of doing it quite traditionally, but in *Hell*». To evoke distant yet familiar musical idioms on a knife-edge between parody and homage is an Adès hallmark. Listeners quickly find their feet in his music and just as soon lose them: the ground is rarely stable for long even if it feels reassuringly familiar to begin with[242].

The musical score, like the choreography, is enucleated and conceived from small «essential cells»[243]: for example, emphasising the gravity and sense of awe associated with approaching the enormous portal in the third canto of *Inferno*[244]; then moving on to the almost comical and pungent high notes of the episode of *The Selfish - stung by wasps*, where Adès uses Dante's metaphorical image of the sloths (the damned of the *Antinferno* destined to run after a meaningless sign, stung by wasps and blowflies, and seeing their own blood feeding large worms on the ground they tread[245]) to construct particularly effective little melodic lines with insistent, stinging sounds reminiscent of the sound of a slap, a stinging sting[246].

This common choice of taking precise cues from certain descriptions presented by Dante and from the passages in the *Commedia* to give clear expression to them through music is also followed by McGregor for some specific passages of the choreographic component, through gestures and research of certain poses performed by the dancers; together with this direct correspondence,

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[242] Illustrative material on *The Dante Project* can be found on the LA Philharmonic website: https://www.laphil.com/musicdb/pieces/4807/dante-us-premiere-commissioned-by-the-la-phil-and-the-royal-ballet-with-generous-support-from-the-lenore-s-and-bernard-a-greenberg-fund (last accessed 23/05/2025). Some of the same quotes and material can be found in PETER QUANTRILL*, Composing*, in ROYAL OPERA HOUSE (edited by), *The Dante Project-Programme*, 2023, pp. 56-59.

[243] PETER QUANTRILL*, Composing*, in ROYAL OPERA HOUSE (edited by), *The Dante Project-Programme*, cit., quotation at p. 57.

[244] See *If.* III, vv. 1-18.

[245] *Ibidem*, vv. 34-69.

[246] On the new composition *DANTE*, by Thomas Ades, commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic and recorded live by the latter in the Walt Disney Concert Hall in 2022, conducted by Gustavo Dudamel, all information can be found on the Institution's website. Awarded at the 2024 Grammy Awards as best orchestral performance, it includes the following passages divided into two CDs: Side A: Inferno. I. Abandon Hope; II. The Selfish - stung by wasps; III. The Ferryman; IV. Pavan of the Souls in Limbo; V. Paolo and Francesca - the endless whirlwind; VI. The Gluttons - in slime; Side B: Inferno. VII. The Suicides - the bleeding trees; VIII. The Deviants - on burning sand; IX. The Fortune-tellers - facing both ways; X. The Popes' Adagio - heads first; XI. The Hypocrites - in coats of lead; XII. The Thieves - devoured by reptiles; XIII. Satan - in the lake of ice; Side C: Purgatorio. I. Dawn on the Sea of Purgatory; II. Mount Purgatory; III. The Valley of Flowers; IV. The Healing Fire; V. The Earthly Paradise; VI. The Heavenly Procession; VII. The Ascent; Side D: Paradise. Paradise, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter (The Eagle), Saturn (The Golden Ladder), Fixed Stars, Empyrean. The recording, along with the Los Angeles Philharmonic orchestra and artistic director Gustavo Dudamel, also features: the Los Angeles Master Chorale, with Grant Gershon and Jenny Wong, as artistic directors, and the recorded voices of Khazan Gabriel A. Shrem, of the Khazan congregation and Great Ades Synagogue in Jerusalem.

however, it is reaffirmed how all the different stage elements have had substantial freedom and creative autonomy in the compositional process. In fact, in order to conceive the choreography, McGregor starts from the definition of the protagonists, as it is precisely with these, as well as with the other artists of stage, that he characterises his own compositional mode:

Dance is a collaborative art form. It demands that we work together to realise our vision: the choreographer and the dancer, the music and the dance and so it goes on. We, not I. The inter-personal, highly discursive art form requires that we create in tandem and communicate both psychologically and physically, effectively to become greater than the sum of the parts. [...] All my work is ensemble work[247].

Edward E. Watson (1976), *principal* dancer at the Royal Opera House, one of the best English dancers with whom McGregor has often collaborated, plays Dante. The role is designed on his artistic characteristics, as the last ballet before his retirement from the stage[248]. Although in the first act *Inferno*, his part tends to be somewhat marginal, his magnetic presence establishes a deep connection between each episode. Next to him, a dancer with great artistic experience was chosen for the part of Virgil, particularly suited to match Watson's explosiveness: *senior répétiteur* and principal character artist Gary Avis (1969). As mentioned above and observable from excerpts of the open rehearsal streamed before the *première*[249], McGregor understands creation as a "collaborative act"[250]. Dancers are required to have excellent preparation, but above all an ability to express thoughts and contribute to the definition of the movement and its intentions. To this end, McGregor poses various questions to his performers[251], soliciting their physical abilities and preparation in order to assess together how, and in what terms, to push the canonical positions of classical dance to the limit, for instance by searching for more and more open excursion angles compared to the norm[252]:

Both consciously and unconsciously, my residency at the Royal Opera House with The Royal Ballet has attempted to question assumptions about ballet: how is made, what it communicates, and how far one can explore the form in order to unleash a fresh perspective for the dancers, collaborators, and the audiences. I believe that although some balletomanes

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[247] JO BUTTERWORTH, *Wayne McGregor: Thwarting Expectation at The Royal Ballet*, in KATHRINA FARRUGIA-KRIEL, JILL NUNES JENSEN (edited by), *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Ballet*, cit., quotation at p. 111.

[248] There is also a video of commendation and thanks for the artistic contribution and magnificent career made by various colleagues including dancers, choreographers (including McGregor) and members of the ROH, where some clips related to *The Dante Project*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0i7ax-LWs4k&ab_channel=Dancersdiary . (last accessed 23/05/2025) can be found. Furthermore, one can see in the film clip *Darcey's Ballet Heroes* one of the first moments when Watson and McGregor began their collaboration at the ROH in 2006: directed by Mike Christie, *Darcey's Ballet Heroes*, 2015 (59 min), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FSBF4-E4bbs&ab_channel=Astrid (last accessed 23/05/2025).

[249] *See The Royal Ballet rehearses The Dante Project*, cit.

[250] One can also get a clear sense of the way of working on *The Dante Project* from the video made for the following edition at the Opéra de Paris, in which the entire *cast* changes and McGregor works with the new dancers to give the French version the same poignancy of meaning and the same depth of gesture and mimicry as desired. See for example the video *[INTERVIEW] Germain Louvet répète THE DANTE PROJECT*, available at the Opéra national de Paris' YT channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=minGwLMBtYw&ab_channel=Op%C3%A9ranationaldeParis (last accessed 23/05/2025).

[251] «How does it take to bring the leg over there? Do you think it's possible?», *ibidem*.

[252] This kind of questioning and interaction between choreographer and dancers is clearly visible in the video concerning the open rehearsal of ROH *The Royal Ballet rehearsed The Dante Project*, cit.

and certain critics insist that there are specific formal rules that must govern ballet, (movement that is "acceptable", compositional structures that are "right", costumes that are "appropriate"), rules that must be adhered to for new work to be valid, I have, in the spirit of restless curiosity, wanted to explore and test what these artificial boundaries are[253].

With Watson, thanks to the understanding built up over the years and in the roles performed together, the choreographer conceives dance as a process of knowledge that is impossible to realise without the choral contribution of the other people involved[254]. McGregor defines *physical thinking* as the universal principle that governs the human capacity to know and conceive one's own body in space, a capacity that can be implemented and that identifies, on the one hand, the dancer's body within an architectural system and, on the other hand, the dancer's way of conceiving his or her own body as an architectural element within this given space. McGregor's temperament, speed and compositional mode can be appreciated, *in nuce*, in a June 2012 TED Talk held in Edinburgh, now available online. Together with two dancers, he set up a real-time choreography and described his work for an audience of non-experts as follows[255]:

When I choreograph I generate a vocabulary for movement that in some way challenges, exploits, explores and rediscovers the potential of the human body. With the dancers we generate a physical alphabet that's different from one piece to the next. Then I create the composition[256].

In *Inferno*, Watson and the other *principal dancers* are the minimal units on which McGregor begins to build the dramaturgy for solos, pas de deux and trios. As revealed by Uzma Hameed, dramaturg of the production[257], the casting for this first part was particularly scrupulous, as in the case of Watson, as each of the Dantean episodes chosen by the composer and choreographer involves a precise punishment. Each punishment is interpreted by a solo dancer who does not appear in the subsequent episodes, but only possibly in the choral passages. Therefore, the technical qualities of the performers, even very specific ones, are finalised for maximum scenic performance.

One example above all is the manner used to stage the episode of Paolo and Francesca, the two lustful lovers of the fifth canto of *Inferno*. In the original cast, they are played by two principals, Matthew Ball and Francesca Hayward. On stage, the two dancers are distinguished by their costumes

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[253] JO BUTTERWORTH, *Wayne McGregor: Thwarting Expectation at The Royal Ballet*, in KATHRINA FARRUGIA-KRIEL, JILL NUNES JENSEN (edited by), *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Ballet*, cit., quotation at p. 115.

[254] «a distributive cognitive process and it is collaborative, I can't do it without other people», transcript taken from WAYNE MCGREGOR, *A choreographer's creative process in real time*, in the official TEDGlobal website, June 2012: https://www.ted.com/talks/wayne_mcgregor_a_choreographer_s_creative_process_in_real_time (last accessed 23/05/2025).

[255] See WAYNE MCGREGOR, *A choreographer's creative process in real time*, cit.

[256] CATHERINE HALE, *The science of making dances*, in «Dance Gazette», n. 2, 2004, pp. 16-19.

[257] This figure turns out to be decisive for the deepening of Dante's reception and approach to the medieval text, as Hameed did her studies at Cambridge University, and in this prestigious institution she was able to approach Dante's studies for the first time. Not surprisingly, in order to promote an interdisciplinary debate on *The Dante Project*, she was invited on 14 November 2021 to hold a dialogue with Dante scholar Heather Webb. The dialogue is available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eNP7DC9PaTo&ab_channel=MMLL%2CUniversityofCambridge (last accessed 23/05/2025).

with chalk dust stains on their genitals, which are made even more evident to the audience by their movements and the play of light. The two are at the centre of the stage, a cone of dim light is projected on them while the rest of the stage (where Dante and Virgil are also standing) is enveloped in a dense half-light of smoke. The movements of the two lustful dancers have been studied to keep the centre of gravity very low and to construct a series of holds in the area of the hips and groin, further emphasising the carnal component of their sin through the overlapping of their bodies; as, for example, in the split in the air performed by Hayward-Francesca, placed in front of Ball-Paolo, and supported by him by leaning on her pelvis (*Figure 278*). The two also perform a series of spiralling, increasingly obsessive spins that discharge at various times towards the floor, with the two performers alternately slumping to the floor, but never stopping. This movement immediately generates exhausting upward thrusts with their arms, renewing the feeling of anguish (which pervades them in Dante's verses) as they run across the stage. In the course of the performance, jumps are also inserted into these symbolic circles, made by the bodies of the two dancers, which on the whole recall the infernal storm, which incessantly slams the souls of the lustful into the hollow of the second circle[258].

Other episodes include specific quotations from Dante, such as the almost pedestrian descriptions taken from some of the punishments of Malebolge, the eighth circle divided into ten subsets in which those who committed sins of fraud in life are punished. This is the case of the simoniacs (III *bolgia*), those who have traded in sacred objects and profited from the sincere faith of believers (mostly all men of the Church), whom Dante describes as being stuck upside down, inside fiery pits, with their feet and backsides flailing in the air. McGregor's ballet features a group scene in which the dancers involved are divided into two roles: some (mostly male performers) grab others and hold them upside down in front of them, while the latter (mostly female performers) obsessively flail their legs in the air.

A similar reminder is found for the Sorcerers (IV bolgia), so proud as to predict the future during their lifetime, described by Dante, by way of contrapasso, as destined to walk with their heads completely turned backwards. McGregor once again proposes them in a group scene, during which each individual dancer, with no more reference points and sometimes with his head forcibly turned backwards, sprints madly towards the others, generating great havoc and chaos within which even Watson-Dante is engaged. Finally, one may recall the thieves (VII bolgia). McGregor, for what is one of the bloodiest descriptions taken from *Inferno*, envisages a slavish reprise of the triplets, conceiving a group scene where the dancers' bodies are shocked into inhuman twists and stretches:

[258] There is a video dedicated to this episode within the videos made by the ROH and available on the company's Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/royalballetandopera/videos/367588245608948). Furthermore, part of the choreography is presented within *The Royal Ballet rehearses The Dante Project*, cited above, from minute 54:22 onwards.

Se tu se' or, lettore, a creder lento
ciò ch'io dirò, non sarà maraviglia,
ché io che 'l vidi, a pena il mi consento.

Com'io tenea levate in lor le ciglia,
e un serpente con sei piè si lancia
dinanzi a l'uno, e tutto a lui s'appiglia.

Co' piè di mezzo li avvinse la pancia,
e con li anterior le braccia prese;
poi li addentò e l'una e l'altra guancia;

li diretani a le cosce distese,
e miseli la coda tra 'mbedue,
e dietro per le ren sù la ritese[259].

As Roberta Albano points out, this episode is particularly characterised by a revival of male academic technique, excluding the presence of female dancers on stage. Virtuosities of agility are the focus of the action, with «acrobatic leaps*, jeté* wheels, spins to the second», interspersed with an almost pantomimic tension towards reptile-like movements[260]. As described by Dante, the quality of movement sought by McGregor's dancers is the intricate and sinuous one of the reptilian volutes: just as the damned are destined to perpetual monstrous and bloody metamorphoses, passing from the human body to that of a reptile, so the performers are urged to continue to reintroduce sequences of movements in a constant and painful becoming. The stage exit sees them crawling and wriggling, recalling the snakes or lizards described by Dante. The reflection that Albano articulates emphasises the artistic quality sought by the choreographer in his works, especially in his use of or detachment from academic discipline:

La danza è il mezzo d'espressione di McGregor ma, in questo caso, l'esasperazione dell'aspetto acrobatico, che si riferisce alla tecnica un tempo definita *grottesca*, sembra riflettere e richiamare quella visione medievale di danza come dannazione e come punizione penitenziale, sottolineata anche negli studi di Alessandro Arcangeli. La danza, fortemente condannata dai padri della Chiesa nel Medioevo, è un mezzo satanico che fa delle donne che danzano uno strumento di perdizione. Il virtuosismo è un vuoto e inutile movimento che evoca una punizione divina. I demoni danzanti, nell'iconografia medievale, sono spesso rappresentati in spoglie femminili. La tecnica accademica, in particolare, in quanto disciplina rigidamente codificata allo scopo di rendere i corpi flessibili e duttili strumenti coreografici, viene utilizzata da McGregor come emblema di oppressione e controllo del corpo da parte del potere, in questo caso quello divino[261].

Dance is McGregor's medium of expression but, in this case, the exasperation of the acrobatic aspect, which refers to the technique once defined as *grotesque*, seems to reflect and recall that medieval vision of dance as damnation and as penitential punishment, also emphasised in Alessandro Arcangeli's studies. Dance, strongly condemned by the Church Fathers in the Middle Ages, is a satanic medium that makes dancing women an instrument of perdition. Virtuosity is an

[259] *If*. XXV, vv. 46-57.
[260] «salti acrobatici, ruote di *jeté*, giri alla seconda»; see ROBERTA ALBANO, *The Dante Project: un'ipotesi di lettura*, in ROBERTA ALBANO, GIANLUCA BOCCHINO, MARIA VENUSO (a cura di), *Dante performatico. Letture in diffrazione tra letteratura e Performing Arts*, cit., pp. 55-75, reference at pp. 66-67.
[261] *Ivi*, citation at p. 67. We reproduce in full the footnotes n. 39 and n. 40, referring to passages within the quotation: See ALESSANDRO ARCANGELI, *Rappresentazioni culturali della danza nella prima età moderna*, Tesi di Dottorato, 1992; ALESSANDRO ARCANGELI, *Davide o Salomè? Il dibattito europeo sulla danza nella prima età moderna*, Treviso-Roma, Fondazione Benetton Studi Ricerche-Viella, 2000; CARMELINA URSO, *Donne, danze e spettacoli nel medioevo. Boni ludi o instrumenta diaboli?*, in «Annali della facoltà di Scienze della formazione - Università degli studi di Catania», n.12, 2013, pp. 59-78; FRANCESCO CIABATTONI, *Coreografie dantesche*, cit., pp. 11-30.

empty and useless movement that evokes divine punishment. Dancing demons, in medieval iconography, are often depicted in female guise. Academic technique, in particular, as a rigidly codified discipline aimed at making bodies flexible and ductile choreographic tools, is used by McGregor as an emblem of oppression and control of the body by power, in this case, divine power.

In McGregor's *Inferno*, the recourse to rigid academic technique is codified as a dramaturgical will to reflect on what classical dance is today, what use is there in referring to a past without embracing new instances, without allowing the style to renew itself in order to intercept what is also emerging from the public. This becomes particularly evident in the finale: a disturbing female figure enters the stage, completely covered in plaster, on pointe shoes, who at first glance might look like Beatrice, but instead is Lucifer, played by principal Fumi Kaneko. In addition to her impeccable technique, her character is soon connoted by her sensuality, going on to perform an intense *pas de deux* with Watson-Dante, in which the classical technique is "traviata" with great extensions, sometimes dramatically emphasised (*Figure 279*).

In this last scene, Dean's set design is emphasised by the lighting design created by Lucy Carter and Simon Bennison, which makes the scene even more gloomy and icy by making the white chalk of the scenery stand out, as it has come to represent absolute evil, the cause of humanity's pain. Watson-Dante often brings his hands to his head, thus emphasising how everything is the fruit of his memory, everything is condensed in the memory of the poet that becomes a poem. The character thus experiences the dissent between *auctor* and *agens*, finding himself facing all his fears condensed in the Lord of the Underworld. He is left lifeless on the ground, in total darkness, by Lucifer. Only a blade of light rests on his face, a light that slowly brings Watson-Dante back to his feet; then everything becomes dark and the curtain falls.

Purgatorio, the second act of *The Dante Project*, provides an evolution and a clean break from the first. Once again, the atmosphere created by Dean's set design is striking in its simple refinement. This is how the artist describes one of the first moments in which she started to think of elements for the scene that then materialised on stage:

I was in LA in April and May 2015 and suddenly the whole city was covered in the violet-blue flowers of the Jacaranda trees. The colour is almost like bluebells. I wanted a state-between-states, with just a very large photograph of the tree on the stage. [...] I spent a long time in LA looking for the 'perfect' Jacaranda tree and took a photograph[262].

Dante's second cantica is conceived by Dean from a rarefied but equally material presence of bodies and objects reminiscent of life on earth, of past existence. Just as the purging souls encountered by Dante on his ascent to the mountain stop to tell their stories and ask him to remind the livings to pray in suffrage for them to be submitted to the living, so the first part of the second act is all about

[262] ADRIAN SEARLE, *A journey through mediums. Interview about the designs for the ballet*, in ROYAL OPERA HOUSE (edited by), *The Dante Project-Programme*, cit., quotation at p. 61.

remembrance and recalling the beauty of nature, the value of community. Immersed in a particularly evocative and ascetic soundscape, the set design is reminiscent of a museum, a room as it might appear in real life, in which a monumental installation by Dean is placed obliquely on the right side of the stage, with four minimal wooden stools in front for the dancer-viewers. A timeless, secular and evocative place to let one's thoughts resonate and give space for meditation on existence.

The installation that stands out on stage is *Purgatory (Threshold)*, a «hand-printed photochemical colour photograph printed on Fuji Velvet paper mounted on paper, over-coloured in white pencil» (372 x 468 cm high)[263]. Dean's investigation into the medium, carried out with her own analogue means of imprinting on film, finds great resonance in this cantica, in which Dante himself often dialogues with artists, poets and scholars, discussing the preferred way of making poetry but above all the subject matter to write about. In this monumental photograph, Dean envisages the use of special-coloured films to succeed in imprinting and then printing the right shade of colour of the leaves of the Jacaranda tree, and to these, she adds the meticulous definition of white-coloured leaves hand-drawn by herself on the print (*Figures 280-281*).

Once again, the various layers of the canvas are only apparent to a meticulous and close study, but they allow the audience in the room to experience the warm and vital atmosphere that Dean first experienced while observing and taking the picture in the city of Los Angeles. During the performance of *Purgatory*, thanks to Lucy Carter's light design, the leaves of the Jacaranda tree, made by Dean, are hit by contrasting lights, which gradually make them take on a vibrant lilac colour to remind us of the changing seasons and the natural passing of time. As Adrian Searle points out, the presence of a tree in the middle of a bare stage cannot fail to remind us of the iconic set of *Waiting for Godot*, «the most purgatorial of modern dramas»[264], in which the tree sculpted by the artist Alberto Giacometti stood out in the debut production. This idea was already present in the ICK Amsterdam's *Purgatorio* by Greco and Scholten, used to increase the theme of the condition of waiting and suspension in the drama.

The transition from the previous condition of *Inferno* is made even more evident in the costumes of the entire *ensemble*. The dancers-penitent souls in Purgatorio-wear a new version of the full-body suit with an opaque, milky background, with mottling and patches of contrasting pastel colours, which partly recall Dean's large installation and radiate over the dancers' torsos, as if to focus the spectators' attention on the most central and vital area of the body. The variation is also noticeable

[263] Notes on the opera can be found in ROYAL OPERA HOUSE (edited by), *The Dante Project-Programme*, 2023, p. 68.
[264] ADRIAN SEARLE, *A journey through mediums. Interview about the designs for the ballet*, in ROYAL OPERA HOUSE (edited by), *The Dante Project-Programme*, cit., quotation at p. 61. See also JUDITH WILKINSON, *Samuel Beckett: A Curated Life*, London, Bloomsbury, 2018; JUDITH WILKINSON, *When Alberto Giacometti met Samuel Beckett*, in the official website of the Tate Modern Museum: https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/alberto-giacometti-1159/when-alberto-giacometti-met-samuel-beckett (last accessed 23/05/2025).

in the tunics of the two main performers, Dante and Virgil, with garments that reveal through this chromatic aspect the *in fieri* and transient state of this cantica dedicated to humanity and its possibilities of redemption (*Figure 282*). The tunics of the two principal dancers present a tie-dye motif, which proposes a stain of a colour complementary to the fundamental ones on the upper part of the tunic, a stain confined to the neck, shoulders and chest. Dante presents a vermilion stain on the light blue base of his previous attire; Virgil has a deep dark blue stain on the yellowish base. In this second act, however, the focus is no longer only on the two protagonists described so far but includes the entrance of Beatrice. In order to build up the tension towards the meeting between Dante and his beloved in the Terrestrial Paradise (in the *Commedia* the meeting takes place from the end of the twenty-ninth canto onwards), the artists of *The Dante Project* decide to offer their own interpretation of the story, interpolating the planes of the narrated story of the *Commedia* with the life of the poet outlined in the *Vita Nova*.

As we have said, *Love* is the subtitle chosen for the second cantica and it acquires meaning in the way it approaches the duality of Dante's presence in his own work: as both *agens* and *auctor*, Alighieri declares to the audience from the outset that this is not just a narrative fiction, but the memory of a personal journey, which becomes universal for every human being who wants to take the same path towards knowledge and truth. To shed more light on this point, let us take up the words of the *dramaturg* Hameed:

> In approaching the coreography for the second act of the ballet, McGregor was keen to acknowledge that, unlike Hell with its fragmented narratives, it is unity of story that characterises the world of Purgatory – not only in the sense of collective endeavour, but also in that each soul is responsible for rewriting their individual past, assimilating it, through a process of ritual penance, reflection and prayer, into a story of purity reattained. It made sense, then, for our Dante, as he travels with the purgatorial penitents, to reach backwards through his own memory, to accept the painful history of his love for the earthly Beatrice – in preparation for meeting the celestial Beatrice, the transformed spirit of his beloved, who will take him on the next stage of his journey. Hence, in this act, entitled *Love*, we drew on both *Purgatorio* and *La Vita Nuova*, Dante's lyrical narrative about his love for Beatrice[265].

In order to build this parallelism between the story that precedes the *Commedia*, i.e. the facts narrated by Dante in the prosimetrum *Vita Nova* (the outbreak of the poet's love for Beatrice as soon as he sees her at the age of nine in Florence; the growth of this love until her tragic death at a young age; the subsequent guiding function that Beatrice plays as the blissful soul of *Paradise*), the ballet offers the audience three different stages of the Dante and Beatrice couple: presenting a first pair of very young dancers, Rose Milner and Marco Betteridge-Jimenez, students of the Royal Ballet School; then a young couple, played by Marco Masciari and Francesca Hayward; finally, for the last stage of the reunion in *Paradise*, principal Sarah Lamb (1980) together with Watson.

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[265] UZMA HAMEED, *Towards Hope*, in ROYAL OPERA HOUSE (edited by), *The Dante Project-Programme*, 2023, pp. 36-38, citation at p. 38.

It is worth noting here how these youthful "doubles" of Dante wear a completely red tunic, giving an idea of the completion of the renewal process of his soul. As far as Beatrice is concerned, the dancer's outfit in its various age declinations provides only one solution: a translucent bodysuit with thin straps, a fluid and impalpable skirt composed of shimmering tulle veils, thin and unstructured, capable of allowing the dancer a wide range of movement.

As can be understood from the examinations of the scenography, the second is the most complex act in which the ballet's most innovative choices are proposed. The composer Adès, for example, inserts a biographical element into the writing of *Purgatorio*. Since Dante's second canticle represents a return to life in a new form, in which the natural element of time is present, with the usual subdivision between day and night, and in which a space close to earthly custom is rediscovered and the souls rediscover a community dimension and begin to walk together as penitents along the path of purification, Adès's choice is to insert a vocal element within what until now has been a purely instrumental composition.

Taking his cue from the choral psalms of *Purgatory*, ceaselessly intoned by the community of penitents to support and alleviate their journey, Adès develops the idea of a choir that hovers above the orchestral composition without overpowering it but enriching it with a new meditative and prayerful component, completely human. In this case, he turns to his own origins and records the *baqashot* sung in the Adès Synagogue, founded in 1901 in Jerusalem by his ancestors fleeing persecution in Aleppo, Syria. This particular prayer is recited by the congregation and the *hazzan*, the cantor, in the early hours of the morning and ends at dawn. For Adès, this temporal coincidence between the sung prayer of *baqashot* and the *incipit* of *Purgatory*, with the astronomical periphrasis that captures the beauty of the celestial vault finally visible after the oppressive darkness of *Inferno*[266], provides the basis for the composition of the second act: «Dante's journey in Purgatory also starts at this time of day, with precise descriptions of the changing dawn light as the sun approaches. In a wider sense too, Purgatory is a sort of pre-dawn, before the sun of Paradise»[267].

The meditative component is further developed in the dancers' movements. The initial scene, choreographed by McGregor, features a dancer bent over one of the stools set up by Dean on the left side of the stage, while Watson-Dante enters the stage bewildered and positions himself in front of the landscape installation. Shortly afterwards, he is joined by Virgil who, holding a little girl in his arms, runs across the entire stage and exits. Behind him, following his path to the stage exit, enters a

[266] «Dolce color d'oriental zaffiro, | che s'accoglieva nel sereno aspetto | del mezzo, puro infino al primo giro, | a li occhi miei ricominciò diletto, | tosto ch'io usci' fuor de l'aura morta | che m'avea contristati li occhi e 'l petto», *Pg*. I, vv. 13-18.

[267] PETER QUANTRILL, *Composing*, in ROYAL OPERA HOUSE (edited by), *The Dante Project-Programme*, cit., citation at p. 58.

young Dante, the author composing the lyrics for Beatrice: with this first overlapping of planes between past (young Dante of *Vita Nova*) and present (Watson-Dante of *Commedia*) the second act begins. The dramaturgy of the ballet in this second act envisages a constant juxtaposition between the narrative of the *Commedia* (Dante's reworking of the encounters he makes on the ascent to the mountain) and the memories included in the *Vita Nova* (his past poetic experience dedicated to his love for Beatrice and the poetics of the Dolce Stil Novo).

The different plans are divided into three main sections: *Remembrance 3 - Ritual; Remembrance 2 - Ritual; Remembrance 1 - Sweetest Father*; *Beatrice*. After the first vision of Beatrice in the arms of Virgil (as she had been in the arms of Cupid in the first youthful vision[268]), Dante finds himself alone on stage with the penitent souls. Together with them he begins to develop movements by mimesis, reconstructing the purgatorial dynamic in which he often finds himself sharing the journey and torment with the souls, performing their same gestures.

Just as it happens in the liturgy, in which the faithful observe in the organic whole of the gathered and praying community the same dynamics, making the same gestures, so McGregor performs some sequences of the performance. The dancers who share the stage with Watson-Dante are all men, and sequences are created with them that tend to emphasise articular possibilities, focusing on tractions and abductions, with frequent gestures that go from the inside to the outside, building an inside-out dynamics that is articulated on diagonals and on positions that solicit balance. At times the poses and movements used bring to mind certain martial arts and specific gymnastic exercises, as if to take up the idea of the gymnasium, of bodily training as a metaphor for the training of the spirit required of the souls in *Purgatory*. This male choreography also stresses the limits of academic positions, resulting in a more contemporary quality of the second cantica[269] (*Figures 283-284-285*).

After the conclusion of this first sequence between *Remembrance* and *Ritual*, Dante is led by the souls towards the stools and Virgil reappears from behind the installation together with young Beatrice and two dancers. Recalling some passages of the *Vita Nova*, in which Dante walks through the streets of Florence and sees Beatrice moving through the city, or when he later finds a way to talk about his beloved with the «donne che avete intelletto d'amore»[270], young Beatrice dances at first with the two dancers, according to a specular scheme, in which the gestures and choreographic modules are re-proposed in canon and mirror by the performers, in which a greater reference to the

[268] See Musa/DOL, cap. II, par. 4.
[269] To get an idea of the choreography, we refer once again to a clip made by the ROH relating to *Purgatorio*, *The Dante Project - PURGATORIO: LOVE Clip (Edward Watson; The Royal Ballet)*, which can be found on the ROH's YT channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZS6nPUp7xIQ (last accessed 23/05/2025).
[270] See Musa/DOL, cap. XIX.

neoclassical style is found. Later, as young Dante enters, underlined by wind instruments, drums and percussion, Watson-Dante also begins to dance with them. After a while, however, Beatrice no longer wants to admit Dante to this dance, and taunts him, leaving him in bewilderment, watching her from the side of the stage as she performs a solo before leaving.

In the juxtaposition of two figures of Dante, the adult and the young one, we see all the tension building up due to the discouragement given by Beatrice's refusal to give salvation through the greeting, the glance that allows, according to chivalrous and stilnovistic poetics, salvation to pass from one lover to the other, decreeing their happiness despite the absence of contact. On the young Dante's exit, Watson-Dante performs a solo and is then joined by the other purgatorial souls, who symbolically surround him while he is illuminated by a red light, pausing with his hands on his head, once again in the grip of doubt and fear.

At this point Virgil bursts onto the scene again, accompanying Dante and Beatrice as children. The entrance is underlined by a motif of flutes and triangles, with an adamantine timbre. The two children chase each other and dance, performing a choreography marked by the theme of play, full of circular movements made with their arms, reminiscent of the gesture of embracing. This joyful chase is witnessed by Watson-Dante, who approaches and sees the arrival of young Beatrice, with whom he attempts to dance, unsuccessfully, as if to clearly distinguish the planes of dream and reality.

Meanwhile, young Dante sits at the side of the stage and observes the action together with Virgil. At the end of an increasingly frenetic choral dance, the young Beatrice comes out and Watson-Dante, together with the souls, performs a canon, which is cadenced more and more peremptorily by drums and brass instruments. In progression, the dancers stand in a line, first holding their heads, then describing a cross with their bodies and arms. At the end, Watson-Dante collapses to the ground, lying down in despair.

These are the warnings of Beatrice's death, relived once again by the protagonist, who cannot come to terms with the irreparable loss of his beloved. As the soul-dancers leave the stage, a new trumpet motif is heard, underlining Virgil's return to the scene. The motif announces the scene that sees the master and guide conversing for the last time with the pupil-poet, now ready to undertake the last stretch of the road to complete purification and salvation. Virgil, the soul of infernal Limbo, in fact, cannot pass the limit of the wall of fire guarding the Garden of Eden, and he supports Dante in overcoming this final obstacle, before his reunion with Beatrice.

The pas de deux between Watson-Dante and Avis-Virgilio is characterised by gestures full of transport, love and esteem, sentiments that are characteristic both of Dante's poetry and of the harmony that characterised the two performers in creating these two male roles together with choreographer McGregor. Avis-Virgilio performs a series of diagonals that end with the indication of

a distant point, a series of movements that is copied by Watson-Dante who follows him. Every now and then, it is Avis-Virgilio himself who supports Watson-Dante, who seems to fall, still uncertain in this new phase, but the course has been charted by the master for the pupil who will know how to go towards his own destiny. Let us then return to the passage in which Dante describes the last dialogue between the two:

> e disse: «Il temporal foco e l'etterno
> veduto hai, figlio; e se' venuto in parte
> dov'io per me più oltre non discerno.
>
> Tratto t'ho qui con ingegno e con arte;
> lo tuo piacere omai prendi per duce;
> fuor se' de l'erte vie, fuor se' de l'arte.
>
> Vedi lo sol che 'n fronte ti riluce;
> vedi l'erbette, i fiori e li arbuscelli
> che qui la terra sol da sé produce.
>
> Mentre che vegnan lieti li occhi belli
> che, lagrimando, a te venir mi fenno,
> seder ti puoi e puoi andar tra elli.
>
> Non aspettar mio dir più né mio cenno;
> libero, dritto e sano è tuo arbitrio,
> e fallo fora non fare a suo senno:
>
> per ch'io te sovra te corono e mitrio»[271].

At the end of the pas de deux, Virgil exits and Dante is left alone on the stage, which is pervaded by music, increasingly louder, by the intensification of the colour of the installation, which, struck by the contrasting light, changes the appearance of its leaves to violet. At this point, Lamb-Beatrice enters the scene in all her splendour, embraces Dante from behind and begins a new pas de deux with him (*Figure 286*). At last, they can reunite in a new dimension, one of bliss for her, one of complete purification for him[272]: «puro e disposto a salire a le stelle»[273].

The third and final act, *Paradise*, is characterised by a swirl of light and colour, an ascending abstraction that has no end except in the vision of divine light. To create this otherworldly dimension, Dean conceives the scene as a kind of cinema hall, thus using a visual technique that also characterises her as a visual artist:

> I'm briefly turning the Royal Opera House into a cinema, which gives me huge pleasure, projecting a completely abstract 35mm film above the dancers. [...] I played with light, using combinations of colour filters, taking the gels used in general stage lighting and placing them in front of the camera, layering the complementary coloured filters on top of one another,

[271] *Pg*. XXVII, vv. 127-142.
[272] Elements of the construction of the pas de deux between Dante and Beatrice can be found again in the live *streaming* by the ROH*, The Royal Ballet rehearses The Dante Project*, cit., from minute 8 to minute 32, in which we also find part of the interview with the two dancers Lamb and Watson.
[273] *Pg*. XXXIII, v. 144.

to approach the murky, dirty colour William Blake used in his 1824 illustrations to Dante. It is important that there is no direct correlation between the music and the film. What the pandemic has brought us is the time to develop a closer relationship between music and image, nothing illustrative or literal. [...] There are 19 seconds of black at the beginning of Part 3, to allow the audience to settle and become aware of the projected beam of light. We are so used to digital projections we're in danger of forgetting cinema's relationship to actual projected film. The projector is housed in the auditorium, amongst the audience[274].

The passage from darkness to light sanctions the end of Dante's purification journey and propels him towards perfect knowledge, now able to navigate through the nine heavens towards the Empyrean, together with his new guide, Beatrice. "Vision" is the concept that underpins the entire formulation of *Paradise*. The artistic choice made by Dean recalls in some ways the history of cinema, transforming the stage of the Royal Opera House into an environment which has many similarities with a cinema in the era of silent movies: there is a screen, on which the images are projected, now completely full colour; the orchestra is present to offer greater support to the projection through the creation of an *ad hoc* composition; finally, there is no commentary by a presenter or actor (as was the case in Japanese silent films, for example), but ample space is given to the dramaturgy of the body, creating with the art of dance a new form of collaboration no longer based on pantomime, or exaggerated gestures and mimicry, but on the presence of a more symbolic bodily narrative. For the first time, the presence of wings is also noticeable, making the appearance of the stage potentially more similar to its traditional form and creating a focus in the centre, on the portion of the stage below the screen (*Figure 287*).

In terms of costuming, the challenge of Dante's last cantica sees the transition from negative to positive fulfilled, with Watson-Dante in an outfit with a completely vermilion tunic, finally adhering to the iconography of Botticelli's and Blake's designs. Beatrice, as the blissful soul of *Paradise*, retains the costume seen previously, which with the light sometimes becomes dazzling.

Like the dress of the protagonist, that of the souls of the blessed also varies; they too wear a full-body suit with an opalescent, translucent colour. This quality of colour, different from the extremely bright and material quality of the ICK, and just as different from the translucent whiteness of the Ballett Dortmund, allows Carter to construct a lighting design based on the refraction of colours and the radiating potential of the costumes, which allows the *silhouettes* of the dancers to contrast with the black field of the backdrop (*Figure 288*):

I'm interested in how, through light, we can treat the body to translate Dante's depiction of the three worlds. In Hell, the bodies are tortured, twisted, almost non-human, whereas in Purgatory, they are people - even when they're undergoing penance - at their most natural and serene. Once we get to Paradise, the souls are ciphers, abstractions, they don't hold materiality... it's a challenge![275]

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[274] ADRIAN SEARLE, *A journey through mediums. Interview about the designs for the ballet*, in ROYAL OPERA HOUSE (edited by), *The Dante Project-Programme*, cit., quotation at p. 61.
[275] UZMA HAMEED, *Towards Hope*, in ROYAL OPERA HOUSE (edited by), *The Dante Project-Programme*, cit., quotation at p. 38.

In the last act, the bodies of the dancers become a surface on which to project, building in this prismatic play of refractions a new three-dimensionality. In this way, ideally, it is possible to give form to the multiplicity in the unity of the souls of *Paradise* conceived by Dante, ideally divided in the heavens, but ontologically all part of the one blissful reality in the presence of God. Not insignificant is the fact that the principal dancers who danced in some episodes of *Inferno*[276] interpret these blissful souls. The music Adès writes for *Paradiso* emphasises this ascension towards a rarefied world, a world of difficult codification «with sinuous spirals, mirroring the slow but sure ascent of Dante as he is guided by Beatrice through the vaults of heaven: a sequel, perhaps, to the transfixed beauty of the central movement to his Violin Concerto (subtitled "Concentric Paths")»[277].

As Roberta Albano points out, McGregor in this last act returns once again to academic technique, declining it more in the neoclassical style: the dynamic and more fluid turn of the movements that characterise *Paradiso* sees a greater presence of grasps, leaps and upward thrusts, with particular attention to the development of circular movements that recall the rotation of celestial bodies[278]. If *Purgatorio* was played on chorality, different from the noisy and chaotic one modulated in groups and aggregates of *Inferno*, in *Paradiso* greater attention is paid to couples, to the pas de deux, constructing dynamics not only linked to the figures of Dante and Beatrice, but also between souls.

Interesting in this sense is the pas de deux in which Watson-Dante dances with the soul interpreted by Melissa Hamilton (1989), first soloist (and now principal since 2024), a dancer of incredible talents, who develops a mirror-image *pas de deux*, fully joyful to that compared to that of *Inferno* with Lucifer. The sensuality of the gestures and holds that characterised the previous movements has vanished here, giving way only to tenderness and holds between the two that reveal all the respect and veneration that Dante has for his beloved. Therefore, we find relevant and agreeable Roberta Albano's hypothesis that in the soul interpreted by Hamilton, she sees the Virgin Mary since the fundamental action performed by Dante before the vision of God passes through the encounter with the Virgin and her intercession to keep his talents unaltered in this superhuman undertaking of knowledge[279].

The main feature characterising the poses and gestural passages in *Paradiso* is the touch, that is, in the tension generated between the bodies of the dancers who seem to be particularly careful to

[276] A clip of the third act is available on the company's YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RGeIIJd-yLE&t=14s&ab_channel=RoyalBalletandOpera (last accessed 23/05/2025).
[277] PETER QUANTRILL, *Composing*, in ROYAL OPERA HOUSE (edited by), *The Dante Project-Programme*, cit., quotation at p. 58.
[278] See ROBERTA ALBANO, *The Dante Project: un'ipotesi di lettura*, in ROBERTA ALBANO, GIANLUCA BOCCHINO, MARIA VENUSO (a cura di), *Dante performatico. Letture in diffrazione tra letteratura e Performing Arts*, cit., p. 72.
[279] See *Pd*. XXXIII, vv. 1-57.

circumscribe, as if abstracting it in a temporal-spatial bubble, the instant and the bodily surface within which the contact between the bodies takes place. Embraces, mid-air spins that seem to refer to the iconography of medieval festivals with garlands and festoons, are here taken up and proposed often, underlining how the sensorial and bodily component of bliss is an extremely pregnant theme in *Paradiso*.

Great space is given to the souls and to Watson-Dante, who, after the evocative pas de deux with Hamilton-Maria, finally returns to Beatrice's arms for one last duet and then remains on stage alone. Here, as he strides towards the proscenium, immersed in the mist coloured by Carter's light play, with Dean's kaleidoscopic film of paradisiacal skies behind him and to the notes of Adès' composition in *crescendo*, Watson-Dante looks beyond the audience in the auditorium, towards a distant point on the horizon. In this instant, everything vanishes in a blinding flash of light and then everything becomes dark (*Figure 289*).

In the case of the third act of *Paradiso*, a comparison between the recorded version offered as an online *première* during the pandemic[280] and the live version in the theatre reveals a clearer focus on details offered by the former (due to the video direction offering a more judicious progression of elements), against a more comprehensive overview. In the theatre, the minute elements are sometimes more "disjointed", precisely because of the greater perception of distance. Through the video direction, one is also able to appreciate the great interpretative ability of the selected dancers, which is difficult to grasp in the grandiosity of the Covent Garden theatre.

On the subject of the play *The Dante Project*, Dante scholar Heather Webb emphasises how, in all three acts, Dante's character does not lack many moments of observation, which, in the case of *Purgatorio*, and more fully in *Paradiso*, allow him to stage the «ardente affetto»[281]. This aspect is Dante's driving force from the very first glance towards his beloved Beatrice, a desire that later defines his love as a means to go further, to improve fully as a man, and as a poet in directing his art towards faith. This sentiment subsequently enables him to complete a «broader prophetic gaze» that sanctions Dante's universal and prophetic nature as a Christian pilgrim[282]. The quality of «novella

[280] The film adaptation is directed by Ross MacGibbon.
[281] *Pd*. XXIII, v. 8.
[282] Here we report the statements made by Heather Webb during the seminar *Dante and the Divine Comedy: Conversations around Interpretations in Movement, Music and Performance*, organised by Jane Everson (RHUL) and Catherine Keen (UCL), Friday 10 May 2024, University College London and online. Some of this food for thought can also be found in HEATHER WEBB, *Dante e la scienza del movimento umano*, in ALBERTO CASADEI, FRANCESCA FEDI, ANNALISA NACINOVICH, ANDREA TORRE (a cura di), *Letteratura e Scienze*, Atti delle sessioni parallele speciali del XXIII Congresso dell'ADI-Associazione degli Italianisti (Pisa, 12-14 settembre 2019, Roma, Adi editore, 2021, pp. 1-9; HEATHER WEBB, *Culture visive e teorie degli affetti nella lettura di Dante*, cit.; HEATHER WEBB, *Dante, artist of gesture*, cit.. See also MARIO CIMINI, *Aspetti del codice gestuale nell'Inferno di Dante*, in «Studi Medievali e Moderni. Arte, Letteratura e Storia», a. XVI, voll. I-II, 2012, pp. 79-108; MARIO CIMINI, *Il codice gestuale nella Commedia e altre cose dantesche*, cit.

vista»[283], acquired by Dante in the *transumanar* of the last cantica, allows him to see the multiplicity of the heavens of *Paradise* in their substantial unity, constructing among souls, and together with the reader, a collective, interconnected vision:

Leggendo il poema, siamo non solo testimoni delle interazioni gestuali tra i personaggi, ma entriamo anche noi in una relazione cinesica con questi. Ellen Spolsky, una dei teorici e critici più importanti all'interno del panorama degli studi cinesici in letteratura e nelle arti figurative, definisce l'intelligenza cinesica come «la nostra capacità umana di distinguere ed interpretare i movimenti del corpo, le posture, i gesti, le espressioni facciali sia in situazioni reali che nella ricezione dell'arte visiva». […] Quando leggiamo di qualcuno che compie un gesto specifico, la nostra intelligenza cinesica – per usare il termine di Spolsky – può essere innescata esattamente allo stesso modo di quando vediamo qualcuno che compie quel medesimo gesto. Se inoltre il testo presenta la descrizione di un gesto a fianco di un concetto astratto, il lettore è spinto a mettere in relazione le sensazioni sensori-motorie con tali concetti astratti. Nel momento in cui sperimentiamo questa nuova connessione tra un concetto e una sensazione familiare, riusciamo anche a sviluppare il senso della presenza fisica del personaggio che compie un determinato gesto. È proprio nel gesto, e nella nostra intelligenza di esso, che la rappresentazione dell'altro può diventare qualcosa di più di una semplice astrazione incorporea. In definitiva, quello che oggi stanno studiando i neuroscienziati e gli esperti di cognitivismo in letteratura è in linea con l'idea che Dante ha a proposito dell'osservazione del movimento umano[284].

By reading the poem, we not only witness the gestural interactions between the characters, but we also enter into a kinesic relationship with them. Ellen Spolsky, one of the most important theorists and critics within the field of kinesic studies in literature and the visual arts, defines kinesic intelligence as "our human ability to distinguish and interpret body movements, postures, gestures, and facial expressions both in real situations and in the reception of visual art. [...] When we read about someone performing a specific gesture, our kinesic intelligence - to use Spolsky's term - can be triggered in exactly the same way as when we see someone performing that same gesture. If, moreover, the text presents the description of a gesture alongside an abstract concept, the reader is prompted to relate sensory-motor sensations to these abstract concepts. As we experience this new connection between a concept and a familiar sensation, we are also able to develop a sense of the physical presence of the character performing a given gesture. It is precisely in the gesture and in our intelligence of it that the representation of the other can become more than a mere incorporeal abstraction. Ultimately, what neuroscientists and cognitivists are studying today in literature is in line with Dante's idea of observing human movement.

Since its creation, Dante's subject matter offers the readers/listeners the ability to build a mental image with their own imagination by referring to their own background of experiences and sensations, assimilating what is narrated thanks to their ability to identify with the different situations. The work carried out by the artists of *The Dante Project* has cooperatively allowed McGregor, Adès and Dean, together with dramaturg Hameed and light-designer Carter, to offer the audience the possibility of approaching Dante's *Commedia* through a contemporary, corporeal and multimedia vision, which further allows them to go through Dante's works. In this sensory experience, which takes into account the great artistic heritage of the reception of Alighieri's works and reinterprets it through the means of ballet, the audience is guided into a multifaceted afterlife, where they encounter a new version of themselves.

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[283] *Pd*. XXX, v. 58.

[284] HEATHER WEBB, *Dante e la scienza del movimento umano*, in ALBERTO CASADEI, FRANCESCA FEDI, ANNALISA NACINOVICH, ANDREA TORRE (a cura di), *Letteratura e Scienze*, cit., quotation at p. 6. We have decided to include here the references that Webb includes in her article, in relation to the passage quoted in our text: ELLEN SPOLSKY, *Elaborated Knowledge: Reading Kinesis in Pictures*, in «Poetics Today», vol. 17, n. 2, 1996, pp. 157-180, citazione a p. 159; GUILLEMETTE BOLENS, *The Style of Gestures: Embodiment and Cognition in Literary Narrative*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012; MASSIMO AMMANITI, VITTORIO GALLESE, *The Birth of Intersubjectivity: Psychodynamics, Neurobiology, and the Self*, New York, Norton, 2014 [trad. ita. *La Nascita dell'Intersoggettività. Lo Sviluppo del Sé tra Psicodinamica e Neurobiologia*, Milano, Raffaello Cortina, 2014], pp. 10-20.

5.5. A final contemporary case study: Dante for Florentina Holzinger

5.5.1. From the beginnings to *TANZ*

for a life in action
choreography = to live with chaos
no panic
an autonomous body as an instrument for action
playing the instrument more beautiful than ever before[285]

The last case study we wish to focus on in this work is perhaps the most daring and shocking in the European context of Dante's adaptations on stage. The creator of this performance is Florentina Holzinger (1986), a Viennese artist who, for almost a decade, has been revolutionising the international scene with performances with a strong emotional impact (*Figure 290*). After her studies in choreography at the School for New Dance Development (SNDO) at the Amsterdamse Hogeschool voor de Kunsten, she began to make her way with solos and short performances in which she investigated the component of bodily suffering inherent in academic dance training, as well as the representation of the female body as an element of oppression of the female gender, for constantly requiring to satisfy the male gaze[286].

Together with the socio-cultural and political reflection on the art of dance, Holzinger's performances include a strong metadiscursive component as the main feature of her poetics: in addition to questioning the implications of dance as art on stage, Holzinger wants to understand how it is a means for the creation of an imaginary, and what imaginary can be offered to the audience to solicit the community. In this process of deconstruction of dance and reflection from within on its codes and conventions, great emphasis is placed by the artist on the revival and resemantisation of past choreographic operations, especially by taking inspiration from performances that have marked the history of dance and the performing arts.

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[285] FLORENTINA HOLZINGER, *For A Life In Action*, in KAATJE DE GEEST, CARMEN HORNBOSTEL, MILO RAU (edited by), *Why Theatre*, cit. p. 106.

[286] For up-to-date information on Florentina Holzinger's productions and projects, we recommend the *Neon Lobster* website where you can find a profile dedicated to her, maintained by her press office: https://neonlobster.org/florentina-holzinger (last accessed 23/05/2025). See the page dedicated to her as an artistic mentor on the website of the *Fore Cast* project, funded by the German Ministry of Culture and the European Union https://forecast-platform.com/mentor/florentina-holzinger/ (last accessed 23/05/2025).

This attitude is clearly visible from the very first productions, as, for instance, *Kein Applaus für Scheiße (No Applause for Shit)*, produced together with the Dutch artist Vincent Riebeek, her partner at the time, in 2011. The two artists re-propose, in a contemporary key with inserts of trash and pop elements, what can be brought to the stage, following the groove first traced by the performing and body arts of the 1970s to which the authors expressly refer[287]. This production is articulated in a trilogy *Kein Applaus für Scheiße (No Applause for Shit)*, *Wellness* and *Spirit*, following which emerges the project *Schönheitsabend* (2015)[288], in which the main goal is to question the three-act structure of classical ballet, reworking, in terms of content, the scandalous ballet *Tänze des Lasters, des Grauens und der Ekstase* [*Dances of Vice, Horror and Ecstasy*] created in 1922 by Anita Berber (1899-1928) and Sebastian Droste (1898-1927)[289] (*Figure 291*). Artists adhering to the German Expressionist temperament, Berber and Droste decided to stage themes with a strong impact

[287] See *Kein Applaus für Scheiße (No Applause for Shit)* by and with Florentina Holzinger & Vincent Riebeek, technical Korneel Coessens, production Nona (Mechelen) with the support of SNDO (Amsterdam) & CAMPO executive producer CAMPO - Kunstencentrum Arts centre (Gent), on the official CAMPO website: https://www.campo.nu/en/production/1481/kein_applaus_f_r_scheisse (last accessed 23/05/2025).

[288] See the information on the performance on the website of the arts centre CAMPO: https://sophiensaele.com/de/stueck/florentina-holzinger-vincent-riebeek-schoenheitsabend (last accessed 23/05/2025). This performance was brought to Italy at the Terni Festival in 2016, met with indignation only by some critics, and since then Holzinger has only returned to Italy in 2023, in the face of success, at the Transart Festival in Bolzano, see EKATERINA TRACHSEL, *Il mostruoso femminino in Tanz e A Divine Comedy di Florentina Holzinger*, in «Kritik. Rivista di letteratura e critica culturale», vol. 3, n. 1 (*Teatro tedesco contemporaeneo*, a cura di Francesco Fiorentino), 2024, pp. 251-264, reference to pp. 258-259.

[289] See ANITA BERBER, SEBASTIAN DROSTE (Hg.), *Die Tänze des Lasters, des Grauens und der Ekstase*, Lyrik von Droste, einem Essay von Leopold Rochowanski und 15 Fototafeln aus dem Atelier d'Ora, Wien, Gloriette Verlag, 1923. See also LUCIA RUPRECHT, *Absolutes Substitut: Dora Kallmus' fetischistische Fotografien in Anita Berbers und Sebastian Drostes Die Tänze des Lasters, des Grauens und der Ekstase (1923)*, in ISA WORTELKAMP (Hg.), *Tanz in Bildern: Plurale Konstellationen der Fotografie*, Bielefeld, Transcript, 2022, pp. 189-206; AGNES KERN, *„Alle alle starben […] an meiner Geschlechtslosigkeit, die doch alle Geschlechter in sich hat". Eine queer-feministische Spurensuche zu Anita Berbers tänzerischem Werk der 1920er-jahre*, in «fkw // Zeitschrift für Geschlechterforschung und visuelle Kultur», n. 67 April, 2020, pp. 36-47; JOE JENČÍK, *Anita Berber. Studie*, aus dem Tschechischen von Silke Klein, herausgegeben von Martin Stiefermann, München, K. Kieser, 2014; LOTHAR FISCHER, *Anita Berber. Ein getanztes Leben*, Berlin, Hendrik Bäßler, 2014; GABRIELE BRANDSTETTER, *Pose - Posa - Posing. Zwischen Bild und Bewegung*, in GABRIELE BRANDSTETTER, BETTINA BRANDL-RISI, STEFANIE DIEKMANN (Hg.), *Hold it! Zur Pose zwischen Bild und Performance*, Berlin, Theater der Zeit, 2012, pp. 41-51; ULRIKE WOHLER, *Tanz zwischen Avantgarde und Klassischer Moderne. Anita Berber und Mary Wigman*, in LUTZ HIEBER, STEPHAN MOEBIUS (Hg.), *Avantgarden und Politik*, Bielefeld, transcript, 2009, pp. 67–68; SUSANNE FOELLMER, *Am Rand der Körper. Inventuren des Unabgeschlossenen im zeitgenössischen Tanz*, Bielefeld, transcript, 2009; LOTHAR FISCHER, *Anita Berber, Göttin der Nacht. Collage eines kurzen Lebens*, Berlin, ebersbach, 2006; MEL GORDON, *The Seven Addictions and Five Professions of Anita Berber: Weimar Berlin's Priestess of Depravity*, Los Angeles, Feral House, 2006; JÜRGEN TRIMBORN, *Tänze der Erotik und der Ekstase: Anita Berber (1899–1928)*, in AMELIE SOYKA (hg. v.), *Tanzen und tanzen und nichts als tanzen. Tänzerinnen der Moderne von Josephine Baker bis Mary Wigman*, Berlin, Aviva, 2004, pp. 91-104; KARL TÖPFER, *Empire of Ecstasy. Nudity and Movement in German Body Culture, 1910-1935*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997; LOTHAR FISCHER, *Tanz zwischen Rausch und Tod. Anita Berber 1918 – 1928 in Berlin,* Berlin, Haude & Spener, 1984. See also ISA WORTELKAMP, *Scratches, Holes, and Spots. Decay and Disappearance of Early Dance Photography*, in «Forum Modernes Theater», vol. 32, n. 2 (*Text, Image, Performance*, herausgegeben von Jan Lazardzig), 2021, pp. 254–263; LUCIA RUPRECHT, *Gestural Imaginaries. Dance and Cultural Theory in the Early Twentieth Century*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2019; CLARE CROFT (Hg.), *Queer dance. Meanings and Makings*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2017; PENNY FARFAN, *Performing Queer Modernism*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2017; KATE ELSWIT, *Watching Weimar Dance*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2014; HARTMUT BÖHME, *Fetischismus und Kultur. Eine andere Theorie der Moderne*, Hamburg, Rowohlt, 2006.

on the public of the time in eleven scenes, denouncing the taboos on sexuality, appearing on stage naked, making explicit use of drugs and openly declaring their unconventional sexual orientation.

In particular, a great deal of attention is paid by Holzinger and Riebeek to the figure of the dancer and artist Anita Berber, who died of tuberculosis at the age of twenty-eight, who had begun her career on the stages of Berlin and had then moved to Vienna, one of the pioneers in dance of the investigation of the instances related to the female body on stage. If, at the beginning of the 20th century, artists such as Isadora Duncan promoted modern dance and a more natural gestural expressiveness in performances, harking back to classical art, also starting with the deconstruction of stage costumes that constricted the female body in academic dance, Berber with other colleagues promoted the exposure of the body as a means of expression, even when the female body was considered problematic, such as when pregnant. The body becomes an object of reflection for the dancer as an element of sexual desire, even in the form of autoeroticism and sapphic love; or in the less attractive moments during menstruation and in the moment of greatest change linked to gestation. As had been the case in her interpretation of Salome derived from Oscar Wilde's decadent vision[290], Berber in her early twenties in a letter declared her own vision of the female body, represented even in its unpleasant and disturbing nature:

Die Vorführung ist mir ernst. [...] Wir tanzen den Tod, die Krankheit, die Schwangerschaft und kein Mensch nimmt uns ernst. Sie glotzen nur auf unsere Schleier, ob sie nicht darunter etwas sehen können, die Schweine[291].

I am serious about the performance. [...] We dance death, disease, pregnancy, and no man takes us seriously. They just stare at our veils, hoping to see something underneath them, the pigs.

In these early performances conceived together with Riebeek, and later on alone, Holzinger's choice to refer to these early historical examples of transgressive and non-conformist art realised by female performers, fits into the strand of problematising the vision of art associated with the reflection on the exhibition of the female body and becomes an essential element in her work. It is no coincidence that she shares with these predecessors her hometown and a cultural *nous* particularly

[290] «Die Berber-Salome kreuzte dann langsam die Arme über dem Bauch und stand auf. Das Blut tropfte ihr wie einer unreinen Frau vom Unterleib. […] Aus ihr war eine Hure geworden. Sie war ohne Schmuck, Gewand und Sandalen. Nackt, befleckt, schnaufend und vom Mut ihres unzurechnungsfähigen Fetischismus erhaben»/«The Berber-Salome then slowly crossed her arms over her stomach and stood up. Blood dripped from her lower abdomen like an unclean woman. [...] She had become a whore. She was without jewellery, clothing or sandals. Naked, stained, panting and elevated by the courage of her insane fetishism», JOE JENČÍK, *Anita Berber. Studie*, aus dem Tschechischen von Silke Klein, Herausgegeben von Martin Stiefermann MS Schrittmacher, München, K. Kieser, 2014 [1930[1]], p. 32.

[291] «Prendo la rappresentazione molto sul serio. [...] Danziamo la morte, la malattia, la gravidanza e nessun uomo ci prende sul serio. Fissano solo i nostri veli, per provare a vedere qualcosa sotto, quei maiali», See ANITA BERBER, *Brief*, 1920er-Jahre, Typoskript, aus Bestand Anita Berber in dem Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln. Citazione riportata nel testo AGNES KERN, *„Alle alle starben […] an meiner Geschlechtslosigkeit, die doch alle Geschlechter in sich hat". Eine queer-feministische Spurensuche zu Anita Berbers tänzerischem Werk der 1920er-jahre*, cit., p.45.

receptive to this type of artistic instances[292]. In addition to female performers, also fundamental to Holzinger's imagery is the Austrian artist Hermann Nitsch (1938-2022), a leading exponent of Viennese Actionism, who went down in history for his form of total theatre, *Das Orgien Mysterien Theater* (the *Theatre of Orgies and Mysteries*), in which he takes up the apotropaic ancestral Dionysian and orgiastic rituals and investigates the more feral nature present in the human soul through action painting. His model of *Gesamtkunstwerk* envisages that performers and audience are all performers and proponents of a *catharsis* of the soul through a collective and shared ritual, which passes from the quartering of animals and the use of blood to construct a dynamic and violent action. This action echoes Freudian theories, which saw in the crossing and staging of cruelty the decisive component for a distancing from evil and for the relaxation of all negative drives, recognising in death and devastation a natural door to be crossed for abreaction, that is, to emotionally overcome a trauma had[293].

What at the time of Berber and Droste, and later of Nitsch, was labelled as perverse and immoral, "counter-nature", questioning social conventions, gender differences and the condition of female subalternity (or that of non-heteronormative minorities), is a horizon that still persists in our contemporary world, which Holzinger and other artists decidedly oppose through art, as a vehicle for reflecting on queer, fluid, possibilist and inclusive instances. Once again, the body becomes a force challenging the powers that limit the freedom of expression and self-definition of every individual[294].

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[292] On this topic, see for instance MAGDALENA FUERNKRANZ, *2.1. Klitclique - Vienna's F€M1N1$T Answer to Sad Boys*, in PAULA GUERRA, THIAGO PEREIRA ALBERTO (edited by), *Keep it Simple, Make it Fast! An approach to underground music scenes*, Porto, Universidade do Porto. Faculdade de Letras [University of Porto. Faculty of Arts and Humanities], 2019, pp. 89-97, reference at pp. 91-92.

[293] MICHAEL KARRER, DANIEL MCLAUGHLIN, *Hermann Nitsch. Das Gesamtkunstwerk*, Herausgegeben von Alf Lechner Stiftung, Ingolstadt, Kettler, 2019; DANIELLE SPERA (recorded by), *Hermann Nitsch: life and work*, with text by Hermann Nitsch, Rita Nitsch, Danielle Spera, translated by Paul Bowman, Wien, Nitsch Foundation, 2023 [trad. en. DANIELLE SPERA (aufgezeichnet von), *Hermann Nitsch - Leben und Arbeit*, Wien, Brandstätter, 1999[1]]; HERMANN NITSCH, *Das Orgien Mysterien Theater 1960-1987*, Napoli, Edizioni Morra, 1987; see also the artist's official website: https://www.nitsch.org/ (last accessed 23/05/2025). See CALOGERO PIRRERA, *Professione performer. Intervista a Hermann Nitsch. Dopo il focus sulla performance e l'intervista a Marina Abramović, oggi diamo voce a un altro grande protagonista delle arti performative*, in «Artribune», 29 novembre 2017, available at: https://www.artribune.com/professioni-e-professionisti/who-is-who/2017/11/intervista-hermann-nitsch/ (last accessed 23/05/2025); VALENTINA AVANZINI, *Eros, Thanatos e sangue di porco – Appunti postumi sull'opera di Hermann Nitsch*, in «layOutmagazine», 8 giugno 2022, available at: https://www.layoutmagazine.it/appunti-postumi-hermann-nitsch/ (last accessed 23/05/2025).

[294] Not wishing to enter too much into the extensive debate on the origin of the term *queer*, we recall how one of the most accredited versions attributes the origin of the adjective to the English term connoting the 'strange', the 'unsuitable', initially used as a derogatory term, later taken up and re-semantisised by the LGBTQIA+ movement. The concept of *ecocriticism*, therefore, is linked to *queerness* in that both these movements question the dominant hierarchies (man>woman, adult>child, human>nature, understood as animals and plants), and by extension also the place of Man as dominant within the *cosmos*, that is, the broad set of animate and inanimate elements of the world. For further exploration of these matrices within the broader conception implied in Holzinger's plays, see: JUDITH BUTLER, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, with an introduction by the author, New York/London, Routledge, 2006[1990[1]]; ELIZABETH FREEMAN, *Time binds: queer temporalities, queer histories*, Durham/London, Duke University press, 2010; MICHEL FOUCAULT, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1: An Introduction, London, Allen Lane, 1979 [ed. or. MICHEL

Nearly a century after Berber, Holzinger openly declares how her being a woman and an artist is an essential starting point for the construction of all her performances, both to subvert the taboos linked to the female body still deeply rooted in contemporary society and to support a change of pace in the

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FOUCAULT, *Histoire de la sexualité*, vol. 1, Paris, Gallimard, 1976]; MICHEL FOUCAULT, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure, London, Penguin Books, 1985 [ed. or. MICHEL FOUCAULT, *Histoire de la sexualité*, vol. 2, Paris, Gallimard, 1984]; MICHEL FOUCAULT, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 3: The Care of the Self, London, Penguin Books, 1986 [ed. or. MICHEL FOUCAULT, *Histoire de la sexualité*, vol. 3, Paris, Gallimard, 1984]; MICHEL FOUCAULT, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 4: Confessions of the Flesh, London, Penguin Books, 2021 [ed. or. MICHEL FOUCAULT, *Histoire de la sexualité*, vol. 4, Paris, Gallimard, 2018]; GRETA GAARD, *Toward a Queer Ecofeminism*, in «Hypatia», n. 12, 1997, pp. 114–137; JOSHUA RUSSELL, *Queer Ecopedagogies. Explorations in Nature, Sexuality, and Education*, Cham (Switzerland), Springer, 2021; ASMAE OURKIYA, Queering Ecofeminism: Towards an Anti-Far-Right Environmentalism, in «NiCHE: Network in Canadian History & Environment|Nouvelle initiative Canadienne en histoire de l'environnement», 23 giugno 2020, available at: https://niche-canada.org/2020/06/23/queering-ecofeminism-towards-an-anti-far-right-environmentalism/ ; VIRGINIE DESPENTES, *King Kong Theory*, translated by Frank Wynne, Glasgow, Fitzcarraldo, 2020 [ed. or. VIRGINIE DESPENTES, *King Kong Théorie*, Paris, Grasset, 2006]; ROSI BRAIDOTTI, *Materialismo radicale. Itinerari etici per cyborg e cattive ragazze*, Roma, Meltemi Editore, 2019; DONNA J. HARAWAY, *Manifestly Haraway*, Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 2016; DONNA J. HARAWAY, *Manifesto cyborg. Donne, tecnologie e biopolitiche del corpo*, a cura di Liana Borghi, Milano, Feltrinelli, 2018 [ed. or. DONNA J. HARAWAY, *Cyborg Manifesto*, New York/London, Routledge, 1991]; ALICIA H. PULEO, *Ecofeminismo para otro mundo posible*, Madrid, Cátedra, 2011; IPPOLITA, *Anime elettriche. Riti e miti sui social*, Milano, Jaca Book, 2016; ALYSON CAMPBELL, STEPHEN FARRIER (edited by), *Queer Dramaturgies, International Perspectives on Where Performance Leads Queer*, London, Palgrave MacMillan, 2016; MARLON M. BAILEY, *Butch queens up in pumps: Gender, performance, and ballroom culture in Detroit*, University of Michigan Press, 2013; full issue «Social Text», vol. 23, nn. 3-4 (84-85, *What's Queer About Queer Studies Now?*, edited by David L. Eng, J. JackHalberstam, JoséEsteban Muñoz), 2005, pp. 1-308; ALYSON CAMPBELL, META COHEN, STEPHEN FARRIER, HANNAH MCCANN, *Embracing Feral Pedagogies: Queer Feminist Education Through Queer Performance*, in PENNY JANE BURKE, JULIA COFFEY, ROSALIND GILL, AKANE KANAI (edited by), *Gender in an Era of Post-truth Populism: Pedagogies, Challenges and Strategies*, London, Bloomsbury, 2022, pp. 193-209; ALYSON CAMPBELL, *Queering Pedagogies. Running interference and going feral: twin strategies that work two ways – in to and out from the academy*, in «Theatre Topics», vol. 30, n. 2, 2020, pp. 117–124; TIINA ROSENBERG, SANDRA D'URSO, ANNA RENÉE WINGET (edited by), *The Palgrave Handbook of Queer and Trans Feminisms in Contemporary Performance*, Cham, Palgrave MacMillan, 2021; NANCY NICOL, ADRIAN JJUUKO, RICHARD LUSIMBO, NICK MULÉ, SUSAN URSEL, AMAR WAHAB, PHYLLIS WAUGH (edited by), *Envisioning Global LGBT Human Rights. (Neo)colonialism, Neoliberalism, Resistance and Hope*, London, University of London, 2018; HEATHER LOVE, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2007; ALYSON CAMPBELL, STEPHEN FARRIER, MANOLA-GAYATRI KUMARSWAMY, *What's Queer about Queer Performance Now?*, in «Contemporary Theatre Review», vol. 33, nn. 1–2, 2023, pp. 1–13; STEFANO CASI, *Teatro performativo queer. Scene fluide degli anni Dieci*, in «Scritture della performance», vol. 10, n. 2, 2021, pp. 13-39; MÉLISSA BERTRAND, *Performative theatre: a queer theatre?*, in «Whatever. A Transdisciplinary Journal of Queer Theories and Studies», vol. 3, 2020, pp. 213-232; ALAIN SINFIELD, *Out on stage. Lesbian and Gay Theater in the Twentieth Century*, New Heaven/London, Yale University Press, 1999 [trad. ita. ALAIN SINFIELD, *Out on stage. Una storia del teatro LGBT nel ventesimo secolo*, a cura di Antonio Pizzo, Torino, Rosenberg & Sellier, 2020]; TERESA DE LAURETIS (edited by), *Figures of resistance: essays in feminist theory*, with an introduction by Patricia White, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2007; TERESA DE LAURETIS, *Pratica d'amore. Percorsi del desiderio perverso*, Milano, La Tartaruga, 1997; MATTEO BRONZI, CATERINA CIARLEGLIO (a cura di), Contronature. Teorie e pratiche di ecologia, Bologna, DeriveApprodi, 2022; LAUREN FOURNIER, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2021; BOJANA KUNST, *Artist at work. Proximity of art and capitalism*, Winchester/Washington, Zero Books, 2015; IRIS JULIAN, *Singular Plural ways of staging together. Perspectives on contemporary dance, art performance and visual art*, Biefeld, transcript, 2024; SILVIA FEDERICI, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, New York, Autonomedia, 2004; FABIO VITTORINI, *Queer bodies. Identità trans nella letteratura e nei media dagli anni settanta ad oggi*, Bologna, Patron, 2024; BARBARA CREED, *The monstrous-feminine: film, feminism, psychoanalysis*, London/New York, Routledge, 1993; FLAVIA DALILA D'AMICO, *La performance della soggettività tra scena e studi di genere*, in «Studi di Genere. Quaderni di Donne & Ricerca», vol. 1, 2017, available at: https://www.cirsde.unito.it/sites/c555/files/2024-05/quaderno_isbn_9788890555671.pdf (last accessed 23/05/2025). See also ASTRID ROZEMARIJN KLEIN HANEVELD, *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Woman?: on the affective and queer potential of the monstrous-feminine in contemporary performance*, Supervisor: Prof. Laura Karreman, MA Thesis in Contemporary Theatre, Dance and Dramaturgy, A. A. 2021-2022, Utrecht University, 20 June 2022, available at: https://studenttheses.uu.nl/bitstream/handle/20.500.12932/48371/MA%20Thesis_Klein%20Haneveld_7975430.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y (last accessed 23/05/2025).

practices that lead to the definition of what art is and how it should be brought to the stage. As her colleague and fellow student, Marta Ziółek, reports on their shared way of working:

> I was beginning to work with choreographer Florentina Holzinger - our work explored the dynamics of building an intimate relationship with another woman as well as concerned the notion of sisterhood, moving the borderline between the private and the public, questioning the normativity related to bodies and related to the dance itself: what is permissible in dance and what is not? What are the limits of freedom as such and of onstage freedom in particular? We explored our corporeality, intimacy, and nudity, building an autoerotic space in relation to another woman. It was not so much about a lesbian relation as about a relation that cultivates care and blurs the boundary between bodies. We imparted value to features and modes of expression that women are not commonly rated highly for. This enabled each of us to widen our own scope and to shift the boundaries in relation to the outside world. In a sense, this allowed us to be rude girls[295].

As Ekaterina Trachsel points out, this first phase of Holzinger's production finds a place in off circuits and independent theatres, particularly in the city of Berlin, where she wins scholarships for artistic residencies, allowing her to deepen her vision and construct other performances. Soon acquiring a certain resonance, she began to be cast and promoted by international circuits (such as the Ruhrtriennale Festival der Künste), which commissioned various productions from her[296]. For instance, from 2015 to 2017, she was a resident artist at the ICK Amsterdam Centre of Greco and Scholten. This experience resulted in the performance *Apollon* (2017), in which Holzinger reworks the neoclassical ballet *Apollon musagète*, with music by Igor' Fëdorovič Stravinsky and choreography by George Balanchine, premiered in Europe in 1928. The historic ballet had been commissioned to the choreographer to be short (lasting about half an hour) and with few performers. In his final version in two scenes, Balanchine narrates the birth of Apollo, with his elevation to God protector of the arts, endowing the three muses (Calliope-poetry, Polyhymnia-theatre, Thersichore-dance) with their respective symbolic objects and finally taking his place in Parnassus. As Elena Randi recalls, this ballet is a clear declaration of poetics on the part of Balanchine, who in those years was defining neoclassical ballet, and he entrusted the performers, especially the male lead who plays Apollo, with plastic poses that recall Renaissance studies on the body that define the nature of man in the perfect proportions between figure and space, as in the case of Leonardo da Vinci's drawing of the Vitruvian Man[297]. The ballet that Holzinger decides to take as a reference in this case - an emblem of disciplined dance and Apollonian refinement in movement, in which the male figure predominates over the female component in a jubilation of order and pacified beauty - is overturned and associated with the

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[295] ANKA HERBUT, MARTA ZIÓŁEK*, in praise of the strange. Anka Herbut in conversation with Marta Ziółek*, in MARTA KEIL, JOANNA LEŚNIEROWSKA (edited by), *choreography: strategies*, Daszewice (Poland), Drukmania s.c. Natalia Łuczak, 2018, pp. 340-351, quotation at p. 342.

[296] See EKATERINA TRACHSEL, *Il mostruoso femminino in Tanz e A Divine Comedy di Florentina Holzinger*, in «Kritik. Rivista di letteratura e critica culturale», vol. 3, n. 1 (*Teatro tedesco contemporaeneo*, a cura di Francesco Fiorentino), 2024, pp. 251-264.

[297] See ELENA RANDI, *Il corpo pensato. Teorie della danza del Novecento*, cit., pp. 20-23.

context of *freak shows*, in which the excessive and the different become entertainment[298] (*Figures 292-293*). Pointing the finger at today's obsession with the cult of the perfect body, the atmospheres created by Holzinger are more reminiscent of sweaty sports sessions in crowded gyms or fitness studios than dance studios, thus dismantling the Apollonian image by creating a new Parnassus, pervaded only by women doing stunts or weightlifting. The five performers, naked, with pointe shoes, among whom the choreographer Holzinger herself takes her place, contribute to the creation of a new female order in the art of dance, supplanting Balanchine and his tradition, and bringing forth a new poetics for contemporary dance:

> Through this humorous, furious destruction of a classical narrative, Holzinger addresses the myth of the supposedly perfect woman: the artist herself. These perfect women - what do they even want? Nourished by performance history, Holzinger explores our dualistic relationship to perfection and beauty, lust and disgust, projection and delusion, destruction and construction as well as the rupture between high art and entertainment culture[299].

This is one of the first shows in which Holzinger began to use particularly risky stunts and manipulate blood, real and fictitious, on stage. Her aim is to give a new, more athletic and performing form to the female physique, too often identified with fragility and weakness, thus also deconstructing the rhetoric of the body "to be saved":

> Ich plädiere auch ausdrücklich für einen starken weiblichen Körper, weil ich glaube, dass wir bereit sein müssen, für das zu kämpfen, was wir wollen, und uns zu verteidigen, ohne am Ende Narben zu bekommen - physisch und psychisch. Eins meiner Ziele ist es, dem eigenen Körper als einer Stärke und Waffe wirklich vertrauen zu können, um die Kraft zu gewinnen, die richtige Entscheidung zu treffen[300].
>
> I also explicitly advocate a strong female body because I believe that we have to be ready to fight for what we want and defend ourselves and ultimately not be scarred - physically and mentally. One of my aims is to really be able to trust one's own body as a force and weapon, in order to gain power to make the right choice.

Starting from her personal experience as a dancer, sportswoman and athlete, Holzinger set up her artistic work by trying to answer creative questions through applied scientific research. In interviews, Holzinger declares that she is a total «Adrenalinjunkie», an adrenalin addict, an addiction that leads her to constantly confront her own limits and to set the bar of difficulty higher and higher in her performances, for herself and her colleagues[301]. During a research residency, promoted by the

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[298] See VICTORIA DEJACO, *Florentina Holzinger: "The dancer's body being exhibited is always a sexual object"*, in «Spike Art Magazine», 20 marzo 2018, available at: https://spikeartmagazine.com/articles/florentina-holzinger-the-dancer-s-body-being-exhibited-is-always-a-sexual-object (last accessed 23/05/2025).

[299] See the description of the show that premiered on Thursday, 09 November 2017, at the Festsaal of the Sophiensæle in Berlin: https://sophiensaele.com/en/stueck/florentina-holzinger-apollon-musagete#biografien-1680 (last accessed 23/05/2025). The author of this thesis saw the show on 1 April 2022 at the Theaterzaal Vooruit in Ghent (BE).

[300] Quote taken from the booklet dedicated to Florentina Holzinger produced by the ImPulsTanz Festival and Tanzquartier Wien, available online at: https://www.impulstanz.com/media/booklets/AP_Holzinger_v3_.pdf (last accessed 23/05/2025).

[301] See the series of interviews with Florentina Holzinger: STEPHAN HILPOLD, *Florentina Holzinger: "Ich bin ein Adrenalinjunkie"*, in «Der Standard», 31 marzo 2023, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ala48eEe5w0 ; HYGIN DELIMAT, *Danger on stage - Florentina Holzinger*, in «Mind Culture Podcast», 30 ottobre 2021, available at:

scholar Monica LoCascio, Holzinger reflected on her own way of understanding and producing art on stage. The ritual and physical component of performance art, combined with scientific and applied research on the body (as, for example, of certain principles such as gravity and attraction between forces) enabled her to find a technical answer, applicable to choreographic intentions that would otherwise be unrealistic and impossible to bring to the stage: «the real physically possible things in your body are the ones that you can consciously understand in your mind somehow. […] Understand more to do more. The more info you have, the more are possible»[302].

The performance that by design marks the transition to consciousness in Holzinger's poetics and determines the preconditions for the subsequent work on the *Divine Comedy*, *TANZ. Eine sylphidische Träumerei in Stunts [TANZ. Sylphic reverie in stunts]*[303] , follows these logics. The nature and setting of this performance are essential steps in understanding how the choreographer arrives at the creation of the subsequent *A Divine Comedy*. A more exhaustive analysis is therefore necessary. In *TANZ*, Holzinger confronts a milestone in the history of dance, *La Sylphide* choreographed by Filippo Taglioni for his daughter Maria Taglioni, staged at the Opéra National de Paris on 12 March 1832[304]. Through this comparison, Holzinger wishes to question those conservative practices and processes that have allowed a substantial continuity of transmission of academic dance.

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8R1Y9BEpqGg&ab_channel=MindCulturePodcast ; BARBARA FREY, *FREYBIER_digital — Episode 1: Florentina Holzinger*, in «Ruhrtriennale», 25 agosto 2021, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KYfmD8fLeQE&ab_channel=Ruhrtriennale (last accessed 23/05/2025). In this last interview, Holzinger states that a text she has reflected on in order to reason about the contribution of her athletic past is: KATHY ACKER, *Against ordinary language: the language of the body*, in ARTHUR KROKER, MARILOUISE KROKER (edited by), *The Last Sex. Feminism and outlaw bodies*, Montreal, Ctheory Books, 2001, pp. 20-28.

[302] Filming excerpts from Florentina Holzinger's dialogue with Monica C. LoCascio, Zosia Hołubowsk, Daniela Brill Estrada, Pêdra Costa, Elisabeth Von Samsonow. Reference is made to min 47 in the downloadable video within the contribution MONICA C. LOCASCIO (ED.), FLORENTINA HOLZINGER, ZOSIA HOŁUBOWSKA, DANIELA BRILL ESTRADA, PÊDRA COSTA, ELISABETH VON SAMSONOW, *All You Have to Lose is Ecstasy: The Intuitive, Occult, and Somatic as Methods of Inquiry*, in DALILA HONORATO, MARÍA ANTONIA GONZÁLEZ VALERIO, INGEBORG REICHLE, ANDREAS GIANNAKOULOPOULOS (edited by), *Taboo. Transgression. Transcendence in Art and Science 2020*, Corfu, Ionian University Publications, 2022, pp. 450-456.

[303] See SASCHA EHLERT, *03 - FLORENTINA HOLZINGER*, in «DasWetter», n. 26; ROSEMARIE BRUCHER, *TANZ by Florentina Holzinger*, in «TQW Magazin», 08 ottobre 2019, available at: https://tqw.at/en/kunst-kommt-von-koennen/ ; LUCIA MUNARO, *Scarpette a punta. Il dissacrante spettacolo TANZ di Florentina Holzinger andrà in scena per il festival Transart venerdì 22 settembre alle 20.30 nella sede Niederstätter a Steg*, in «Salto», 19 settembre 2023, available at: https://salto.bz/de/article/19092023/scarpette-punta ; MADELEINE SEIDEL, *"There's Some Bloody Stuff There": Behind the Scenes of Florentina Holzinger's Body Horror Ballet*, photographed by Elsa Okazaki, in «Interview Magazine», 11 febbraio 2025, available at: https://www.interviewmagazine.com/culture/behind-the-scenes-of-choreographer-florentina-holzinger-tanz ; SYBILLA GEORGE, *TANZ at RISING: A Spectacle of Effort*, in «FarragoMagazine», 16 giugno 2023, available at: https://farragomagazine.com/article/farrago/TANZ-at-RISING-A-Spectacle-of-Effort/ ; Annette van Zwoll, A Different Kind of Ballet, in «tanzschreiber. The Dance Review Portal – Current Critiques of Berlin Dance Events», 08 marzo 2020, available at: https://tanzschreiber.de/en/a-different-kind-of-ballet/ (last accessed 23/05/2025). .

[304] For a quick overview on the subject, see SUSAN LEIGH FOSTER, *Coreografia e narrazione. Corpo, danza e società dalla pantomima a Giselle*, traduzione di Alessia Polli, rivista da Clelia Falletti, Roma, Dino Audino, 2003; MARIAN SMITH (edited by), *La Sylphide: Paris 1832 and beyond*, London, Dance Books, 2012. See also the thesis SILVIA ZANTA, *La Sylphide di Filippo Taglioni. Ricostruzione, fonti e concezione estetica del primo balletto romantico*, Relatrice Prof.ssa Elena Randi, Corso di Laurea Quadriennale in Lettere, A. A. 2021-22, available at: https://thesis.unipd.it/retrieve/9aee7cfd-86de-4eec-8325-7d60e1372334/Zanta_Silvia.pdf (last accessed 23/05/2025).

To tackle this undertaking and build a historical perspective from which to start, Holzinger chose to consult scholars from different fields: among these the scholar Anna Leon, later designated as dramaturg of the show *TANZ*[305].

Investigating the prerequisites for the collaboration with Holzinger's team, Leon points out how this particular opportunity was also made possible by the substantial allocation of funds by various cultural institutions, first and foremost the Austrian Ministry of Culture and the city of Vienna[306]. The substantial funding enabled the choreographer to expand the available staff, considerably increasing the number of performers on stage (from five to eleven performers on stage, with the possibility of hiring as many professionals to support the work behind the scenes, such as instructors for stunts and piercers). The set design included mega screens, equipment for live video footage, various types of machinery, costumes and various utensils.

Holzinger's performance is divided into two acts, taking up the themes and structure of the 19th century *Sylphide*, but constantly resemantising it. In Holzinger's revisiting of Taglioni's ballet, which framed the love triangle between James, Effie and Sylphide in the Scottish countryside, the scene opens with a dance class, with the usual exercise bars, where Beatrice Cordua (1941)[307], an *etoile* of the international scene, enters. Dancer Beatrice Cordua, nicknamed *Trixie*, is a famous German dancer, one of the first to dance nude in 1972 for the ballet *La Sacre du printemps* conceived by choreographer John Neumeier. With this performance, she triggered a new imagery on the international dance scene (*Figure 294*).

In Holzinger's performance, *Trixie* welcomes the dancers of her class naked and begins to give three lessons to train the body for ballet: «how to govern your body», «how to be light» and finally «how to leave the floor»[308] (*Figures 295-296*). The first act thus becomes a meta-choreutic game in which dance, its tradition and its masters are investigated through the form of the dance class, a framework that takes up the high academic tradition and is constantly subverted by gags and

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[305] See ANNA LEON, *Reverse-Engineering the Sylph: Reclaiming Female Ballet Bodies in Florentina Holzinger's TANZ*, in «İstanbul Üniversitesi Kadın Araştırmaları Dergisi. Istanbul University Journal of Women's Studies», n. 26, 2023, pp. 23-43.

[306] Within the description of the performance, it reads: «A coproduction by Spirit and Tanzquartier Wien, Spring Festival (Utrecht), Productiehuis Theater Rotterdam, Künstlerhaus Mousonturm (Frankfurt), Arsenic (Lausanne), Münchner Kammerspiele, Take Me Somewhere Festival (Glasgow), Beursschouwburg (Brussels), deSingel (Antwerp), Sophiensaele (Berlin), Frascati Productions (Amsterdam), Theater im Pumpenhaus (Münster), asphalt Festival (Düsseldorf). Supported by O Espaço do Tempo (Montemor-o-Novo), Fondation LUMA (Arles) and De Châtel Award (NL) Thanks to CAMPO Gent, ImPulsTanz, Eva Beresin, Stefanie Leitner, Tanz-Archiv MUK Wien, Stimuleringsfonds Creative Industries, Mochi Catering (Vienna), Andres Stirn Funded by Cultural Department of the City of Vienna, Arts and Culture Division of the Federal Chancellery of Austria and Performing Arts Fund NL».

[307] Beatrice Cordua is a famous German dancer, one of the first to dance nude in 1972 for choreographer John Neumeier's *La Sacre du printemps*. With her, a new imagery was inaugurated in the international dance scene. The documentary film *TRIXIE* was created about her. *Documentary film*, directed by Bastien Genoux, written by Nicole Seiler & Bastien Genoux, Production Detours Films & Cie Nicole Seiler, 2020, 80 min.

[308] The elements given here and the following are taken from the play, transcribed during the performance.

demystifying moments tending towards low culture: some are presented with trash or voyeuristic connotations, others as real sexual acts on stage. Cordua, in the guise of a teacher, directs the action, talking to the dancers and to the audience, explaining and commenting on what is going to happen on stage, asking questions and juxtaposing dance steps and positions with human conditions, to outline a new path of awareness and knowledge of the body, as when the dancers are asked to immerse themselves in ample *pliés*, in which they observe their own genitals through mirrors and start from this 'encounter' with their own most intimate nature to give themselves pleasure.

At this point, an interlude is inserted, in which the narration of events is suspended and Cordua officially welcomes the audience and calls the performance «the naked truth». At this juncture, she explains how the research carried out by Holzinger's company on the *Sylphide* aims at elaborating a new type of contemporary ballet and has led to maintaining a first act, in which the real or realistic world is represented, to then move on to the second act, which tends to be set in the magical and unreal context of the forest, of the night, among spirits and mysterious creatures, to arrive at the tragic finale, which here becomes «a journey through nature». Declaring the imminent beginning of the second act, a collection is proposed to the audience to replant the Sylph forest in Austria and define a new home for the fantastic creatures. The idea is a contest for a benefactor, complete with a Power Point presentation, describing the benefits of the venture and a final certificate for the acquired asset. Through pantomime, again derived from the classical ballet tradition, the action finally returns to focus on the fiction of the stage, of the performance, where the performers are finally «ready to fly» (*Figure 297*).

The second act is set in the context of classical ballet, with scenography and costumes recalling the grotesque and mysterious atmosphere of the forest at night. Embodying the instance of romantic *quête* immersed in dark recesses, the performers arrange themselves around the body of Cordua who is magically giving birth to a being: from the live shot of the action broadcast on mega-screens at the side of the stage, a symbolic *petit rat* emerges. In the tradition of the Parisian Opéra, the *petits rats* were the young girls who were anonymously part of the corps de ballet and unfortunately had to suffer a lot of harassment, resulting in various forms of violence; in Holzinger's show, the intention is to associate the condition of the *petits rats*, exploited and without protection, with that of the young girls working in contemporary dance theatre, still destined to sexual and economic subalternity[309] (*Figures 298-299-300*).

[309] In Leon's proposed analysis of Holzinger's performance *TANZ*, we quote here the passage that highlights the association between the condition of the younger girls and the condition of labour and sexual subalternity to which these girls were destined: «In opposition to *étoile* (star or principal) dancers, the anonymous dancers of the *corps de ballet* were not perceived as artists, but as members of a working class, on par with other professional groups performing physical labour (Sabee, 2022: 557, 575). This labour was both performative and sexual. The dire working conditions of the Opéra's

The tension and erotic charge of the scene conceived by Holzinger, full of blood and excitement, are arrested by the alienating statement of the performers, who pronounce a resounding «stop» to the "scene within a scene", as if they were on a film set at the end of a useful take. At this point, the stage is cleansed of blood, both symbolically and materially, and a new phase of the journey into the unknown or, rather, into the different declinations of the limit of bearable human pain begins. In fact, after childbirth, acupuncture and piercing sessions are staged, in which the spectator watches in astonishment as the performers begin to create forms on their own bodies, thanks to piercings and body hooks, making the human body magical without having to resort to pretence. In Holzinger's *TANZ*, the *pas de deux* between the Sylph and James, ending with the woodland creature losing her wings and dying, is replaced with an all-female moment, in which, one by one, all the performers, instead of dying and mourning the death of the Sylph, become the protagonists of the joyful finale of the drama. Suspended in the air, some by their hair, some by subcutaneous plates, some on motorbikes, they relegate James's patriarchal world to the 19th century, redefining a new ending for the ballerina-Sylphides (*Figures 301-302-303-304*). In a riot of bodies suspended above the stage, like new witches and/or fairy creatures, the show is closed by the phrase uttered once again by Cordua, «Queen of beauty and night, sorry for being a wicked witch. If I fail, I will dance the dance of death», and the curtain falls.

With this performance, Holzinger deals a first blow to the tradition of academic dance, questioning the very essence of the *corps de ballet*, starting with the training of the dancers. Holzinger decides to work programmatically with only women on stage, naked, of different ages, with different physicalities and artistic backgrounds, thus demolishing the canonical uniformity of the corps de ballet and the standardisation of bodies for the ballet stage. By choosing to propose only women on stage, to provide for the constant exposure of the naked body and to take the resistance of these bodies to the limit, through apparently dangerous practices, but strictly regulated by precise and meticulous techniques such as stunts, sadomasochism, BDSM and lifting through piercings, Holzinger intends to challenge and ridicule the practices of cruelty and sadism that surround the bodies of ballet dancers, apparently beautiful and ethereal, but in reality painful and fragile. In doing so, she exposes the component of perversion and danger to the safety of performers (and in particular women) inherent

petits rats (students of its ballet school, subsequently low-ranking young dancers in the company) were associated with backstage arrangements such as paid access to the *Foyer de la Danse*, where wealthy patrons, notably members of the private Jockey Club, could meet and engage in affairs with them. In parallel with confirming the gendered socioeconomic distributions of bourgeois society, romantic ballet narratively and dramaturgically confirmed its values and mores. Even if ballet's storylines provided entertainment by hinting at transgressive (in most cases, extramarital) adventures, they ultimately confirmed bourgeois morals of class belonging and sexual norms and the place of women therein (see Banes & Caroll, 1997: 92)», See ANNA LEON, *Reverse-Engineering the Sylph: Reclaiming Female Ballet Bodies in Florentina Holzinger's TANZ*, cit., p. 37. See anche ILYANA KARTHAS, *The Politics of Gender and the Revival of Ballet in Early Twentieth Century France*, «Journal of Social History», vol. 45, n. 4, 2012, pp. 960-989.

in the history of dance: «The significant amount of physical discomfort and risk-taking tacitly underlying the embodiment of ethereal romantic femininity is paradigmatic of painful and risky procedures that female bodies are still expected to endure but hide»[310].

For the purposes of her own artistic creation, Holzinger conceives of her company as a team, a heterogeneous ensemble of professionals from the most disparate disciplines, in which each brings her own expertise and becomes a point of reference for the others. In a constant dynamic of support and exchange of skills, in which the hierarchies and useless rivalries given by the "role" are destroyed and the training, first, and the performance, then, are conceived together as a process of mutual enrichment, a democratic exchange and constant improvement of one's skills, the final result is focused on the group and not on the individual, to create a new collective organism on stage that contrasts the divisiveness of the mainstream stages. Here are some passages from an interview with the choreographer that make these concepts explicit:

> I was curious about in creating work, showing mechanics or the part of the practice that we are not supposed to see on stage. The illusion of ballet is the opposite of the training of a ballerina, which is very hardcore and strenuous on the body and muscles and ligaments. Your feet wear out from it. On stage, of course, it's the perfect illusion of complete ease in movement. It was interesting for us to celebrate the illusion of the body in flight, and at the same time, show what is inside a pointe shoe. There's some bloody stuff there. We show the inside, basically, of the ballet, not just the body from the outside with its accomplished form. [...] In TANZ, I was specifically casting people who have expertise in physical suspension, or taking the body away from the floor. This brought me, of course, to something I do in general. I work often with people from the circus and from the sideshow world or so-called freak shows, because they know so much about the body in flight, using the body as this matter with which to do things that other people deem impossible or painful. So in my cast, they were all people who bring this certain know-how about making the body fly from their own work. [...] There is a big aspect of that, especially in TANZ, which is based around a classroom setting where a teacher teaches something to students. In general, I often assemble my cast as people who teach each other from their own physical practices. I mean, I say in the show that we all have this in common. We work with and through the body but in very different ways, and it's part of the process to share that amongst each other. It's very interdisciplinary. [...] There, people are much more used to seeing everything fake. It was quite scandalous to see real bodies and real things, which is completely normal for us coming from performance art. We like to play on the edge of what is illusion and what is real. That's very essential for the work[311].

With this performance, in particular, Holzinger wants to declare what her approach to dance in the contemporary world is: a mediated "method", influenced by and bearer of instances long left on the margins of the canon, namely the queer, intersectional, feminist, inclusive, non-ableist, democratic ones, in support of a debate on the profound relationship between nature and society, to

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[310] ANNA LEON, *Reverse-Engineering the Sylph: Reclaiming Female Ballet Bodies in Florentina Holzinger's TANZ*, cit., p. 30. See also ANNA AALTEN, *In the Presence of the Body: Theorizing Training, Injuries and Pain in Ballet*, in «Dance Research Journal», vol. 37, n. 2 (*Women's Health in Dance*, edited by Jill Green), 2005, pp. 55-72; JEN TARR, HELEN THOMAS, *Good Pain, Bad Pain: Dancers, Injury, and Listening to the Body*, in «Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research», vol. 39, n. 1, 2021, pp. 53-71; EVA VON REDECKER, *The Dream of Flying. A conversation with Eva von Redecker & Florentina Holzinger*, in «Kulturstiftung des Bundes», available at: https://www.kulturstiftung-des-bundes.de/en/magazine.html?tx_ksbmagazin_pi1%5Baction%5D=showSectionContent&tx_ksbmagazin_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=Magazin&tx_ksbmagazin_pi1%5BsectionContent%5D=320&cHash=b698642fe86c8efb5a201203eaa02efd (last accessed 23/05/2025).

[311] Contributions by Florentina Holzinger taken from the interview MADELEINE SEIDEL, *'There's Some Bloody Stuff There': Behind the Scenes of Florentina Holzinger's Body Horror Ballet*, cit.

understand the role of the artist in the reality in which she works and lives. Therefore, as Anna Leon points out, her work of adapting and reflecting on the gender of classical ballet, its rules, patterns and consequences, essentially aims to lay bare the representation of women as objects to be moulded, subordinate and subservient to the etero-normative male gaze and *machismo*, in order to support a new set-up of relationships that are no longer based on a binary opposition between the sexes, but build together a new spectrum of possibilities for performers[312].

In this sense, Leon speaks of a *detournement* to describe Holzinger's approach to the classics as a shared cultural heritage, demonstrating that she simply wants to be the repository of her own poetics, by which she does not want to oppose or to attack something, but simply to create:

> To borrow philosopher and queer theorist Paul Preciado's (2003) terms, TANZ des-ontologises female ballet bodies: it counters the naturalised affirmation of their existence as such. It replaces their appearance of otherworldliness, one that grounded an essentialised view of mysterious femininity, by a confrontation with their constructed-ness - and the effort, pain, and risk implicated in that process of construction[313].

> [...] in the perspective of Guy Debord [...], détournement consisted in de- and re-contextualising cultural products or fragments thereof, changing the meaning of the recontextualised element through its new semantic context. This can be utilised to repurpose a work from a commercial-commodified status to a critical perspective upon that status. In this perspective Holzinger re-employs several of the characteristics of romantic spectacle while performing a détournement of its purposes of pleasant entertainment confirming bourgeois values. In doing so, TANZ transforms the women on stage from commodified, pleasing figures to daring, at times even scary presences; and from financially exploited workers to professional artists[314].

The mystification of beauty, as a feminine value in a patriarchal universe, second only to submissiveness and subjugation, is programmatically put in check by Holzinger in his representations, which instead seek to put the identity and capacities of the body, an expression of the abilities and poetics of the individual inhabiting it, back at the centre.

At the same time as reflections on dance and its history, the choreographer also investigates the influences and admixtures between the different arts, starting with cinema, due to its strong component and influence in the contemporary visual imaginary. If in the performance *Apollon*,

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[312] See JENNIFER FISHER, *Tulle as Tool: Embracing the Conflict of the Ballerina as Powerhouse*, in «Dance Research Journal», vol. 39, n. 1, 2007, pp. 2-24; CLARE CROFT, *Feminist Dance Criticism and Ballet*, in «Dance Chronicle», vol. 37, n. 2 (Special Issue: *Dance Critics and Criticism*, edited by Joellen A. Meglin, Lynn Matluck Brooks), 2014, pp. 195-217; ALEXANDRA KOLB, SOPHIA KALOGEROPOULOU, *In Defence of Ballet: Women, Agency and the Philosophy of Pleasure*, in «Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research», vol. 30, n. 2, 2012, pp. 107-125.

[313] ANNA LEON, *Reverse-Engineering the Sylph: Reclaiming Female Ballet Bodies in Florentina Holzinger's TANZ*, cit., p. 31. Footnote 3 in Leon's quotation reads: «For an analysis of the image of the ballerina as both elegant dancing figure and poverty-marked worker, see Sabee (2022). For an overview of the disparity between the myth and reality of romantic dancers, see Jarrasse (2018)».

[314] ANNA LEON, *Reverse-Engineering the Sylph: Reclaiming Female Ballet Bodies in Florentina Holzinger's TANZ*, cit., p. 38. The references in Leon's text refer to GUY DEBORD, GIL J. WOLMAN, *A User's Guide to Detournement*, in Ken Knabb (edited by), *Situationist International Anthology: Revised and Expanded Edition*, Berkeley, Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006 (1956), pp. 14-21. Mention should also be made here of Annelies Van Assche's research on the relationship between the working conditions of dancers and ANNELIES VAN ASSCHE, *Labor and Aesthetics in European Contemporary Dance Dancing Precarity*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020; ANNELIES VAN ASSCHE *et al*. (editors), *(Post)Socialist Dance: A Search for Hidden Legacies*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2024.

Holzinger superimposes the reprise of Balanchine's ballet with many elements taken from pop culture, trash imagery and mass culture, in *TANZ* Holzinger decides to add a further reference to the romantic ballet, which develops as a further undercurrent. Holzinger refers to the cult film *Suspiria*, made in 1977 by Italian director Dario Argento, the first episode of the *Three Mothers* trilogy, which includes *Inferno* (1980) and *The Third Mother* (2007). In the iconic horror film inspired by the 19th century novel *Suspiria De Profundis* by Thomas de Quincey[315] the story is told of a young student studying at a dance academy in Freiburg, Germany. In this academy, terrible events happen to the young pupils, as there is a witch and a coven that rule this apparently healthy and protected place in the shadows: Holzinger superimposes the romantic imagery of the *Sylphide* on the gothic and horror atmospheres of *Suspiria*, to create a new and more disturbing cultural imagery to refer to in the performance. As is the case with the specific language of dance, in addition to the reference to the film itself, Holzinger uses the very medium of filming on stage and problematises it: for example, in *TANZ* she proposes screens at the sides of the stage on which the sequence of Cordua's monstrous birth is projected live, documented by a camera-woman-performer, who films the scene from the stage.

This decision is not without developments regarding the component of feminist and queer reflection undertaken by Holzinger, which in this specific case allows the artist and performers to constantly direct the audience's gaze, subverting the patriarchal and submissive dynamic, which would see the dancers' naked bodies objectified by the dominant drives and gazes of the people in the room[316], to allow, instead, the performers on stage to be both protagonists and creators of the image to be offered to the audience. In this way, each performance becomes unique and unrepeatable; if by contrasting the fantastic and magical setting with the hyperreality of the acrobatic and choreographic technique, the sexual tension is dampened with parodying motets and pantomimes, the carnivalesque reversal technique ends up promoting an important message of inclusion and freedom of expression:

> Instead of pathos and tragedy she relies on an aesthetics of the spectacle, of horror and trash. Subtlety is mercilessly cast out in the process, profundity is programmatically prevented, and yet the blood that flows is real. Consequently, not only is the self-harm sequence immediately followed by a lurid splatter scene, but the bloody suspension itself is constantly undermined in a humorous manner, for example, by equipping the hovering performer with a broom for her to smugly ride through the air, in line with the "Witches - Sisters in Crime" theme[317].

The transition from trash and pop culture to the horror genre and its declinations in history (especially as understood in 19th-century Gothic, later in decadentism and the subsequent 20th-

[315] See THOMAS DE QUINCEY, *Suspiria*, traduzione di Renata Barocas, Milano, Garzanti, 2018.
[316] See ANNA LEON, *Reverse-Engineering the Sylph: Reclaiming Female Ballet Bodies in Florentina Holzinger's TANZ*, cit., pp. 32-33.
[317] ROSEMARIE BRUCHER, *TANZ by Florentina Holzinger*, cit.

century historical avant-gardes) is described by Trachsel[318] as a precise dramaturgical strategy, which makes it possible to cloak reality, the verisimilar, with a patina of indefiniteness, disregarding programmatically the hypotheses formulated by the audience in the auditorium and transporting the stage and the audience into a new, common, sensory reality, in which perception is redefined and negotiated together. The choice to represent women in their monstrous aspect implicitly refers to the theories of Barbara Creed, who asserted that «when woman is represented as monstrous it is almost always in relation to her mothering and reproductive function»[319], and more broadly to what Rasmus Overthun writes about the aesthetics of the monstrous:

Genau in dem Vermögen der unanschaulichen Vorstellung eines Ganzen im Medium der Vernunft sieht Kant nicht nur die Voraussetzung einer 'negativen' Lust am Erhabenen und dessen Zweckmäßigkeit, sondern auch die Bedingung der Möglichkeit des Denkens ethischer Prinzipien gegeben. In der Erschwerung der gleichsam nur fast unmöglichen ästhetischen Darstellung werde dieses Vermögen aktiviert. Gelingt dies nicht, wäre abzuleiten, ist der Gegenstand der Darstellung ungeheuerlich, weil er seine Darstellung durch subjektive Vermögen, worin der Zweck seines Begriffes besteht, vernichtet. Vernichtet ist in diesem Sinne also eine Darstellung, wenn sie - auf welchen Umwegen immer - nicht in der Vorstellung eines Ganzen aufgehoben werden kann. Vor diesem Hintergrund, in allerdings nur mittelbarer Anlehnung an Kant, soll unter einer monströsen An-Ordnung eine ästhetische Darstellungsform verstanden werden, welche die semiologische Aufhebung in einem finalen Sinn, die gattungsästhetische Herstellung der Einheit eines Ganzen oder die mediale Simulation einer raumzeitlich stabilen Welt scheitern lässt. Ein solcher Darstellungsbruch bedeutet aber keinesfalls zwangsläufig die vollständige Vernichtung einer Darstellung, sondern lanciert die ästhetische Reflexion unhinterfragter Darstellungskonventionen, die erst in ihrer Überschreitung 'gezeigt' (demonstriert) werden können[320].

It is precisely in the capacity for the non-intuitive presentation of a whole in the medium of reason that Kant sees not only the precondition for a 'negative' pleasure in the sublime and its expediency, but also the condition for the possibility of thinking ethical principles. This capacity is activated in the complication of the almost impossible aesthetic representation. If this does not succeed, it could be deduced that the subject of the representation is monstrous because it destroys its representation through subjective capacities, which is the purpose of its concept. In this sense, a representation is destroyed if it cannot be suspended in the imagination of a whole, regardless of the detours involved. Against this background, and with only an indirect reference to Kant, a monstrous arrangement is to be understood as an aesthetic form of representation that causes the semiological suspension in a final sense, the generic-aesthetic production of the unity of a whole or the medial simulation of a spatially and temporally stable world, to fail. However, such a break in representation does not necessarily mean the complete destruction of a representation, but rather launches the aesthetic reflection of unquestioned conventions of representation, which can only be 'shown' (demonstrated) in their transgression.

What Holzinger develops with this performance, therefore, and which is further developed with *A Divine Comedy*, is a recursive dramaturgical choice of the monstrous female as the main subject capable of subverting socio-cultural norms, giving rise to a new "normality", an image of the feminine generative of a new artisticity. In this sense, it is important to report what Annina Klapper writes about creating a monster as a process of knowledge capable of transcending imposed limits:

Monströs ist immer das, was unkontrollierbar und bedrohlich erscheint und daher ausgegrenzt werden soll oder aber - so zeigen die verschiedenen Inszenierungen - integriert werden kann. Die Grenzen des Rahmens, der jeweils darüber entscheidet, sind also flexibel, so dass das Monster eine gewollte oder ungewollte Störung der Grenzen markiert, über die der Rahmen selbst in den Blick gerät und verkleinert oder erweitert werden kann. Monster werden damit nicht nur

[318] See EKATERINA TRACHSEL, *Il mostruoso femminino in Tanz e A Divine Comedy di Florentina Holzinger*, cit., pp. 253-256.
[319] BARBARA CREED, *The Monstrous-Feminine. Film, feminism, psychoanalysis*, cit., p. 7.
[320] RASMUS OVERTHUN, *Das Monströse und das Normale. Konstellationen einer Ästhetik des Monströsen*, in ACHIM GEISENHANSLÜKE, GEORG MEIN (herausgegeben von), *Monströse Ordnungen. Zur Typologie und Ästhetik des Anormalen*, Bielefeld, transcript, 2009, pp. 43-79, quotation at p.72.

gemacht, sie sind auch dekonstruierbar. Ihre Funktion besteht darin, eine monströse Figur zu bilden, und als solche monströse Figur Wissen auszubilden. Das Monster ist damit eine Form der Wissensgenerierung, ein Zugewinn an Wissen über die Rahmen, durch die Wahrnehmungen gesteuert werden. Es ist eine Figur, anhand derer Wissen über eigene Grenzen generiert werden kann[321].

That which appears uncontrollable and threatening is always monstrous and is therefore to be marginalised or - as the various enactments show - can be integrated. The boundaries of the frame, which decide in each case, are thus flexible, so that the monster marks an intentional or unintentional disruption of the boundaries, through which the frame itself comes into view and can be reduced or expanded. Monsters are thus not only created, they can also be deconstructed. Their function is to form a monstrous figure and to develop knowledge as such a monstrous figure. The monster is thus a form of knowledge generation, an increase in knowledge about the frames through which perceptions are controlled. It is a figure that can be used to generate knowledge about one's own limits.

The recourse to the monstrous, to the horror context as generative of a new human species is used by Holzinger precisely by resorting to the incredible figure of Beatrice Cordua. As we have seen, the choreographer builds the performance *TANZ* on her, which also determines a reflection on the life of the performer, redefining the figure of the contemporary dancer in her person, presenting her as old, naked and, despite everything, capable of doing anything on stage. In this first performance, it is her life, the professional and the woman in dance that is staged, transforming the body from a limited to a protagonist subject, declaring classical dance from a hidden discipline, for the few, to a manifest possibility for all, overturning every pre-existing tradition, every taboo.

Before delving into the examination of Dante's adaptation, it is useful to recall how from 2019, the year of the creation of *TANZ*, it still takes an artistic step to arrive at the invitation by the Ruhrtriennale Festival der Künste to create a performance for the year 2021. In 2020, in fact, Holzinger deepened her interdisciplinary approach applied to dance and her propensity to use increasingly sophisticated machinery on stage. *Étude for an Emergency* is the first musical collaboration with the Münchner Kammerspiele, in which Holzinger is not on stage and, as the director, envisages «a musical composition for ten bodies and a car». The choice of the term *Étude* is intended to echo the musical nomenclature and emphasise the attention given to the technical component and the element of difficulty required by the piece to be performed, in this case not only referring to the vocal component, which would be the prerogative of the orchestra and singers involved, but to the bodies of the *ensemble* as a whole, admitting into this calculation also the body of the props in a crescendo of virtuosity. *Emergency*, on the other hand, emphasises the vulnerable condition of the scene, in which all these bodies begin to collide, collide and commit acts of violence, against themselves and against each other, juxtaposing the bodies of flesh against those of the objects, such as the only car on stage (an *Opel Corsa*), which in the performance will end up undergoing a traumatic car crash test*:*

[321] ANNINA KLAPPERT*, Monster machen*, in ACHIM GEISENHANSLÜKE, GEORG MEIN (herausgegeben von), *Monströse Ordnungen. Zur Typologie und Ästhetik des Anormalen*, cit., pp. 125-164, quotation at p.162.

The essence of these études is the very literal creation of sound with and through the body as an instrument. I played a lot of Chopin on and off the piano as a child. The repetition of technical difficulties plays into the definition of an étude - I wanted to represent that musically as well as to embody it. Stunt elements usually play a big role in our études, we like to use the effects repertoire from stunts for sound production (crashes, collisions, etc)[322].

Some opera arias are performed by the singers on stage while the performers are engaged in evolutions and sequences taken from the aesthetics of violence coming once again from the cinematic sphere of Stanley Kubrick and Quentin Tarantino. In this performance, the aim is to investigate the complete and complex musicality of bodies in all their facets, starting from a reflection on the typical role of women as victims in the arts, and proposing a subversion with that of the warrior/character, as capable of violence and strength as the male figure to whom she is opposed. The weapon proposed by Holzinger to accomplish this goal is a woman herself: she is the machine capable of destruction and is finally freed of the prevailing narrative that sees her as the necessary victim of historical patriarchal dramaturgy (*Figure 305*).

Once again revealing and describing Holzinger's objective is the illustrative prologue played by the actress Annette Paulmann (1964), the only actress on stage, who declares that she has died too many times in her 30-year career in the theatre and now wishes to make up for the time spent with a heroic death, demonstrating all the potential offered by her artist's body. Once again, the women's bodies, naked, are contrasted only by objects and a machine, made human by the performers' manipulation and the violence they manage to portray on stage, leaving the inanimate to play the role of sacrificial victims.

In this passage, which, as we shall see, prefigures the work on Alighieri, we can see how the grandeur of the set design and special effects used in *TANZ* is maintained and reproposed, using the component of direct negotiation with the audience. Through the forcing of the fourth wall and the direct request to participate in an online challenge. The audience is offered the opportunity to request photos from the artists by providing an email. If in the previous performance, a collection for the Sylph forest in Austria was promoted, in this one, the support to the company is promoted through *social* channels and reference to subscription platforms such as *Only Fans*. In this way, the collateral and equally performative component of the artists' presence on social media and the commodification of the artistic product in the complex contemporary multimedia jungle[323] is problematised and

[322] Statements by Florentina Holzinger in the interview by DELFINA MARTINEZ MENDIBERRY, *Florentina Holzinger. Bodies, Noise, and the Church*, in «Metal Magazine», available at: https://metalmagazine.eu/en/post/florentina-holzinger (last accessed 23/05/2025).

[323] On this subject, see the reviews of the performance: ANNA LANDEFELD, *Étude for an Emergency. Composition for ten bodies and a car - Münchner Kammerspiele. Kaboom Kapeng!*, in «nachtkritik.de», 1 marzo 2020, available at: https://www.nachtkritik.de/nachtkritiken/deutschland/bayern/muenchen/muenchner-kammerspiele/etude-for-an-emergency-composition-for-ten-bodies-and-a-car-muenchner-kammerspiele-florentina-holzinger-gibt-den-frauen-glamouroese-buehnentode ; MARGARETE AFFENZELLER, *Frauen im Crashtest: Florentina Holzingers "Étude" in München Zehn Körper und ein Auto: Für "Étude for an Emergency" verwandelt die österreichische Choreografin die*

brought to the stage. The overlapping of the planes of reality, of stage fiction and of multimedia linked to the artist (in addition to the dramaturgical planes of confrontation between a low, pop and trivial culture with the historical and high one), represents a constant in Holzinger's working approach, who in her shows tries to photograph the evolution of a contemporary artisticity in which the place of performance is no longer only relegated to the contingency of the *hic et nunc* of the stage event, but evolves into a more fluid and persistent immaterial shared presence.

5.5.2. *A Divine Comedy*

To begin the examination of the performance proposed by Holzinger and her team on the *Divine Comedy* and to evaluate what are the most important and innovative elements within her show, one must start from the assumptions that led to its realisation. After receiving many awards for *TANZ*, in the face of the new collaboration with the Münchner Kammerspiele, Holzinger was commissioned to create a new performance by the Ruhrtriennale Festival der Künste[324] for the year 2021. In an interview, the Viennese artist stated at the time how she was beginning to work on the concept of the dance macabre[325], once again starting from the historical element in order to construct an articulate

Kammerspiele München in ein Crashtest-Areal, in «derStandard», 2 marzo 2020, available at: https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000115232679/schmerztechnisch-leichter-vertraeglich-florentina-holzingers-etude-in-muenchen?ref=rss; ANNETTE WALTER, *Radikales Körpertheater. Sehnsucht nach Actionrollen. Mit Gewalt aus der Opferrolle: Florentina Holzinger hat eine „Stuntoper" für zehn Frauen und ein Auto an den Münchner Kammer-spielen inszeniert,* in «taz», 4 marzo 2020, available at: https://taz.de/Radikales-Koerpertheater/!5666431/; SABINE LEUCHT, *Uraufführung an den Münchner Kammerspielen: Reine Körpermechanik*, in «Süddeutsche Zeitung», 2 marzo 2020, available at: https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/etude-for-an-emergency-muenchner-kammerspiele-florentina-holzinger-1.4828405 (last accessed 23/05/2025).

[324] The show *A Divine Comedy* debuted on 19 August 2021 at the Kraftzentrale, Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord, of the Ruhrtriennale Festival der Künste. See https://archiv.ruhrtriennale.de/2021/en/programme/a-divine-comedy/4.html(last accessed 23/05/2025). The performance *A Divine Comedy* was seen by the author of the thesis at the deSingel Theatre (Antwerp, BE) on 13 November 2021.

[325] For the Dance Macabre, see: GIUSEPPE ABBATE, *Alcune considerazioni su tre iconografie della morte tra XIV e XV secolo: Il Trionfo della morte, L'Incontro dei tre vivi e dei tre morti, La Danza macabra*, in «I quaderni dell'Accademia», a. III, n. 1 (*Sacramente. Ragionamenti, esperienze attorno all'arte e il sacro*, a cura di Loredana Finicelli, Chiara Guerzi, Loredana Rea), 2020-2021, pp. 81-98; MAJA DUJAKOVIC, *Into Print: Early Illustrated Books and the Reframing of the Danse Macabre*, in STEPHEN PERKINSON, NOA TUREL (edited by), *Picturing Death 1200–1600*, Leiden, Brill, 2020, pp. 253–277; CRISTINA NOACCO, ANGELO FLORAMO, *Balla con la morte: la tradizione della danza macabra nel medioevo*, in «La Panarie: rivista friulana d'arte e di coltura», a. 50, n. 195, 2017, pp. 417-440; CHIARA FRUGONI, *Senza misericordia: il "Trionfo della Morte" e la "Danza macabra" a Clusone*, Torino, Giulio Einaudi, 2016; HANS HOLBEIN, *The dance of death*, London, Penguin Books, 2016; BARBARA PEKLAR, Reading of the Dance of the Death, in MARJETA CIGLENECKI, POLONA VIDMAR (edited by), *Art and architecture around 1400: global and regional perspectives/Umetnost okrog 1400: globalni in regionalni pogledi*, Maribor, Faculty of Arts of the University of Maribor, 2012, pp. 333-336; SOPHIE OOSTERWIJK, STEFANIE KNÖLL (edited by), *Mixed Metaphors. The Danse Macabre in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011; ELINA GERTSMAN, *The Dance of Death in the Middle Ages. Image, Text, Performance*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2010; GUGLIELMO INVERNIZZI (a cura di), *Immagini della danza macabra nella cultura occidentale dal Medioevo al Novecento*, Como, Nodo Libri, 1995. A recent article was concerned with highlighting how dance macabre is present in the works of many contemporary artists, see PAOLO

and contemporary vision of what the representation of death on stage is today and what value it assumes. From an initial inspection of the hall that was to host the future staging (the imposing open space of the Kraftzentrale at the Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord), the memory of Dante's otherworldly imagery resurfaced in Holzinger, especially in the spatial terms of the infernal realm, which she associated with contemporary trash imagery. The room was visualised as an ideal setting for a circuit for acrobatic motocross evolutions, typical of the American reality show *Nitro Circus*[326] (*Figure 306*):

> Initially, I was working on the theme of the Totentanz; the *danse macabre* or 'dance of death'. This is where my research started. The first visit to the Kraftzentrale at the Ruhrtriennale in Duisburg, Germany, where the show premiered, sparked my imagination. This venue screams for a Nitro Circus. It could be the gateway to hell. And then Dante was just there. It was an internal joke: we were premiering at this prestigious theatre festival and I imagined it could be funny to transform an epic theatrical piece into dance. But I wasn't interested in adapting the book too closely; there is no catholic imagery, for example. I haven't even read it entirely. With the approach of staging a danse macabre through the lens of the classic poem, I wanted to research what happens when dance takes itself too seriously; when it tries to transcend and become more-than-human, to move beyond death. We called this transcendental experience that dance is proposing 'flipping to the other side'. In the scenography of *A Divine Comedy*, this flipping is quite literally depicted: first, everything happens on the floor, and then, the entire scene turns ninety degrees. The grand piano is lifted into the air, cars are suspended at the ceiling. From the perspective of the audience, it's as if you look from above, from the other side of life. In *TANZ*, I also explored ballet's claim to defy gravity - the flying, weightless bodies of dancers. This theme keeps on coming back in *A Divine Comedy*, although now a different kind of question triggered me: what happens to the dancer's body after death? Does the soul depart when we die? Does it fly away from our corporeal selves?[327]

After having conceived an initial imagery capable of bringing past and present together, the artist's attention is immediately fixed on the component of the dancer's body, on the soul-body ambivalence, which has always inspired the investigation of death and the afterlife. The possibility of entering into resonance with Alighieri's work, therefore, is seen not so much as an end to which to conform, but as a key to proposing a reflection on the conditions that gravitate around the end of life, that the human body experiences as a limit to its own existence and, ultimately, that determine its disappearance.

In this emergence of Dantesque suggestions and definition of an object of investigation linked to the dancer's body, the direct contact she has had with the staging and metadiscursive reflections

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MARTINI, *Il domani è la Domanda, già: e se la nuova Danza macabra di Morau riaprisse pure la stessa questione del teatro di ricerca?*, in «Dramaholic», available at: https://www.dramaholic.it/notes/il-domani-e-la-domanda-gia-la-nuova-danza-macabra-di-morau-riapre-pure-la-stessa-questione-del-teatro-di-ricerca (last accessed 23/05/2025).

[326] *Nitro Circus* is an American *reality show* in which circuits are created in which stuntmen perform jumps and stunts on souped-up motorbikes or cars. The shows, which used to be aired on MTV, are still scheduled in the USA today, see the official website: https://www.nitrocircus.com/ (last accessed 23/05/2025).

[327] Statements by Florentina Holzinger in PERSIS BEKKERING, *Vienna. Florentina Holzinger on Vitality and Transcending the Double Death of the Dancer*, in «extraextramagazine», available at: https://extraextramagazine.com/talk/florentina-holzinger-on-vitality-and-transcending-the-double-death-of-the-dancer/ (last accessed 23/05/2025). We mention again the interview HYGIN DELIMAT, *Danger on stage - Florentina Holzinger*, cit; see also the reviews: ELISA FRASSON, *A Human Comedy*, in «tanzschreiber. The Dance Review Portal – Current Critiques of Berlin Dance Events», 03 ottobre 2021, available at: https://tanzschreiber.de/en/a-human-comedy/ ; MOOS VAN DEN BROEK, *Florentina Holzinger. A Divine Comedy. Een goddelijk orgasme als ultieme ontsnapping*, in «Theaterkrant», 22 agosto 2021, available at: https://www.theaterkrant.nl/recensie/a-divine-comedy/florentina-holzinger/ (last accessed 25/05/2025).

on the dance of Dante's *Comedy* by Greco and Scholten's ICK, where Holzinger had an artistic residency, should not be overlooked. Here she had free access to the company's library, where there are many references and materials used in the realisation of Dante's plays. It was during those years that she had the opportunity to become directly acquainted with the working method of Greco and Scholten, who at the time were working on *Paradiso remastered* (2017), giving her the opportunity to interact with the preparation of the choreographies. Referring back to a marginal artistic culture such as the circus, connected with the problematisation of the artistic canon, with the redefinition of genres and with the dimension of work in dance, all themes brought to the stage by the ICK in the early 2000s, in Holzinger these elements are found and enriched with grotesque traits and a focus on the condition of women and of minorities. In addition, the choreographer recalls how, in the exploration phase of Dante's text, several members of her team had the work well in mind and proposed quotations, episodes and figures linked to the *Divine Comedy*. Some of the female artists involved in the production of this play were even of Italian nationality or origin. As has been evident for other companies, the presence of collaborators with close ties to our peninsula had a clear influence on the deepening, the identification of themes and the subsequent final performance.

Holzinger in the play, like Dante in his poem, warns the audience that what is represented is fiction and the result of an artistic conception. To this end, she elaborated an *ad hoc* narrative framework. The performance devised takes its cue from the story of Beatrice Cordua, who returns as the protagonist of the performance. The dancer investigates her artistic experience as a dancer in the final part of her career, experiencing illness and physical decline. In her show, the *fabula*, which is supposed to retrace the journey to *Paradise* and the vision of the Supreme Good, is re-proposed in a parodic and anecdotal sense, offering also a grotesque counterbalance. In fact, Holzinger reflects on how Dante wrote his best work in the middle of his life, at a time of great emotional and psychological distress, precisely the same distress that the Viennese artist (then 35 years old) faced with the COVID-19 pandemic, the limitations imposed by the contagion and the impossibility of predicting the future[328].

Also for the preparation of this particular show, with its grandiose set design, costumes, special effects and number of performers involved (in this case twenty-two, including herself), Holzinger contacted various scholars and experts from different disciplines: from literary scholars to dance historians, or legal experts; from psychiatrists and sexologists to end-of-life doctors, sports doctors

[328] See PERSIS BEKKERING, *Vienna. Florentina Holzinger on Vitality and Transcending the Double Death of the Dancer*, cit.

and consultants of gender equality in athletics[329]. Alongside these experts, Holzinger was joined by *dramaturg* Sara Abbasi[330]. For this specific performance, moreover, it was essential to repropose the scheme constructed by Dante with Virgil, identifying a triad of "masters" of the stage: the dancers Beatrice Cordua, Renée Copraij and Ria Higler, the artistic pillars on which Holzinger's training rested. Calling on all three to share the stage together for the *Commedia*, on the one hand, disrupted the usual hierarchical dynamic of learning, which relegates the Maestro and the Choreographer off the stage, and on the other, constituted an interesting parallelism with the maestro/guide-disciple/pupil dynamic described by Dante in his poem, in which the pupil, thanks to the example and constant presence of the master, matures his own thinking to the point of being able to sustain the journey of knowledge and awareness of his mission in the first person, taking leave of him only after being blessed and recognised for his human and poetic merits[331].

Holzinger appropriates this dialectic by staging professionals who help and dance together with their students, thus creating an endless circle of performative knowledge in a democratic approach to the transmission and creation of art, which takes into account the importance of the exchange of knowledge on the horizontal axis with one another, peer to peer, while on the vertical axis an intergenerational exchange of experiences and approaches to art remains alive and generative:

> Ria was one of my teachers at the School for New Dance Development (SNDO) in Amsterdam. As a trio, they represent different generations and notions of dance. Trixie has a background in classical ballet, whereas Renée was one of the main performers of Jan Fabre, which is not modern dance per se but still represents strong formalistic aspects. Ria taught me about the integration of body and mind, where inner experiences are as important as physicality. All three have such distinctive personalities as mentors which is why I invited them to be a part of the show; to bring in their respective backgrounds, to stage a negotiation of form. Then, there's also the importance of the symbolism of the number three in *La Divina Commedia* - three as in the Holy Trinity[332].

It has been mentioned that Holzinger has a particular inclination to problematise art through the narration of personal stories of women artists, as women's history (*herstory*) still receives little

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[329] «Research: Thomas Macho (Cultural Scientist), Johann F. Spittler (Sterbebegleiter, Psychiater), Julian Heigel (Mortician), Cora Schmechel (Feministic Scientist of Sport, Boxing Trainer), Theresa Lachner (Sexologist), Wolfram Proksch (Jurist), Harald Retschitzegger (Palliative Care Medical), Charles Sassen (Medical), Branko Popadic (Medical), Elisabeth Vlasaty (Legal Advice), Manuele Gragnolati (Professor Italian Literature), Julia Hartley (Dante-Expert), Mariama Diagne (Dance Scientist, Danse Macabre), Andrea Amort (Dance Scientist, Danse Macabre), Katharina Illnar (Alumna MUK, Danse Macabre)», see *A Divine Comedy* on the official Ruhrtriennale website: https://archiv.ruhrtriennale.de/2021/en/programme/a-divine-comedy/4.html (last accessed 23/05/2025).

[330] See SARA ABBASI, *E caddi come corpo morto cade – I fell like a dead body falls. 4 questions to the dancer and choreographer Florentina Holzinger on »A Divine Comedy« by dramaturge Sara Abbasi*, in «Ruhrtriennale», 26 May 2021, available at: https://archiv.ruhrtriennale.de/2021/en/magazine/e-caddi-come-corpo-morto-cade-i-fell-like-a-dead-body-falls/40.html (last accessed 23/05/2025). A Flemish version of the same interview is available and downloadable at the website of the De Singel theatre in Antwerpen: https://desingel.be/en/programme/dance/florentina-holzinger-a-divine-comedy?id=a0J0N00002xwmT9UAI (last accessed 23/05/2025).

[331] See *Pg*. XXVII.

[332] Holzinger in PERSIS BEKKERING, *Vienna. Florentina Holzinger on Vitality and Transcending the Double Death of the Dancer*, cit.

attention from the historical disciplines and is, therefore, the subject of an avowedly gender-oriented artistic investigation and political claim.

A Divine Comedy is a performance in which different semantic planes overlap, following precisely Dante's narrative dynamic that proposes the story of a protagonist Dante who speaks of the stories of different characters, but is also enclosed in a universal design, in which Dante is a prophetic image of Christ and able to offer a glimpse of human history. Even if with strong parodic intent, Holzinger aligns herself with this design, claiming the need to redefine the spaces, modes and subjects of art-making based on feminist and inclusive logic, offering her audience the possibility, the time and the place to problematise their own gaze, their own way of conceiving not only the artistic object but also their own agency on society.

To offer a direct link between performers and audience, between the reality of the stage and everyday life, the choreographer adopts a metatheatrical perspective in this performance. A few days before the performance, the theatre hosting the performance sends an email to the audience asking for volunteers to participate in the performance, offering a hypnosis session. Anyone wishing to participate should contact the company at the address given and come to the theatre for a short training session. On the evening of the performance, the show starts with the curtain closed, with six chairs lined up on the proscenium and an announcer to welcome the volunteers, all of whom are of age. Of different ages and conditions, they are ready to entrust themselves to the professional: the Dutchwoman Miranda van Kuilenburg, the only female hypnotist in Europe, contacted by Holzinger to participate in the show *A Divine Comedy*[333] (*Figure 307*).

The state of semi-death or semi-consciousness, resulting from the suspension of the self into which van Kuilenburg transports the volunteers (and ideally the audience in the auditorium), recalls the mental and psychological state of Dante at the beginning of his own journey in the *Comedy*, the loss of consciousness of reality induced by the difficult moment in which he found himself and the total inability to distinguish dream, fiction, from reality:

> Io non so ben ridir com'i' v'intrai,
> tant'era pien di sonno a quel punto
> che la verace via abbandonai[334].

[333] The following are the instructions required to participate in the hypnosis phase: «You should expect to spend approximately 2-3 hours. Persons over 18 years of age are eligible to participate. The participation is on a voluntary basis and free of charge. Participation requires a valid vaccination certificate (1G), as we want to keep the risk of infection as low as possible for all participants», see article *People interested in hypnosis wanted for Florentina Holzinger's show*, in «TanzQuartierWien», 23 September 2021, available at: https://tqw.at/en/people-interested-in-hypnosis-wanted-for-florentina-holzingers-show/ (last accessed 23/05/2025). See also HELMUT HETZEL, *A Divine Comedy von Florentina Holzinger – mit holländischer Hypnotiseurin Miranda van Kuilenburg*, in «HetzelMedia», 24 ottobre 2021, available at: https://www.hetzelmedia.com/a-divine-comedy-von-florentina-holzinger-mit-hollaendischer-hypnotiseurin-miranda-van-kuilenburg/ (last accessed 23/05/2025).

[334] *If*. I, vv. 10-12.

In a prologue unlike any other previously devised by Holzinger, in that it constitutes a further performance in which the hypnotist is the protagonist of the scene, the audience is invited to participate and to let themselves go, following a narrative that echoes and paraphrases many of Dante's passages. Van Kuilenburg declares herself to be the Virgil of the performance, and Dante becomes every spectator in the room (including the volunteers on stage), thus making the lack of difference between what happens on stage and off stage more evident. The hypnosis session ends with the definition of a Dante for the stage, in this case Annina Machaz, one of the youngest collaborators of Holzinger's team, an expert in the interpretation of caricatured, grotesque and theatrically parodic roles. After this step, all the volunteers are awakened and leave together with the hypnotist. At this point, the curtain opens and the journey into Holzinger's *Comedy* begins[335].

The imposing set design of *A Divine Comedy* welcomes the new Dante, who utters a few phrases to introduce the audience to Dante's world, including some sibylline questions such as «Is there really a stairway to Heaven?»[336], which support the constant recourse to popular imagery: on opposite sides of the stage are two long screens broadcasting evocative images of, for example, the flames of *Hell* and the blue skies of *Paradise*, as well as verses and keywords taken from Dante's *Comedy*. In the centre of the stage, an imposing staircase rises; while at the sides, two cars, two old black *Opel Corsa* are suspended. At the side of the stage (in a proscenium box or in an ad hoc carved-out space on the stage) take their places a lighting technician and a DJ, women who appear naked like the entire cast of Holzinger.

Despite the fact that the open space is initially left in shadow, Annina Machaz, impersonating Dante, begins to take off the clothes of reality, which united her with all the other volunteers on stage, to remain naked, with only the classic red *lucco* of Dante's portraiture and the poetic laurel on her head. When she crosses the imposing door of *Inferno*, Machaz-Dante enters, instead, into a chemical toilette, lowered from the grating. After soundly performing her vital functions, she emerges declaring: «I can tell, this is Hell!» (*Figure 308*).

The beginning of the performance, marked by theatrical codes, is followed by the entrance of the real star of the show: Beatrice Cordua aka *Trixie*, who arrives on stage in a mobility scooter. As in *TANZ*, she makes it clear how Dante's setting is intersected by her personal reflection on the decay of the body and death. With her, the other performers enter the stage and arrange themselves on the staircase, naked, each with a skeleton fixed to her back (*Figures 309-310*).

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[335] See for example the show's trailer on the TanzforumBerlin website, in which some clips of the theatrical moments involving the *performer* Annina Machaz can be seen, especially from min. 1:40 onwards: https://www.tanzforumberlin.de/en/production/a-divine-comedy/ (last accessed 23/05/2025).

[336] This quotation, and the following, is a transcript of the performance, taken by the author of this thesis during the Antwerp performance on 13 November 2021.

Cordua, whose real name is Beatrice and who also takes on her role in the performance, begins to talk to the audience about how depressing and difficult it is to go from being an object of desire to an undesirable subject, acquiring an awareness of herself only in relation to her own end and her own worthlessness, as the body of a dancer after the age of forty-five becomes unpresentable on stage. Moreover, by virtue of the decay imposed by a disease such as Parkinson's (from which she suffers), after that age the process of uglification hastens, decreeing a rapid end. In the play, Cordua states that a dancer dies at least twice: when she leaves the stage and when her life ends. As she is no longer able to perform her artistic act, Cordua is determined to give the audience a grandiose preview of her death. Therefore, the performance *A Divine Comedy* is framed as a grand audition for her funeral.

The first thematic core investigated on stage is pain, rendered with a paratactic and metonymic approach of medieval spectacle. While Cordua concludes her speech on physical decay by speaking to the audience on the proscenium, a dead rat is skinned on stage and filmed by a camera. The action is projected on the side screens while some performers start performing stretching exercises to prepare for the next scene, intoning a *bordone*, a low monotonous note, to support Cordua's speech. Next, the staircase divides into two flights and more performers enter the stage, starting to place obstacles for a hurdles race. While some perform the race, some musicians play live and others keep time for their fellow "athletes". Soon a motocross bike appears alongside the contenders, overcoming their timing, in a dystopian confrontation between human and machine (*Figure 311*). Meanwhile, on the side screens, videos with tongues of fire are projected. Once the hurdles race is over, wood-cutting stations are set up on the proscenium.

This first composite action of the performance is realised by the cast in a constant and increasingly accentuated dynamism, in which they seem to be observing an Olympic Games arena rather than a performance of Dante's *Comedy*, combining athletic disciplines with particularly unusual bodily practices. When the athletics competition concludes, the two flights of stairs come together and the performers perform the first real moment of dance to the cry of «let's dance»: all the women begin to perform turns and *pirouettes*, emphasising the position of their arms, making each body become a spatial vector on the stage, ideally a machine that replicates an input given countless times in space, always the same, but different depending on the body performing it. Not all of Holzinger's performers, in fact, come from an academic background; there are many sex workers among them and other belonging to different choreographic disciplines, so the technical difference between the performers is particularly evident in this type of scene[337]. At one point, they all stop and climb up the steps and, after performing poses of their choice, throw themselves down the structure.

[337] See PERSIS BEKKERING, *Vienna. Florentina Holzinger on Vitality and Transcending the Double Death of the Dancer*, cit.

At this moment, a second section of physical sequences begins, in which the musicians continue to play concussive music while some performers climb onto logs, previously prepared, and start chopping wood with a particular cadence of blows, trying to build a rhythmic harmony of efforts and blows. At the same time, the staircase opens up again, allowing a glimpse behind it of the evolutions of the motocross bikes, in a *Nitro Circus* way (*Figures 312-313*).

With her electric mobility scooter, Cordua passes among the artists who are working hard to hit the stumps, still carrying skeletons on their shoulders. Then, the action returns thematically to the dance class, as it did in *TANZ*, only in this case focusing on different styles practised simultaneously by the different artists. During this session, Dantean contents appear on the screens, referring to the three canticles, and then behind them, the staircase closes again.

Thus begins a third, if one can call it that, section, in which the performers are all encouraged to climb the staircase, while on the lower part of the stage only Cordua on a *scooter* and the musicians remain. With *tableau vivant* plasticity, the performers all take on the appearance of a large Renaissance fresco, alluding to previous universal judgments and hells depicted in famous churches and paintings (*Figures 314-315*):

> In *A Divine Comedy* specifically, nudity is an essential component which is utilised to allude to the traditional depiction of heaven and hell in art history. Museums are filled with images of naked bodies, and the show contains many references to these historical works. For instance, we mime out iconic Renaissance paintings, so nudity is part of the aesthetic[338].

This artistic moment of apparent stasis and harmony, in which art history and a certain ideal of the body meet on stage with Holzinger's feminist and queer aesthetics, is immediately redefined by Cordua, who asks, «Is a dancer an artist or is a body that needs to listen?». Meanwhile, Renée Copraij has come down the steps, stands beside her and asks: «Do you want to see something more contemporary?». At Cordua's affirmative and enthusiastic response to this last question, the scene shifts and becomes chaos. The setting is now that of the medieval *mansiones*, or of the "*stage façade*" of the Chambers of Rhetoric of 16th and 17th-century Flanders, with the scene divided into several episodes, all co-present in the eyes of the audience, who can only decide what to dwell on in a crescendo of busyness and movement.

On the right side of the stage, the previously skinned rat appears again, which is now first dissected, showing its innards, and then meticulously stitched up and reassembled, recalling the high art of embalming. On the central part of the stage, on the other hand, a painting *atelier* is set up, with the installation of a large white canvas with a worktable in front of it, on which, however, several surgical tools stand out. Soon a performer with gloves and disinfectant draws blood from another, and

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[338] Holzinger's statements in PERSIS BEKKERING, *Vienna. Florentina Holzinger on Vitality and Transcending the Double Death of the Dancer*, cit. For example, Holzinger declares Auguste Rodin's sculpture *La Porte de l'Enfer* as an overtly Dantean figurative reference for her performance, see HYGIN DELIMAT, *Danger on stage - Florentina Holzinger*, cit.

the extracted liquid is inserted into the painting material, positioned nearby, as Cordua declares: «some splendid colour».

From the stage, the DJ is asked to produce the «rehearsal» track, as if she were a kind of auxiliary device with artificial intelligence, common to all modern smartphones, or home automation systems, a new version of the piano accompanist. The action realised in this particular part of the performance takes the form of an extension of the artistic preparation of the performance, constantly revealing to the audience and decontextualising the final moment of the stage event, in order to constantly maintain the magmatic, plastic and repetitive condition of the rehearsal. The discipline required to realise the performance is similar to that required of the spectators who attend it because Holzinger's performances at all times continue to negotiate attention with the audience, disregarding a univocal and all-encompassing resolution.

The culmination of this artistic and metadiscursive section, which unites the performing arts with the figurative arts, is a rather unexpected sequence. Referring back to the desecrating twentieth-century dialectic in artists such as the Surrealist René Magritte, the Dadaist Marcel Duchamp, and the provocative and anti-formal Piero Manzoni[339], who challenge the very concept of a valuable work of art, bringing replicability to the public's attention, the ready-made, the shamelessness of the insult and the difficulty in conceiving the limit of what can be a valid art object: Holzinger once again tests what is the underlying concept of the representability of certain actions. To this end, he has five performers simultaneously defecate on stage on painter's palettes, so that the nature of the gesture is irrefutable and clearly visible[340]. The idea is to emphasise how the same technique and self-denial that is required of a female dancer in performing a particular dance step is also necessary and implied in order to be able to carry out, at a given time and place, the evacuation: both are actions that the body can be trained to perform. This particular recourse to the lowest register applicable to the representation of bodily possibilities is fully in line with Dante's pluristilism: just as Alighieri in his *Comedy* succeeds in touching the heights of *Paradise* and describing the unspeakable, the vision of God the creator and his eternal glory in the heavens, he equally well and with a certain abundance of details goes into describing the bestial and aberrant dimension of the damned in *Hell*, destined to the eternal perpetuation of the punishments inflicted upon them and the degradation of their person.

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[339] Reference is made here to the works *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*, a series of canvases by René Magritte (1926-1960), to Marcel Duchamp's sculpture *Fountain* of 1917 and to Piero Manzoni's 1961 numbered series of ninety cans *Merda d'artista (Artist's Shit).*

[340] «Through rigorous and disciplined daily training. This is all about getting the body used to different "rituals", no?! […] You can also re-school your body into different ways. It's just another type of training, I would say. […] it's more about ritual timing than using a special product […] dance technique can be so much!», HYGIN DELIMAT, *Danger on stage - Florentina Holzinger*, cit., min. 25 to min. 28.

In her own way, Holzinger embodies in her artistic practice the excursion of this investigation into the heights and lows of the body, disconcerting the audience with the continuous contrast between high and low registers. This is followed by a sequence of body painting, a further performance within the performance, during which the artists' bodies are both objects and creators, in a colourful action painting that at times recalls Jackson Pollock's dripping technique, with an artist harnessed and lifted off the ground, splashing paint in the air with a rifle onto the canvas and her companions. It goes without saying that all these actions involve a constant live video replay of the content performed on stage, increasing the visual effect created, following Dante's example of the multiplication of planes of narration (*Figures 316-317*). At the conclusion of this fourth sequence, with the exhausted bodies of the performers lying between the painting and the stage, Cordua re-enters the scene to recount her past as a dancer and her glorious moment of collaboration with the visionary choreographer John Neumeier, for whom she performed her first nude role in 1972.

After grief, the time has come to explore death through art as well. To the notes of *Forever Young* by Alphaville (1984), a German synth pop band, a collective dance moment about colour is performed, in which the action of the motocross bike also participates in its own way. Cordua recounts her relationship with her body as an elderly and ill woman, the way in which she feels she is no longer seen as a woman associated with pleasure, but as a reject, a thing, also stating how she now experiences death when she masturbates, a practice she performs more frequently now that she is elderly than when she was younger, during which she experiences a sense of abandonment that is in itself a little death (the idiomatic *a petite mort*), a total abstraction from reality and a total relaxation of the body (*Figure 318*).

Starting with the historical association between *Eros* and *Thanatos*, the camera fixes on one *performer* in particular, who begins to masturbate and is filmed live on the screens to transmit the exact moment of ecstasy at the climax of the notes of Igor Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps* (1913). The composition is chosen by Holzinger expressly, as it was the ballet performed by Cordua at the height of her career, and here it is interpreted by the sex worker Foxxy Angel: «In *A Divine Comedy*, the most skilful performer, if you ask me, is Foxxy Angel, who can squirt on the exact last notes of *The Rite of Spring*»[341]. Following lovemaking, in the form of autoeroticism, a coffin is brought onto the stage, which will be Cordua's coffin. As a last request, before her burial, Cordua asks for one last *petite mort* and a sex scene between the woman and another performer is then performed. At the end

[341] Holzinger's statements in PERSIS BEKKERING, *Vienna. Florentina Holzinger on Vitality and Transcending the Double Death of the Dancer*, cit. In another interview Holzinger reiterates how she was looking for a «human fountain», for that particular representation of the orgasm on stage in a specific technical time, see HYGIN DELIMAT, *Danger on stage - Florentina Holzinger*, cit. min. 28-30. It is not secondary that precisely one of the attributes of the Virgin Mary, in *Pd.* XXXIII, v. 12, is «fontana vivace». This example testifies to how the corporeal reading of Dante promoted by Holzinger is anything but banal or to be taken for granted.

of the act, surrounded by her companions who intone a *bordone* note to accompany her one last time, Cordua is placed in the coffin, which is closed and lifted into the air.

Following this death, soothing images of the sky and clouds are shown on the screens, while ropes descend from the trellis: the actual ascent to the heavens of *Paradise* is being prepared, in the usual bodily style involving the suspension of the performers by means of different body parts, already seen in *TANZ*. The suspension of gravity, which leads to a *levitas* in the tones of the performance, until now particularly concentrated on the parodistic, loaded and low aspect of Dante's message, is expressed in a new conception of *Paradise*, or supposed *Paradise*, concentrated on the incredible and always particularly suggestive presence of women in the air, through those thin body parts that resist the impressive stress(*Figure 319*). The stunt technique, with which Holzinger and colleagues overcome the force of gravity for the duration of the performance, succeeds in bringing into being the words of Dante, impersonated by Machaz who watches in awe as her own body of flesh and blood makes its way through the heavens of *Paradise* in the presence of all the saints and blessed, thanks to Beatrice's explanation:

> Le cose tutte quante
> hanno ordine tra loro, e questo è forma
> che l'universo a Dio fa simigliante.
>
> Qui veggion l'alte creature l'orma
> de l'etterno valore, il qual è fine
> al quale è fatta la toccata norma.
>
> Ne l'ordine ch'io dico sono accline
> tutte nature, per diverse sorti,
> più al principio loro e men vicine;
>
> onde si muovono a diversi porti
> per lo gran mar de l'essere, e ciascuna
> con istinto a lei dato che la porti[342].

Soon even this particularly courtly if carnal sequence is agitated by the presence of fire and a sudden change in lighting. The sidereal magnitude of the celestial spheres and the speed of movement in the heavens is agitated by the insistent presence of strobe lights, which begin to send flashes and direct light randomly across the stage. Meanwhile, as a performer strides across the stage, a flame thrower is used on her, causing her to catch fire; in the space above, suspended machines also begin to shake, and a piano in the air is revealed, on which a musician hoisted in mid-air with her instrument begins to play. The performers are divided between stage and mid-air; some are suspended, others hoist themselves onto the suspended cars, others perform stunts. The chaotic dynamism of this moment ends with the crash of the cars on the ground, which destroys Cordua's coffin. The chemical

[342] *Pd*. I, vv. 103-114.

toilette, in which Machaz-Dante had taken refuge at the beginning of the performance, is brought down from the trellis and, coming out of this, Machaz-Dante reappears on the scene.

The last section closes the show circularly, re-presenting a sequence of particularly theatrical and surreal actions. «I'm an artist» is the self-conscious and impactful statement that Machaz-Dante offers the audience following the almost two-hour performance they have just witnessed. In uttering this phrase, however, the parodistic element once again takes over to lower what might otherwise be an overly lofty moment of reflection on the performance and the messages that Holzinger and Alighieri share about art. Thus, a particularly funny scene is conceived in which, walking among the equipment left behind by the various performers, Machaz-Dante accidentally injures her leg, which "awakens" the bloodthirsty skeletons initially seen on the performers' backs (*Figure 320*). Now, however, they are huge puppets (puppets of black theatre)[343] that start running after her around the stage. This infernal race of skeletons is very reminiscent of the 'macabre dances' that were the main *leitmotif* of Holzinger's preparatory investigation of the *Comedy*. Towards the end, Machaz-Dante, animated by much courage and holding a mega toilet brush, begins to sweep away the skeletons and, ideally, all the material that has brought this «shitty journey» to the stage in a comical *Putzaktion* [cleaning action].

The German theatre is full of similar situations, dramaturgies that juxtapose moments of figure theatre with dramaturgies of speech theatre precisely to let the figure component play the role of counterbalance to the main scene, remodelling the usual strategy of Shakespearean *play within the play* in a German-speaking key to building articulated architectures of meta-dramaturgical reflection on the art of theatre itself. This further technical aspect of the play's composition juxtaposes Holzinger and her style with the theatrical works of great Romantic artists such as Tieck and Goethe, hinting at how her thinking takes into account a tradition particularly appreciated in German theatre, remodelling it in a contemporary key in her physical theatre.

Once this *Putzaktion* is over, Machaz-Dante returns to the stage with the hypnotist Miranda van Kuilenburg, to close the circle of the initial frame, reminding the audience how «Death is a new beginning, that's the way you feel good with love and peace», re-adapting some pivotal elements of the last canto of *Paradise*, namely the need to build on love and a peace actively to be sought the hope for the future of the world. After these uplifting words, Beatrice Cordua herself comes out of the chemical toilette declaring «it's complited», the show is over (*Figures 321-322*).

[343] Black Theatre is a type of figure theatre where puppets are animated directly or indirectly by animators dressed in black and placed directly in contact with them. If the puppet is manoeuvred by means of rods or sticks, especially because of its considerable size, it is called indirect; if, on the other hand, the animator moves the puppet directly with his or her hands, it is called direct. For more in-depth information on the subject, see FRANCESCA CECCONI, *Il teatro di figura. Storia e tecniche*, introduzione di Simona Brunetti, Roma, Dino Audino, 2025.

Holzinger's vision of the *Divine Comedy* provides a complex and multifaceted picture of how the international, and especially European, reception of Dante aims to enrich the already vast patrimony of episodes and characters (which offer a key to universal reflection on humanity) with an updated and politically aligned dramaturgy. As we have seen in relation to other contemporary adaptations, in Holzinger's case every scenic element is the object of Dante's influence and the reason for an artistic claim. The choreographer decides to insert her Dantean vision into every level of the performance: in the meta-narrative frame, in which the hypnotist and Dante's parodic character operate; in Beatrice Cordua's *fabula*, which brings the dancer's artistic experience closer to Dante's journey of the soul; in the management of certain dance and pantomime sequences useful for the unfolding of the performance, in which episodes, characters and verses from Dante are recognisable; finally, in the set design and the overall *mise-en-scene*, which appropriates elements taken from the *Comedy* and adapts them to the contemporary context.

The performer's body, however, is the focus of the investigation: on the one hand, conceived and presented as a performing, incredible and unexpected body, capable of any feat, a kind of "perfect human machine"; on the other, represented as contingent and impermanent in the old and incapacitated physique of Cordua, the ballet's infernal mother.

Holzinger's reflection on art in relation to Dante is articulated around the realisation of *vanitas vanitatum*, once again asking herself, as an artist, what message it is important to bring to the stage in order to overcome this implacable law. Holzinger not only offers her own reading of the *Commedia* and its reception in the European context but also outlines a path for art to follow, declaring inclusion and a new culture of the body as the key, made up of listening, circular operation, democratic ordering and the breaking down of all pre-established barriers on what is right and lawful to bring to the stage, without forgetting a light dimension with which to lead the audience to question themselves about life with a smile.

Holzinger, more or less consciously, manages to replicate Dante's compositional mode quite faithfully, interpreting it in her own physical theatre. At a deeper level, just as Dante was empowered for the mission he had taken on towards humanity by presenting and encountering various figures dear and familiar to him in the *Comedy*, so Holzinger conceives of the stage as a demonstration of a new way of working, where she gives space to each person and offers a safe place where she can confront any kind of taboo and instance through art[344].

After her experience with Dante, Holzinger decided to tackle another great of European and world literature, William Shakespeare, in the play *Ophelia's got talent* created in 2022 for the

[344] See HYGIN DELIMAT, *Danger on stage - Florentina Holzinger*, cit., min. 14 ff.

Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz in Berlin[345], and subsequently staged the play *Sancta* in 2024, an adaptation taken from Paul Hindemith's opera *Sancta Susanna* with a libretto by August Schramm at the Staatsoper Stuttgart[346].

Her crash test with the classics and traditional culture led her to increasing success, culminating in her nomination as associate artist to represent Austrian at the Venice Biennale 2026[347]. Unlike other artists, who face Dante with an established path, Holzinger's example constitutes a new trend for the future: the choice, no matter what, not to be crushed by the monument and to construct a dramaturgy capable of entering into the differences and contradictions of the contemporary, while taking on the transmission of links with the past.

As she claims in an interview asking her about her particular predilection for scandalous art and subjects, Holzinger points out:

> It's impossible to create a performance for a specific response - not unless you want to control people's mind, and I don't. Aside from that, you should always enjoy what you do on stage. If you don't, it's fucking pointless to do art. But after twelve, thirteen years of working, what I do is of course not random. I see my work as an answer to the questions I ask myself while the times are changing. The themes I engage with are rather specific, and I always try to delve deeper into them each time; however, I'm not after a teachable moment - I don't want to lecture anyone. I'd rather have people arrive at their own understanding of my work, which they do not need to be able to put into words. It's not about providing

[345] The world premiere of the show took place on 15 September 2022 at the Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz theatre, see the video *trailer* available at the theatre's website: https://mediathek.berlinerfestspiele.de/en/theatertreffen/2023/ophelias-got-talent-trailer (last accessed 23/05/2025).

[346] See the show's file provided on the website of the Staatsoper Stuttgart, which premiered on 30 May 2024: https://www.staatsoper-stuttgart.de/en/schedule/a-z/sancta/ (last accessed 23/05/2025). See also DELFINA MARTINEZ MENDIBERRY, APOLLONIA THERESA BITZAN, *Florentina Holzinger. Bodies, Noise, and the Church*, cit.; Florian Malzacher, *Liberation Theology: Florentina Holzinger's "SANCTA"*, in «Spike Art Magazine», 14 giugno 2024, available at: https://spikeartmagazine.com/articles/review-florentina-holzinger-debut-opera-sancta-2024 ; MATTHEW MCLEAN, *'I Want the Pope on Stage': Florentina Holzinger Takes on the Church. The choreographer speaks to Matthew McLean about 'TANZ', 'Ophelia's got Talent' and her plans for the future*, in «FRIEZE», 02 febbraio 2023, available at: https://www.frieze.com/article/i-want-pope-stage-florentina-holzinger-takes-church ; KATHRIN HEINRICH, *Mavericks Florentina Holzinger and Milo Rau push theatre beyond its limits. In an interview with Art Basel, they share their thoughts on opera, madness, and their upcoming involvement in Vienna's Wiener Festwochen*, in «Art Basel», 15 maggio 2024, available at: https://www.artbasel.com/stories/florentina-holzinger-milo-rau-wiener-festwochen ; ILARIA BONVICINI, *Suore nude sui pattini e bdsm in scena: l'opera di Holzinger che "fa svenire il pubblico"*, in «DOMUS», 15 ottobre 2024, available at: https://www.domusweb.it/it/notizie/2024/10/16/florentina-holzingers-sancta-persone-svenute-recensioni.html ; GIORGIA BOTTER, *Piercing e sesso dal vivo a teatro: 18spettatori sono dovuti ricorrere a cure mediche*, in «EuropaToday», 11 ottobre 2024, available at: https://europa.today.it/attualita/piercing-sesso-opera-teatrale-shock-spettatori-ospedale-nausea.html (last accessed 23/05/2025).

[347] See the announcement issued by the Ministry of Arts, Culture, Civil Service and Sport of the Federal State of Austria, where the press release can be downloaded: https://www.bmkoes.gv.at/en/Topics/arts-and-culture/Venice-Biennale/Florentina-Holzinger-will-design-Austria-pavilion-at-the-2026-Biennale-Arte-in-Venice.html (last accessed 23/05/2025). See also LUDOVICA ZECCHINI, *"Seaworld Venice": Florentina Holzinger per l'Austria*, in «ArtsLife: the cultural revolution online», 13 gennaio 2025, available at: https://artslife.com/2025/01/13/florentina-holzinger-rappresentera-laustria-alla-biennale-di-venezia-2026/ ; JOSIE THADDEUS-JOHNS, *Subversive theater artist Florentina Holzinger to represent Austria at the 2026 Venice Biennale*, in «Artsy», 10 gennaio 2025, available at: https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-subversive-theater-artist-florentina-holzinger-represent-austria-2026-venice-biennale ; JO LAWSON-TANCRED, *Subversive Feminist Artist Florentina Holzinger Will Represent Austria at 2026 Venice Biennale*, in «artnet», 10 gennaio 2025, available at: https://news.artnet.com/art-world/florentina-holzinger-2026-venice-biennale-2596681 (last accessed 23/05/2025).

specific content. I create my performances as if I was my own audience; yet, in the end, our performances are made to be witnessed. That is the reason I try to be considerate in my work[348].

[348] Statements by Holzinger in SASCHA EHLERT, *Florentina Holzinger: Preparing for an Emergency*, photos of Svenja Trierschied, in «Various Artists», 03 febbraio 2022, available at: https://various-artists.com/florentina-holzinger/ (last accessed 23/05/2025).

PHOTOGRAPHIC SUPPLEMENT

INTRODUCTION

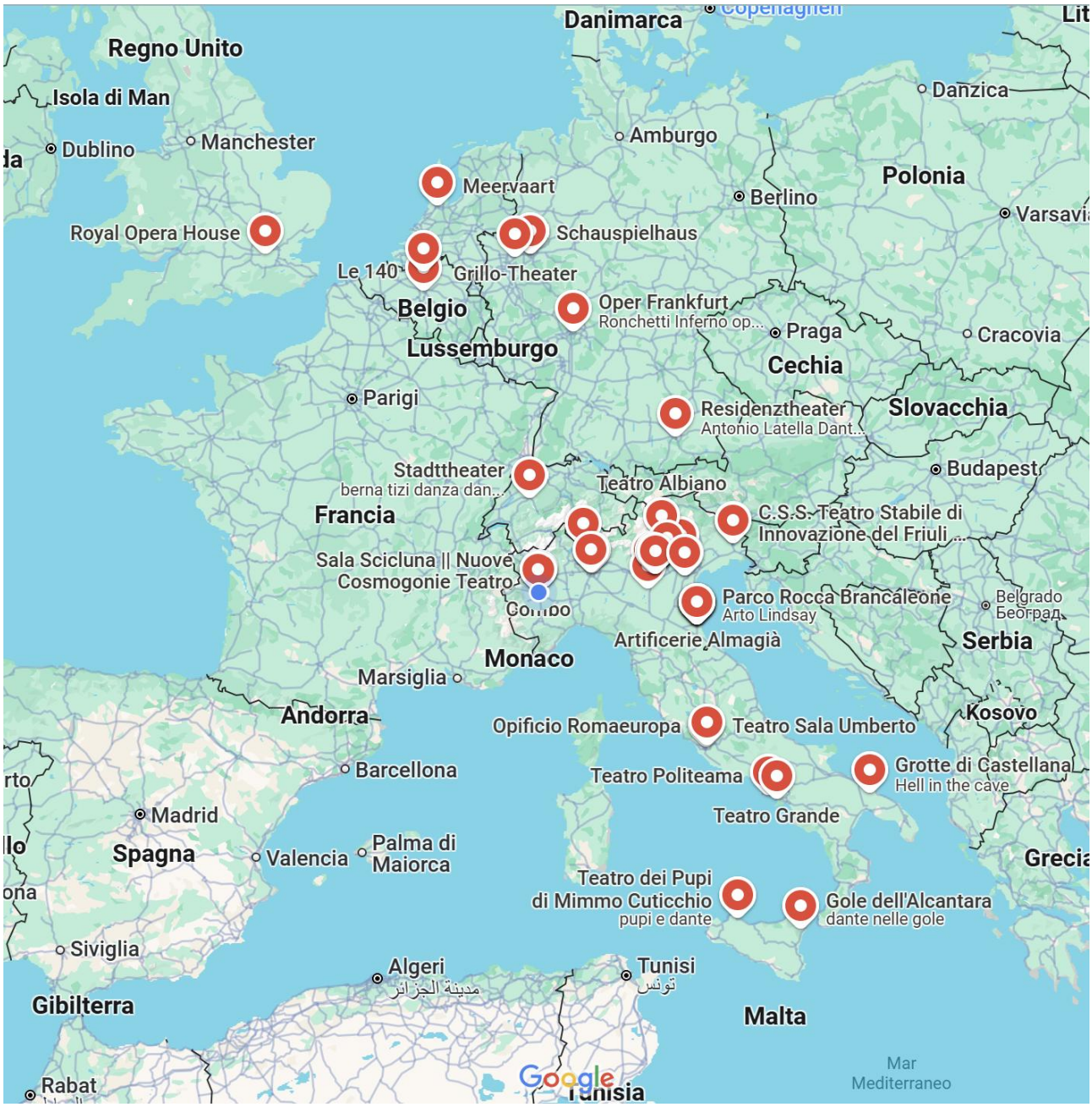


Figure 1, Overview of performances seen during the doctoral programme.

THIRD CHAPTER

The *Lecturae Dantis* from the Second Half of the 20th century to the New Millennium

3.1. Exemplary interpreters of the *Lecturae Dantis*

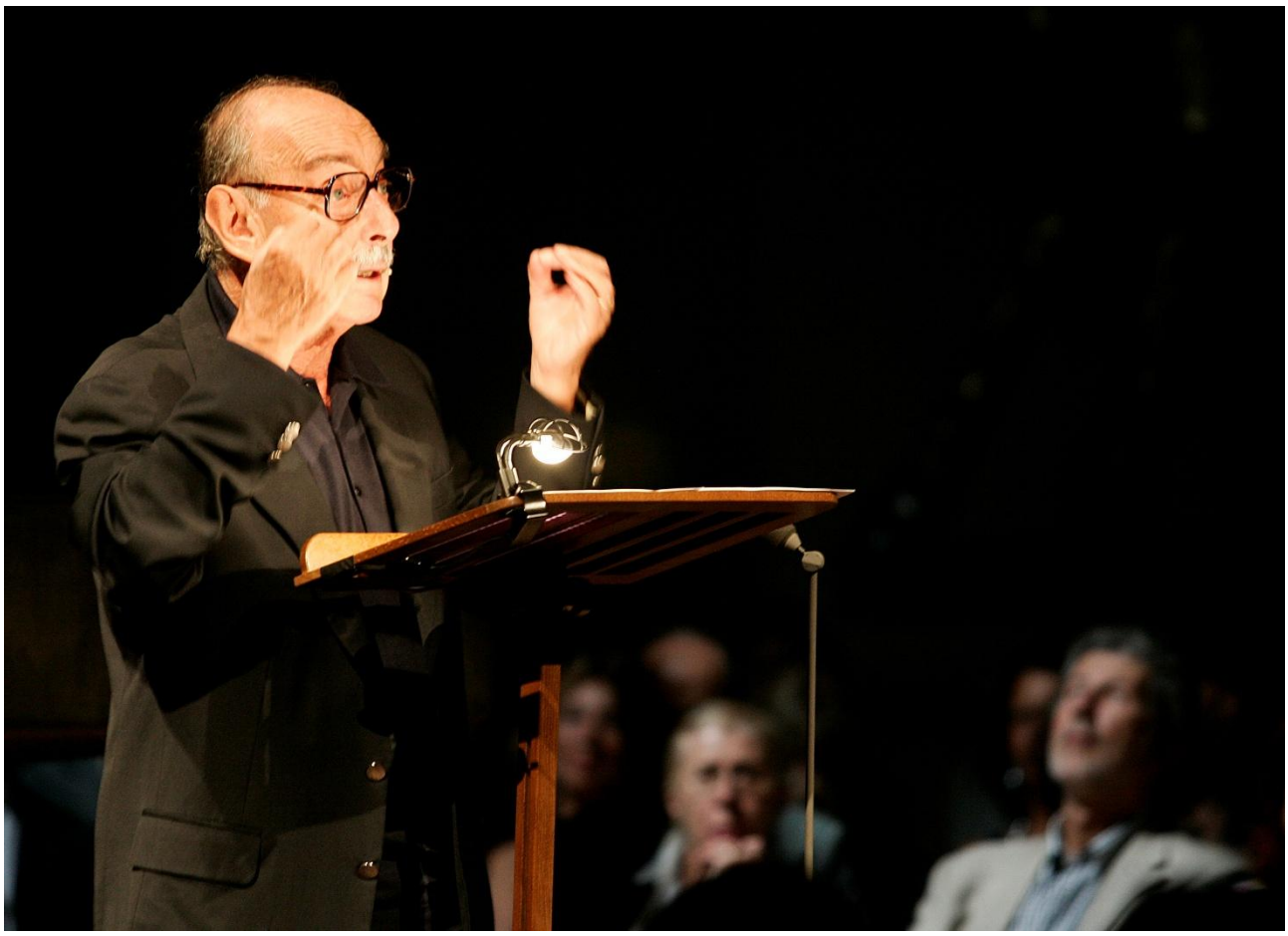


Figure 2, Vittorio Sermonti reads Dante.

Figure 3, Vittorio Gassman reads Dante.

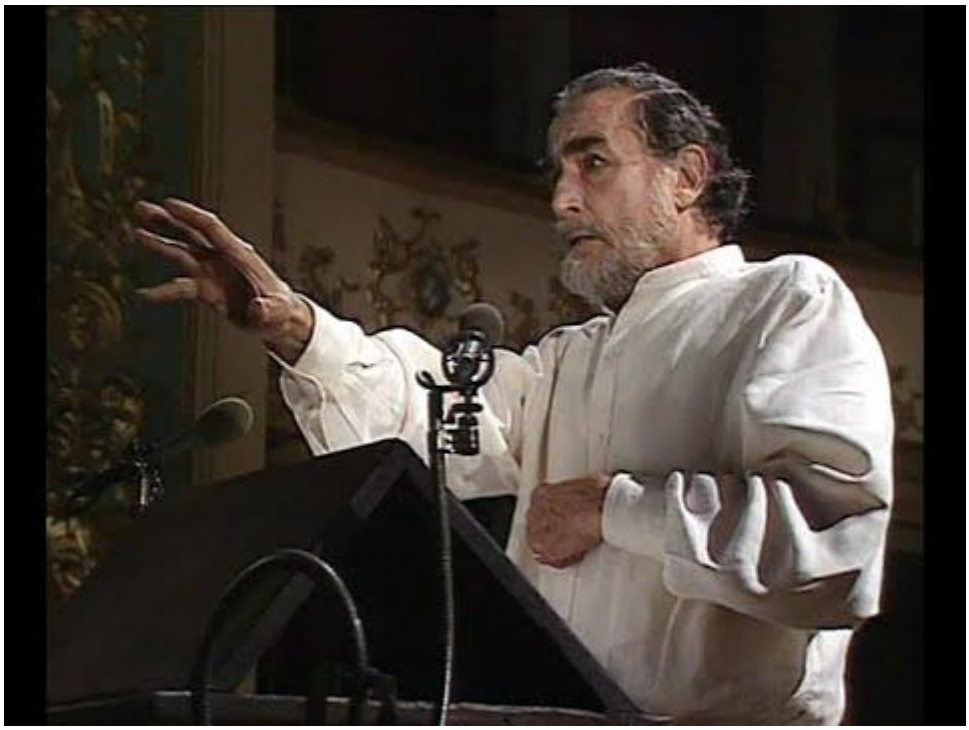


Figure 4, Vittorio Gassman reads Dante.

Figure 5, Vittorio Gassman reads Dante.

Figure 6, Carmelo Bene sings Dante.

Figure 7, Carmelo Bene sings Dante.

Figure 8, Torre degli Asinelli in Bologna.

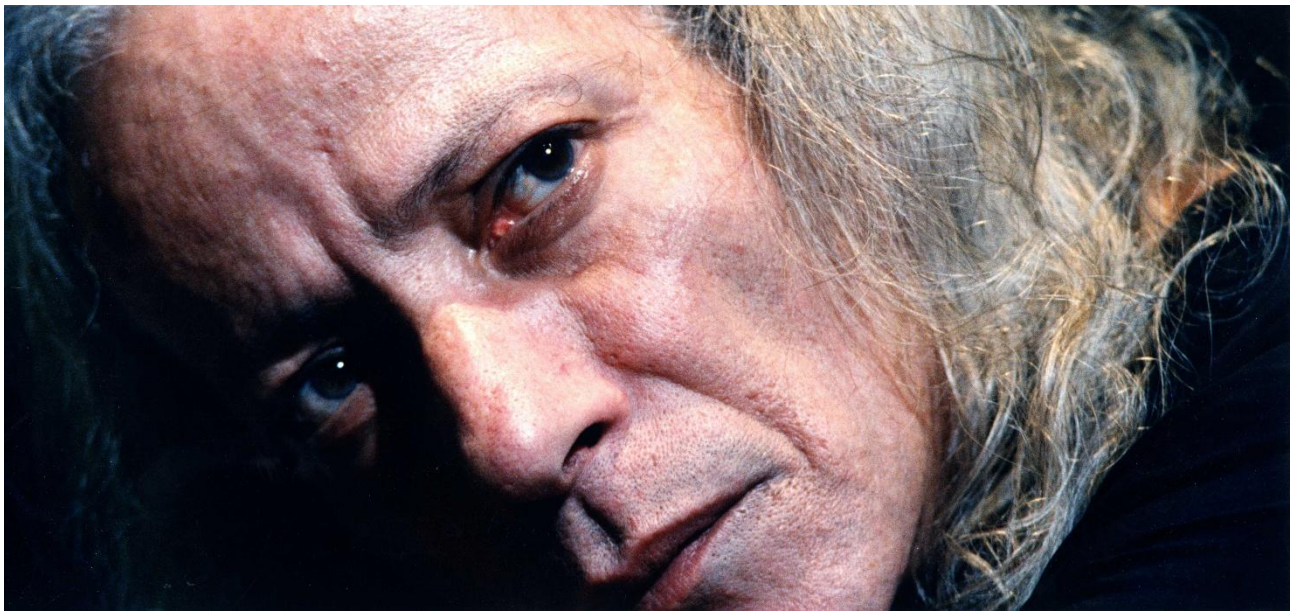


Figure 9, Leo De Berardinis.

Figure 10, Leo De Berardinis and Perla Peragallo on stage.

Figure 11, Roberto Benigni in Tutto Dante.

Figure 12, Roberto Benigni in Tutto Dante in Piazza Santa Croce in Florence.

Figure 13, Piazza Santa Croce, with the Statue of Dante Alighieri on the left, during Tutto Dante.

Figure 14, Roberto Benigni during the Lectura Dantis of 2021.

3.2. The *Lecturae Dantis* of the New Millennium

Figure 15, Marion D'Amburgo.

Figure 16, Mariangela Gualtieri on stage.

Figure 17, Mariangela Gualtieri on stage.

Figure 18, Chiara Guidi and Francesco Guerri. Photo credits Nicolò Cecchella.

Figure 19, Chiara and Francesco Guerri. Photo credits Nicolò Cecchella.

Figure 20, Guidi and Guerri after the first show in Verona, 21/10/2021. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

Figure 21, Guidi and Guerri after the first show in Verona, 21/10/2021. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

Figure 22, Guidi, Guerri and the poetic chorus of students of UniVR after the second show in Verona, 22/10/2021. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

Figure 23, Guidi, Guerri and the poetic chorus of students of UniVR after the second show in Verona, 22/10/2021. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

Figure 24, Guidi and Guerri during the workshop with students of UniVR at Teatro Camploy (VR). Photo credits Sara Fontana.

Figure 25, Another frame of Guidi and Guerri during the workshop with students of UniVR at Teatro Camploy (VR). Photo credits Sara Fontana.

Figure 26, Ermanna Montanari.

Figure 27, Ermanna Montanari during Verso Paradiso in 2021. Photo credits Zani-Casadio.

Figure 28, Ermanna Montanari and Marco Martinelli during Verso Paradiso in 2021. Photo credits Zani-Casadio.

Figure 29, The closing applause of Verso Paradiso with Martinelli and the cast at dawn in 2021. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

Figure 30, Duomo of Lecce, where Montanari read Dante in July 2022.

Figure 31, Ermanna Montanari and Enrico Pitozzi at Malagola.

Figure 32, Lucilla Giagnoni.

Figure 33, Lucilla Giagnoni in Vergine Madre.

Figure 34, Lucilla Giagnoni at Teatro Comunale of Schio (VI), December 2023. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

FOURTH CHAPTER

Canticles as theatrical performances

Figure 35, Orazio Costa.

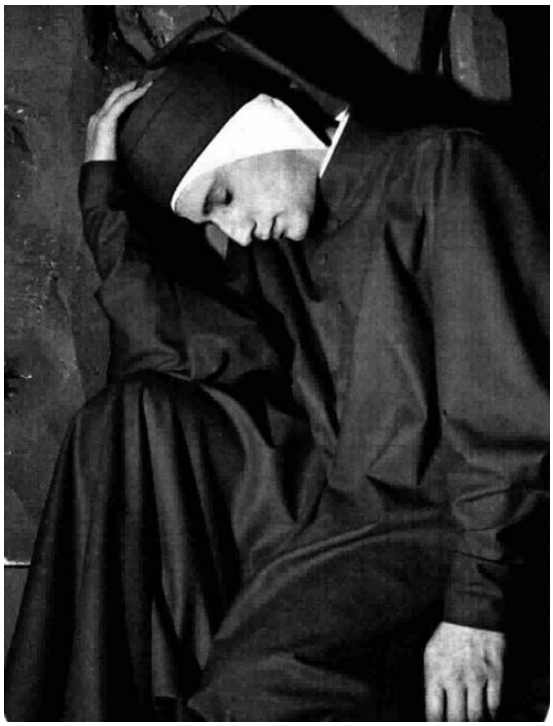
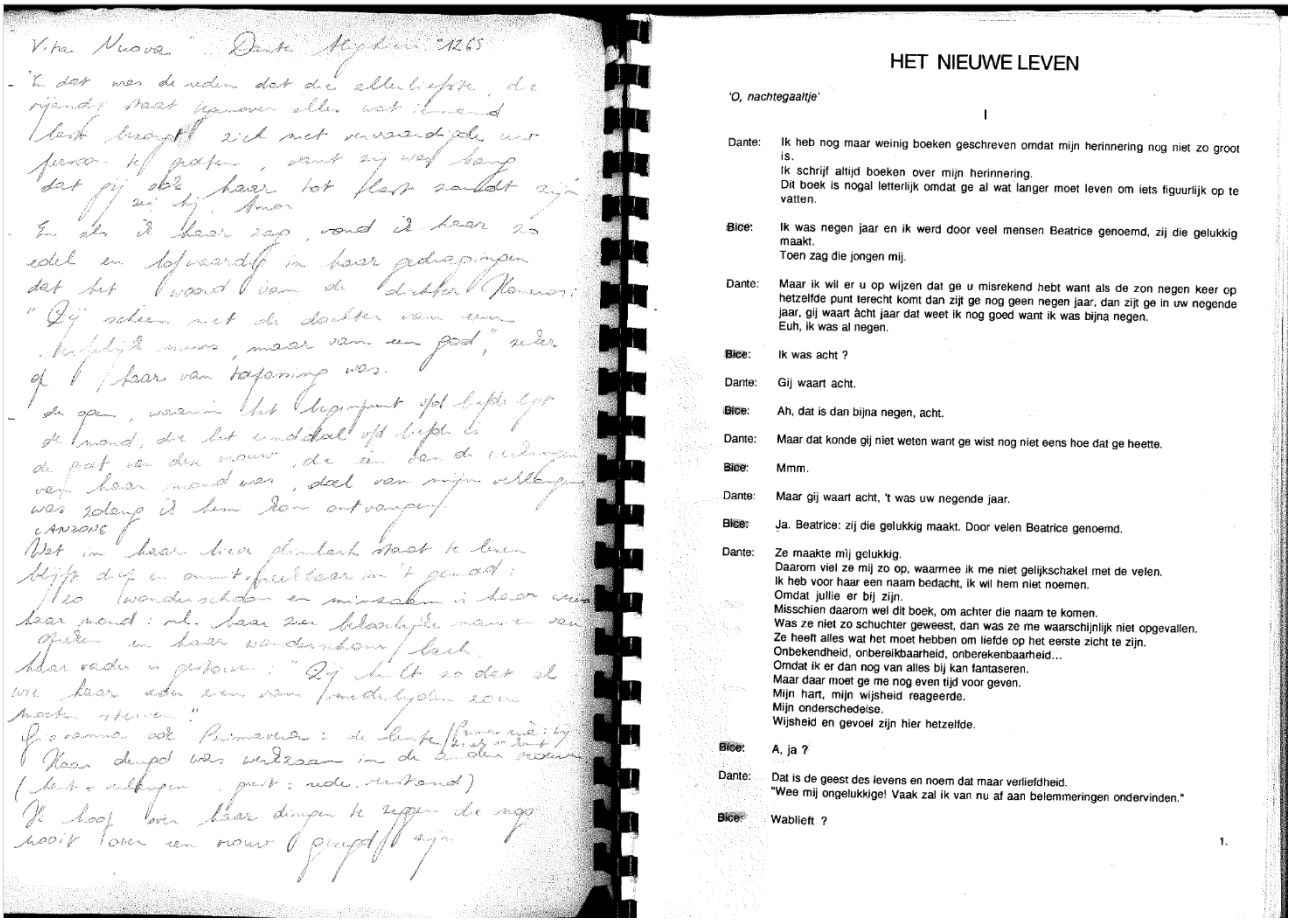


Figure 36, A young Roberto Herlitzka in the role of Dante Alighieri directed by Orazio Costa.

4.1. *Vita Nova, Het Nieuwe Leven, naar Dante Alighieri*: the case study of Gent

Figure 37, The winning painting at KASK contest. Photo credits Paul De Loore.

Figure 38, Poster of the show Het Nieuwe Leven, 1994.



Vita Nuova Dante Alighieri 1265

HET NIEUWE LEVEN

'O, nachtegaaltje'

I

Dante: Ik heb nog maar weinig boeken geschreven omdat mijn herinnering nog niet zo groot is.
Ik schrijf altijd boeken over mijn herinnering.
Dit boek is nogal letterlijk omdat ge al wat langer moet leven om iets figuurlijk op te vatten.

Bice: Ik was negen jaar en ik werd door veel mensen Beatrice genoemd, zij die gelukkig maakt.
Toen zag die jongen mij.

Dante: Maar ik wil er u op wijzen dat ge u misrekend hebt want als de zon negen keer op hetzelfde punt terecht komt dan zijt ge nog geen negen jaar, dan zijt ge in uw negende jaar, gij waart ácht jaar dat weet ik nog goed want ik was bijna negen.
Euh, ik was al negen.

Bice: Ik was acht ?

Dante: Gij waart acht.

Bice: Ah, dat is dan bijna negen, acht.

Dante: Maar dat konde gij niet weten want ge wist nog niet eens hoe dat ge heette.

Bice: Mmm.

Dante: Maar gij waart acht, 't was uw negende jaar.

Bice: Ja. Beatrice: zij die gelukkig maakt. Door velen Beatrice genoemd.

Dante: Ze maakte mij gelukkig.
Daarom viel ze mij zo op, waarmee ik me niet gelijkschakel met de velen.
Ik heb voor haar een naam bedacht, ik wil hem niet noemen.
Omdat jullie er bij zijn.
Misschien daarom wel dit boek, om achter die naam te komen.
Was ze niet zo schuchter geweest, dan was ze me waarschijnlijk niet opgevallen.
Ze heeft alles wat het moet hebben om liefde op het eerste zicht te zijn.
Onbekendheid, onbereikbaarheid, onberekenbaarheid...
Omdat ik er dan nog van alles bij kan fantaseren.
Maar daar moet ge me nog even tijd voor geven.
Mijn hart, mijn wijsheid reageerde.
Mijn onderschedeise.
Wijsheid en gevoel zijn hier hetzelfde.

Bice: A, ja ?

Dante: Dat is de geest des levens en noem dat maar verliefdheid.
"Wee mij ongelukkige! Vaak zal ik van nu af aan belemmeringen ondervinden."

Bice: Wablieft ?

1.

Figure 39, Front page of the script by actress Twiggy Bossuyt.

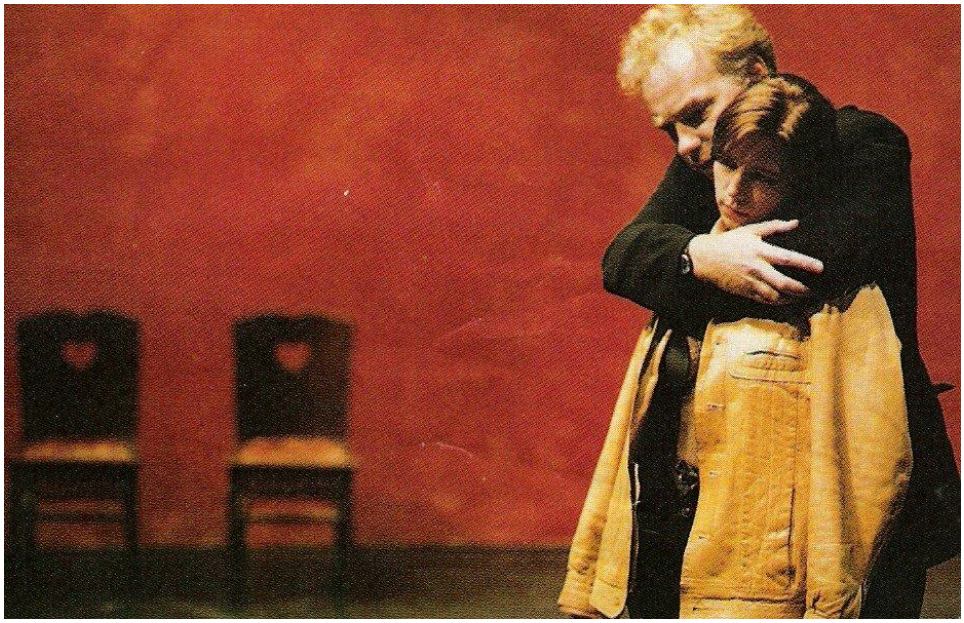


Figure 40, Dante and Beatrice in a scene of the show Het Nieuwe Leven.

4.2. The first Dante trilogy: the *Commedia* of the Lombardi-Tiezzi Company

MITTELFEST

I MAGAZZINI

Dante - " Divina Commedia "

laboratorio per un teatro di poesia diretto da Federico Tiezzi

Commedia dell'Inferno - Un travestimento dantesco

Il Purgatorio - La notte lava la mente

Il Paradiso - Perchè mi vinse il lume d'esta stella

interpreti: Sandro Lombardi, Marion D'Amburgo, Alessandra Antinori, Alessandra Celi, Pietro Conversano, Giovanni Fochi, Laura Martelli, Adonella Monaco, Enrico Pallini, Graziano Piazza, Ivan Polidoro, Marcello Prayer, Paolo Ricchi, Nadia Ristori, Emanuela Villagrossi, Paolo Zuccari; con la partecipazione di Aurelio Pierucci e del soprano Francesca Della Monica.

regia: Federico Tiezzi

Una produzione i Magazzini/ Consorzio per il Teatro Metastasio di Prato, con la collaborazione della Regione Toscana e il patrocinio del Ministero del Turismo e dello Spettacolo.

Si ringrazia per la partecipazione a " Il Purgatorio " il Coro "Gottardo Tomat" di Spilimbergo diretto da Giorgio Kirschner.

Alcune informazioni al pubblico sullo svolgimento della nottata.

Ore 20.30	La Commedia dell'inferno (durata 135' ca.) Campo sportivo del Convitto Paolo Diacono
Ore 23-23.45	Primo intervallo
Servizi ristoro	Sul sagrato della Chiesa di San Martino è allestito un buffet per il pubblico predisposto dal ristorante Zorutti (piatto unico con vino o bibita L. 10.000). Il bar Il Campanile serve panino e bibita all'esterno L.5.000. Sono inoltre in servizio per lo spettacolo i seguenti esercizi: Kimbo Kiko, Zorutti, Bar Centrale.
Servizio coperte	All'ingresso del Centro Civico, saranno disponibili coperte per i più freddolosi;

Figure 41, First part of the programme of the show Divina Commedia at Mittelfest 1991.

Ore 23.45 ca.	Il Purgatorio (durata 125' ca.) Lo spettacolo è itinerante
1^ parte (50' ca.)	Riva della Bruscandola - Greto del Natisone Il pubblico può seguire lo spettacolo dai seguenti luoghi: - Belvedere (riva sinistra del Natisone) - discesa della Riva della Bruscandola
2^ parte (15' ca.)	Cortile delle Orsoline
3^ parte (25' ca.)	Pozzo di Callisto
4^ parte (20' ca.)	Porta Patriarcale
5^ parte (15' ca.)	Chiesa di San Biagio
Percorso	Il percorso si articola lungo via Monastero Maggiore ed è segnato da un'apposita illuminazione.
Posti a sedere	Alcune sedie sono predisposte unicamente presso la Porta Patriarcale e la Chiesa di San Biagio.
Ore 2.10-3.00 circa	Secondo intervallo
Servizi ristoro	Sono aperti gli esercizi sopra indicati, il Caffe San Marco e altri nel centro di Cividale.
Ore 3.00 ca.	Il Paradiso (durata 130' ca.) Duomo
Servizi ristoro	Al termine gli esercizi sopra indicati e il Caffe ristoro Longobardo sono aperti per la prima colazione.

Si raccomanda al pubblico di conservare il biglietto
sino al termine dello spettacolo

Figure 42, Second part of the programme of the show Divina Commedia at Mittelfest 1991.

Figure 43, Scene from Inferno. Photo credits Marcello Norberth.

Figure 44, Scene from Inferno. Photo credits Marcello Norberth.

Figure 45, Scene from Inferno. Photo credits Marcello Norberth.

Purgatorio. La notte lava la mente: Drammaturgia di un'ascensione **(1990)**

Figure 46, Scene from Purgatorio. Photo credits Marcello Norberth.

Figure 47, Scene from Purgatorio. Photo credits Marcello Norberth.

Figure 48, Scene from Purgatorio. Photo credits Marcello Norberth.

Il Paradiso: Perché mi vinse il lume d'esta stella (1991)

Figure 49, Scene from Paradiso. Photo credits Marcello Norberth.

Figure 50, Scene from Paradiso. Photo credits Marcello Norberth.

Figure 51, Scene from Paradiso. Photo credits Marcello Norberth.

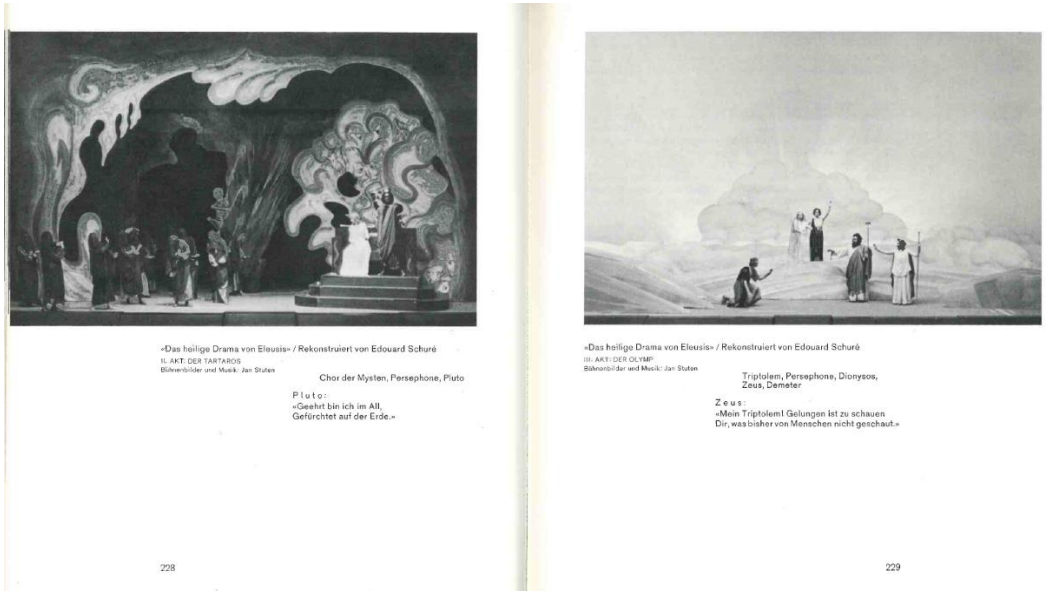


Figure 52, Exaples of scenographies taken from shows directed by Rudolf Steiner.

«Der Hüter der Schwelle» / Mysteriendrama von Rudolf Steiner
VI. BILD: GEISTERLAND
Dekorations-Entwurf: W. Scott-Pyle

Die andere Philia, Capesius, Lucifer,
Luna, Frau Balde, Astrid, Maria, Philia,
Ahriman, Benedictus

Schlußbild

Gegenüberliegende Seite: Aus dem Arbeitsbuch von Marie Steiner
zu: Rudolf Steiner «Die Prüfung der Seele», IV. Bild

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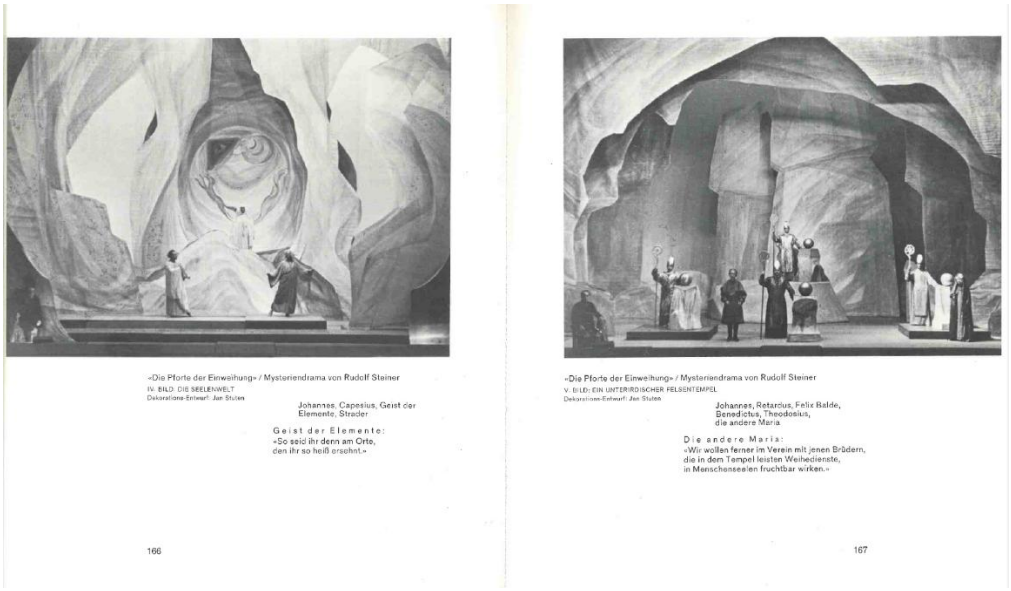
Figure 53, Exaples of scenographies taken from shows directed by Rudolf Steiner.



«Die Pforte der Einweihung» / Mysteriendrama von Rudolf Steiner
IV. BILD: DIE SEELENWELT
Dekorations-Entwurf: Jan Stuten

Johannes, Capesius, Geist der
Elemente, Strader

Geist der Elemente:
«So seid ihr denn am Orte,
den ihr so heiß ersehnt.»

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«Die Pforte der Einweihung» / Mysteriendrama von Rudolf Steiner
V. BILD: EIN UNTERIRDISCHER FELSENTEMPEL
Dekorations-Entwurf: Jan Stuten

Johannes, Retardus, Felix Balde,
Benedictus, Theodosius,
die andere Maria

Die andere Maria:
«Wir wollen ferner im Verein mit jenen Brüdern,
die in dem Tempel leisten Weihedienste,
in Menschenseelen fruchtbar wirken.»

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Figure 54, Exaples of scenographies taken from shows directed by Rudolf Steiner.

***Inferno Novecento. Dante e il grande giornalismo del Secolo Breve* (2016)**

Figure 55, Inferno Novecento with Sandro Lombardi and David Riondino.

Figure 56, Sandro Lombardi in Inferno Novecento.

Purgatorio (2021 edition)

Figure 57, Purgatorio 2021 at Pompeii Theatrum Mundi. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

Figure 58, Purgatorio 2021 right before the start of the show in Pompei. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

Figure 59, Antipurgatorio scene in Purgatorio 2021. Photo credits Luca Manfrini.

Figure 60, Dante, Poema and Virgilio in Purgatorio 2021. Photo credits Luca Manfrini.

Figure 61, Curtain call of Purgatorio 2021 in Pompei. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

Poetical workshop on the *Divine Comedy* by and with Sandro Lombardi at the University of Turin (2024)

Figure 62, Sandro Lombardi during the poetical workshop at the University of Turin, September 2024. Photo credits Bruna Lorenzin.

Figure 63, Sandro Lombardi during the poetical workshop at the University of Turin, September 2024. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

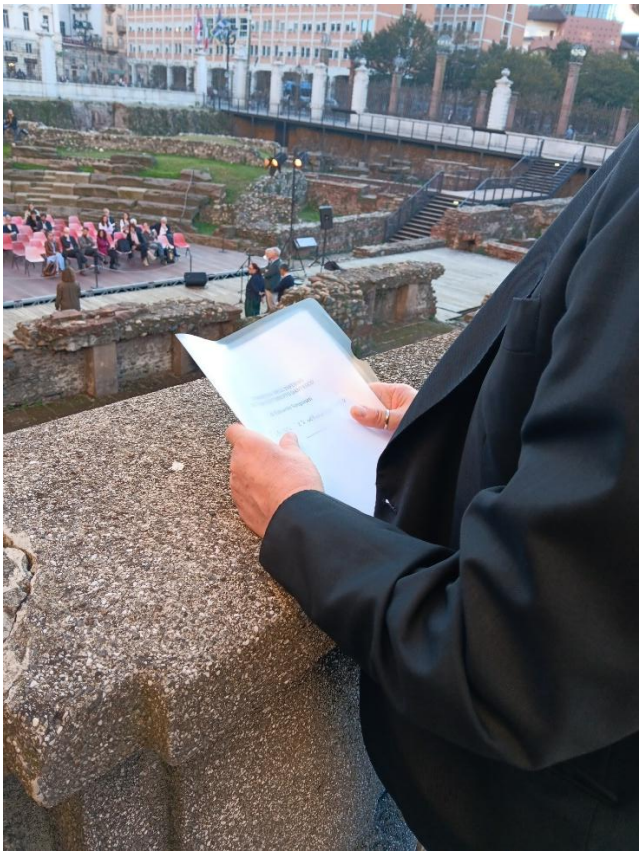

Figure 64, Sandro Lombardi before his Dantesque recital at the Teatro Romano in Turin, September 2024. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

Figure 65, Sandro Lombardi on stage at the Teatro Romano of Turin, September 2024. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

4.3. The Trilogy of the Socìetas Raffaello Sanzio: the Cruelty of the Scene

Inferno (2008)

Figure 66, Romeo Castellucci attacked by the dogs in Inferno. Photo credits Christophe Raynaud de Lage.

Figure 67, Castellucci after the attack. Behind the climber. Photo credits Christophe Raynaud de Lage.

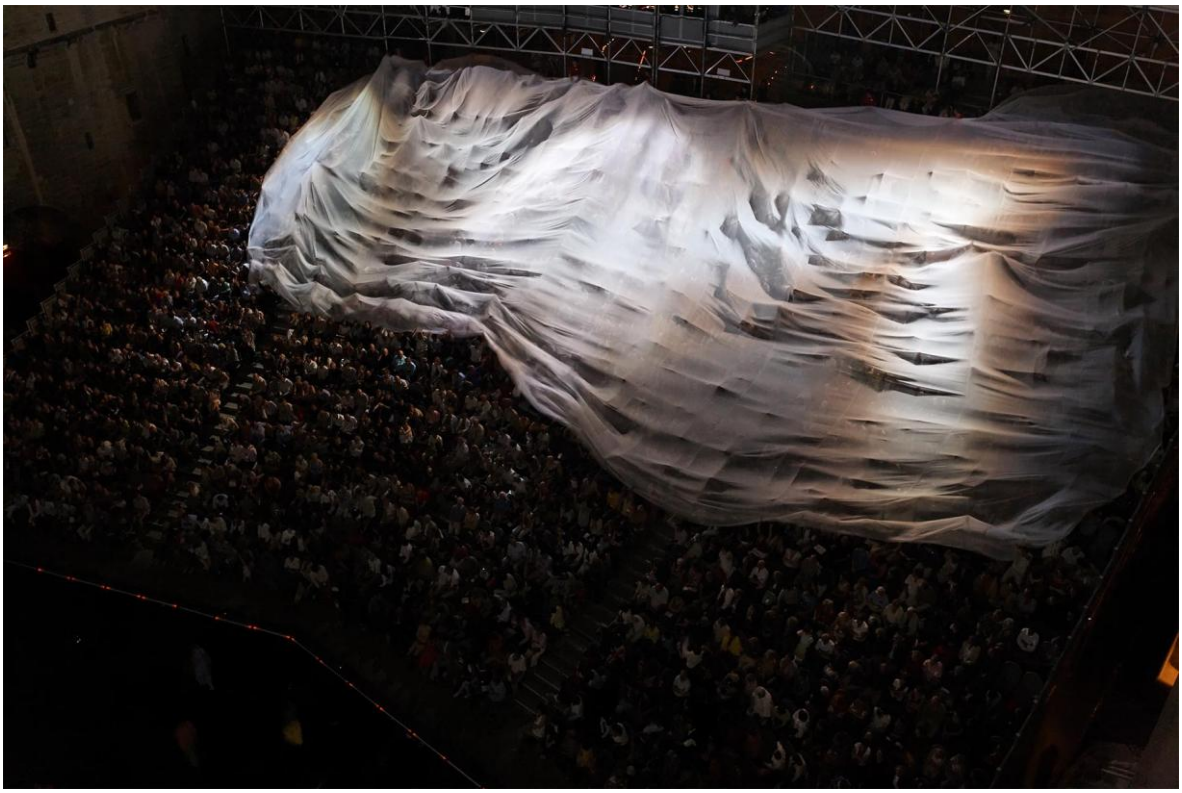

Figure 68, The white robe scene during Inferno. Photo credits Christophe Raynaud de Lage.

Figure 69, The actors and volunteers of Inferno during a scene. Photo credits Christophe Raynaud de Lage.

Figure 70, The killing gesture in Inferno. Photo credits Christophe Raynaud de Lage.

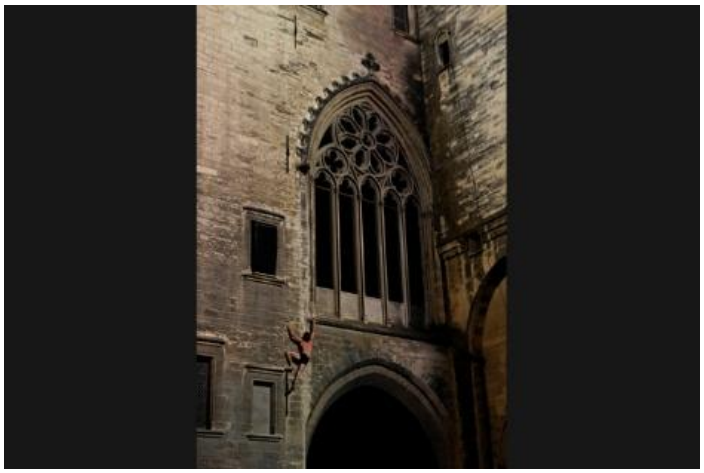

Figure 71, The climber on the walls of Avignon's square. Photo credits Christophe Raynaud de Lage.

Figure 72, Andy Warhol in Inferno. Photo credits Christophe Raynaud de Lage.

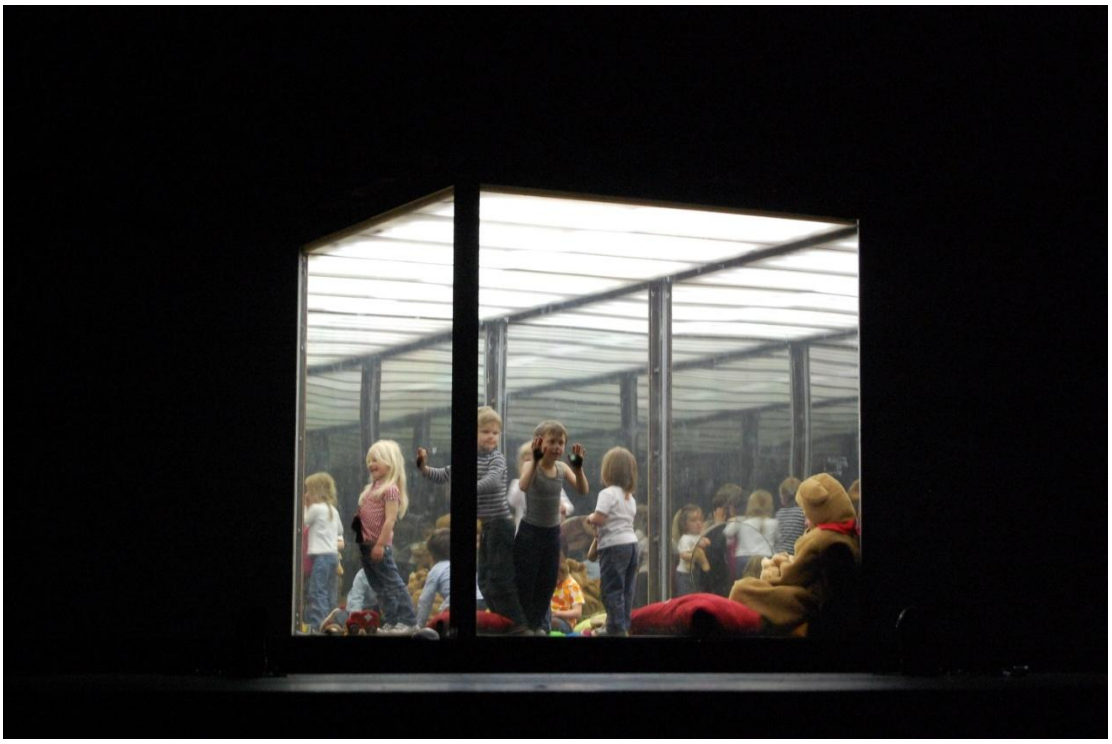

Figure 73, The children of Limbo in Inferno. Photo credits Christophe Raynaud de Lage.

Purgatorio **(2008)**

Figure 74, A floral projection during Purgatorio. Photo credits Christophe Raynaud de Lage.

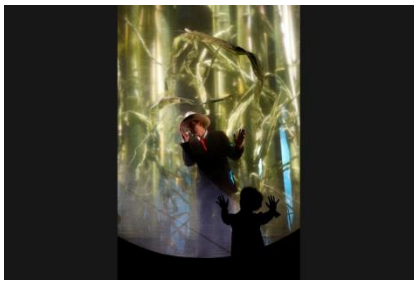

Figure 75, A floral projection with the Father and the Son. Photo credits Christophe Raynaud de Lage.

Figure 76, Father and Son in a scene of Purgatorio. Photo credits Christophe Raynaud de Lage.

Paradiso **(2008)**

Figure 77, The installation of Paradiso. Photo credits Christophe Raynaud de Lage.

Figure 78, Interior view of the église des Célestins in Avignon.

Figure 79, Exterior view of the église des Célestins in Avignon.

Figure 80, The piano on fire in Inferno. Photo credits Christophe Raynaud de Lage.

Figure 81, The piano in Purgatorio.

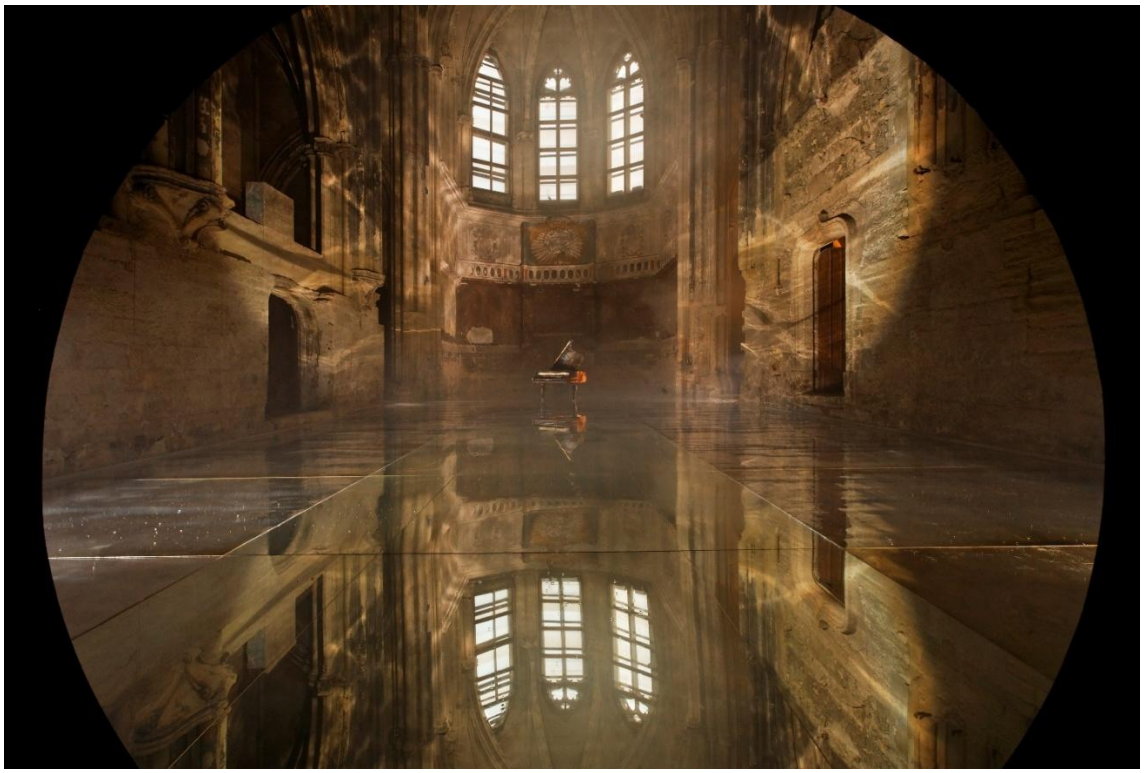

Figure 82, The piano in Paradiso. Photo credits Christophe Raynaud de Lage.

4.4. Babilonia Teatri: Theater and inclusion for a participatory life experience

Figure 83, Enrico Castellani and Valeria Raimondi, founders of Babilonia Teatri. Photo credits Marco Caselli Nirmal.

Inferno (2014)

Figure 84, Scene from Inferno. Photo credits Eleonora Cavallo.

Figure 85, Scene from Inferno. Photo credits Eleonora Cavallo.

Figure 86, Scene from Inferno. Photo credits Eleonora Cavallo.

Figure 87, Scene from Inferno. Photo credits Eleonora Cavallo.

Purgatorio (2016)

Figure 88, The press conference during the show Purgatorio. Photo credits Eleonora Cavallo.

Figure 89, The boxe session in Purgatorio. Photo credits Eleonora Cavallo.

Figure 90, Dante and Beatrice in Purgatorio. Photo credits Eleonora Cavallo.

Figure 91, Scene from Purgatorio. Photo credits Eleonora Cavallo.

***Paradiso* (2017)**

Figure 92, The three protagonists of Paradiso. Photo credits Sara Castiglioni.

Figure 93, Scene from Paradiso. Photo credits Luca d'Agostino.

Figure 94, Scene from Paradiso. Photo credits Luca d'Agostino.

4.5. Bringing the *Commedia* to Life: Teatro delle Albe

Arrevuoto (2006)

Figure 95, Arrevuoto 2006, Naples. Photo credits Stefano Cardone.

Figure 96, Arrevuoto 2006 Naples. Photo credits Stefano Cardone.

Eresia della Felicità **(2011)**

Figure 97, Eresia della felicità at Santarcangelo Festival 2011. Martinelli and the chorus. Photo credits Claire Pasquier.

Figure 98, Eresia della felicità at Santarcangelo Festival 2011. Martinelli and the chorus. Photo credits Claire Pasquier.

Figure 99, Eresia della felicità at Santarcangelo Festival 2011, Marco Martinelli. Photo credits Claire Pasquier.

Figure 100, Eresia della felicità at Santarcangelo Festival 2011, the chorus. Photo credits Claire Pasquier.

Chiamata Pubblica **for the** ***Divine Comedy*** **(2017)**

Figure 101, Ermanna Montanari, Marco Martinelli and the volunteer citizens of Ravenna during the Chiamata Pubblica for Inferno 2017. Photo credits Alessandra Dragoni.

Figure 102, Ermanna Montanari, Marco Martinelli and the volunteer citizens of Ravenna during the Chiamata Pubblica for Inferno 2017. Photo credits Alessandra Dragoni.

Figure 103, Ermanna Montanari, Marco Martinelli and the volunteer citizens of Ravenna during the Chiamata Pubblica for Inferno 2017. Photo credits Alessandra Dragoni.

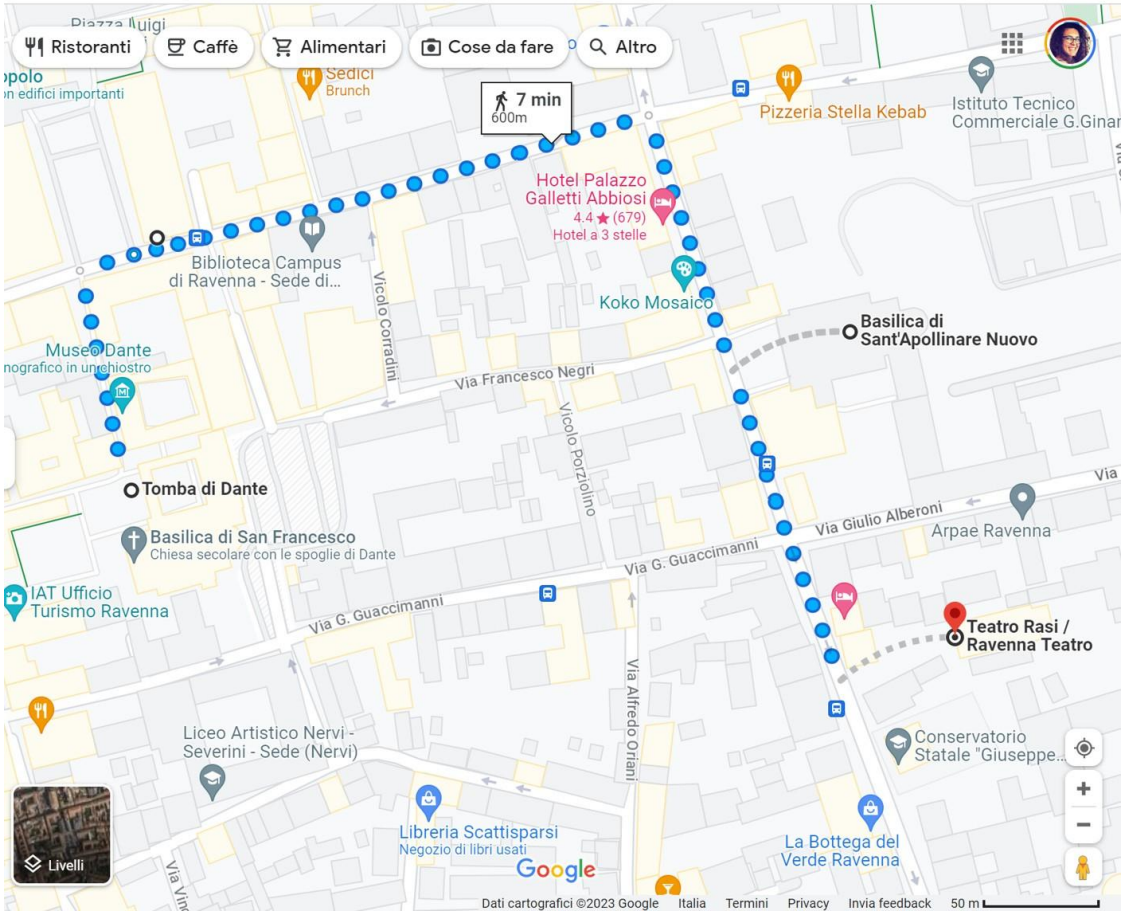

Figure 104, The itinerary of Inferno from Dante's Tomb to the Teatro Rasi in Ravenna.

Figure 105, PER ME SI VA. The Gate of Inferno, Teatro Rasi. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

Figure 106, Caronte and the soldiers of Antinferno. Photo credits Silvia Lelli.

Figure 107, The platea of Teatro Rasi redesigned for Inferno. Photo credits Nicola Baldazzi.

Figure 108, Scene from Inferno with Ermanna Montanari. Photo credits Silvia Lelli.

Figure 109, Rehearsal scene of Paolo and Francesca, in couples, with Martinelli and Montanari. Photo credits Eleonora Dottorini.

Figure 110, A scene from Malebolge, Inferno. Photo credits Cesare Fabbri.

Figure 111, A riveder le stelle: out of Inferno. Photo credits Mauro Bosi.

The Sky over Kibera (2018)

Figure 112, Non scuola in Kibera with Marco Martinelli.

Figure 113, Scene from The Sky over Kibera.

Figure 114, Marco Martinelli in The Sky over Kibera. Photo credits Andrea Signori.

***Fedeli d'Amore. Polittico in sette quadri per Dante Alighieri* (2018)**

Figure 115, Fedeli d'Amore. Photo credits Enrico Fedrigoli.

Figure 116, Ermanna Montanari in Fedeli d'Amore. Photo credits Enrico Fedrigoli.

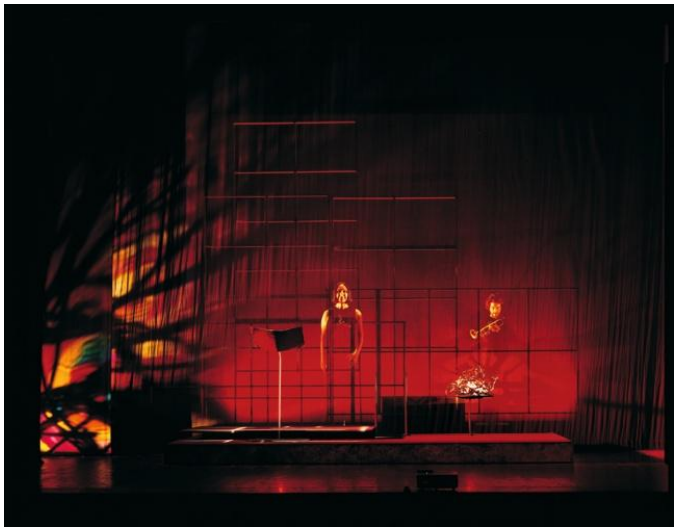

Figure 117, The scenography in Fedeli d'Amore. Photo credits Enrico Fedrigoli.

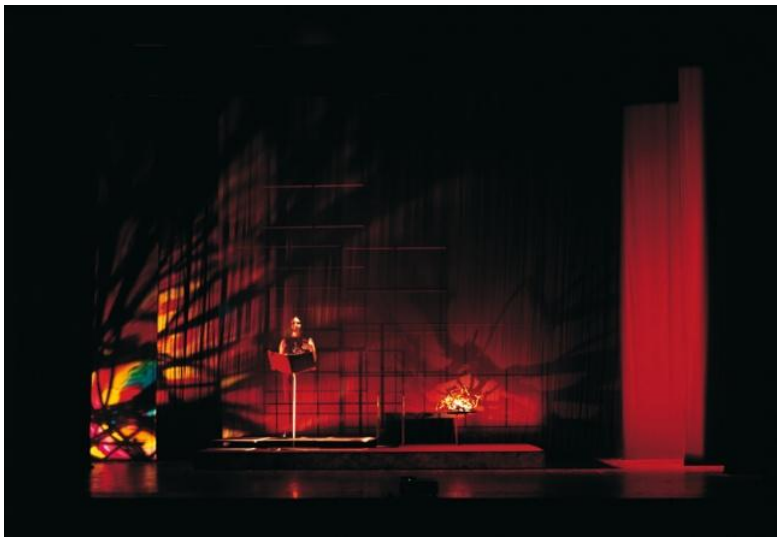

Figure 118, The shadows in Fedeli d'Amore. Photo credits Enrico Fedrigoli.

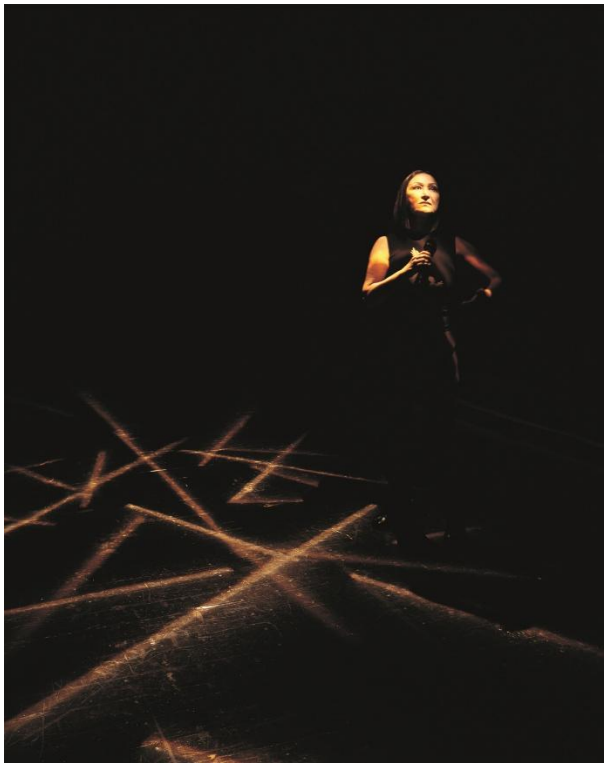

Figure 119, Shadows and lights in Fedeli d'Amore. Photo credits Enrico Fedrigoli.

Figure 120, Projections in Fedeli d'Amore. Photo credits Enrico Fedrigoli.

Figure 121, Stage and projections in Fedeli d'Amore. Photo credits Enrico Fedrigoli.

Figure 122, Ermanna Montanari and the scenography of Fedeli d'Amore. Photo credits Enrico Fedrigoli.

Figure 123, Ermanna Montanari and the projections of Fedeli d'Amore. Photo credits Enrico Fedrigoli.

Purgatorio (2019)

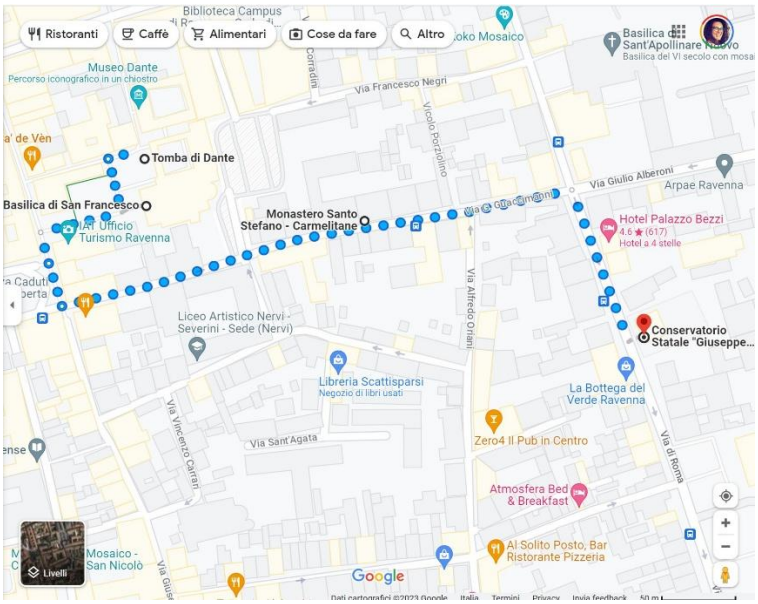

Figure 124, Journey of Purgatorio from Dante's Tomb to the Istituto Musicale Giuseppe Verdi in Ravenna.

Figure 125, Montanari, Martinelli and Marzocchi opening the procession of Purgatorio. Photo credits Silvia Lelli.

Figure 126, Gianni Plazzi as Catone l'Uticense. Photo credits Silvia Lelli.

Figure 127, The display of the purified reeds of Purgatory in front of Dante's tomb. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

Figure 128, The schoolchildren in Purgatorio. Photo credits Marco Caselli Nirmal.

Figure 129, Ermanna Montanari receiving the P for entering the Purgatorio. Photo credits Silvia Lelli.

Figure 130, The chorus of Pia de' Tolomei. Photo credits Marco Caselli Nirmal.

Figure 131, Joseph Beuys/Oderisi da Gubbio. Photo credits Marco Caselli Nirmal.

Figure 132, Totò during the class of the chorus of Beuys/Oderisi between the public seated. Photo credits Marco Caselli Nirmal.

Figure 133, The importance of the school theme in the scenography and costumes of Purgatorio. Photo credits Silvia Lelli.

Figure 134, Poetic chorus of Vermi e Farfalle. Photo credits Silvia Lelli.

Figure 135, Vermi e Farfalle. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

Figure 136, Marco Lombardo and the vertical use of buildings for Purgatorio. Photo credits Silvia Lelli.

Figure 137, The Garden of Eden. Photo credits Silvia Lelli.

Figure 138, Puri e disposti. Photo credits Marco Caselli Nirmal.

Verso Paradiso **(2021)**

Figure 139, Montanari and Martinelli opening Verso Paradiso. On the left the ensemble of Luigi Ceccarelli and behind the Loggetta Lombardesca of Ravenna. Photo credits Zani Casadio.

Figure 140, Montanari and Martinelli during Verso Paradiso. Photo credits Zani Casadio.

Figure 141, The area between the Loggetta Lombardesca and the Public Gardens of Ravenna chosen by Albe for setting Paradiso. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

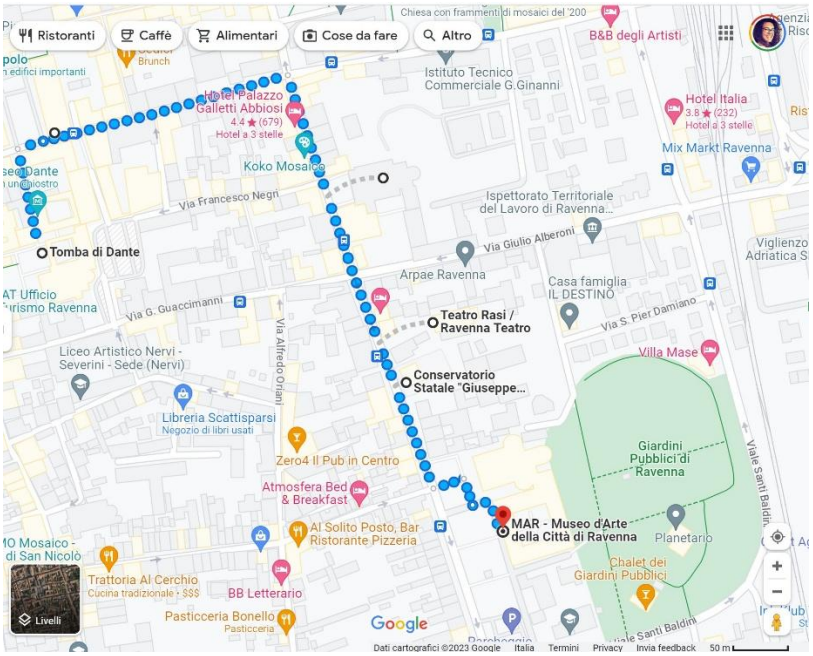

Figure 142, The journey of Paradiso through the streets of Ravenna to reach the Loggetta Lombardesca.

Figure 143, Montanari and Martinelli directing the chorus of citizens in Paradiso. Photo credits Silvia Lelli.

Figure 144, The Mobiles installation of Teatro delle Albe. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

Figure 145, The Mobiles installation of Teatro delle Albe. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

Figure 146, Montanari and Martinelli marking the audience before entering Paradiso. Photo credits Silvia Lelli.

Figure 147, The children of Paradiso. Photo credits Silvia Lelli.

Figure 148, The children of Paradiso. Photo credits Silvia Lelli.

Figure 149, Piccarda Donati, the souls of the sky of the Moon and singer Mirella Mastronardi. Photo credits Silvia Lelli.

Figure 150, The souls of the sky of the Moon. Photo credits Silvia Lelli.

Figure 151, Cunizza da Romano, the sky of Venus. Photo credits Silvia Lelli.

Figure 152, Luigi Dadina/Cacciaguida surrounded by soldiers. Photo credits Silvia Lelli.

Figure 153, The bread in Paradiso, the communis mensa. Photo credits Silvia Lelli.

Figure 154, The cloaks/skies of Borromini for listening to Par. XXXIII. Photo credits Silvia Lelli.

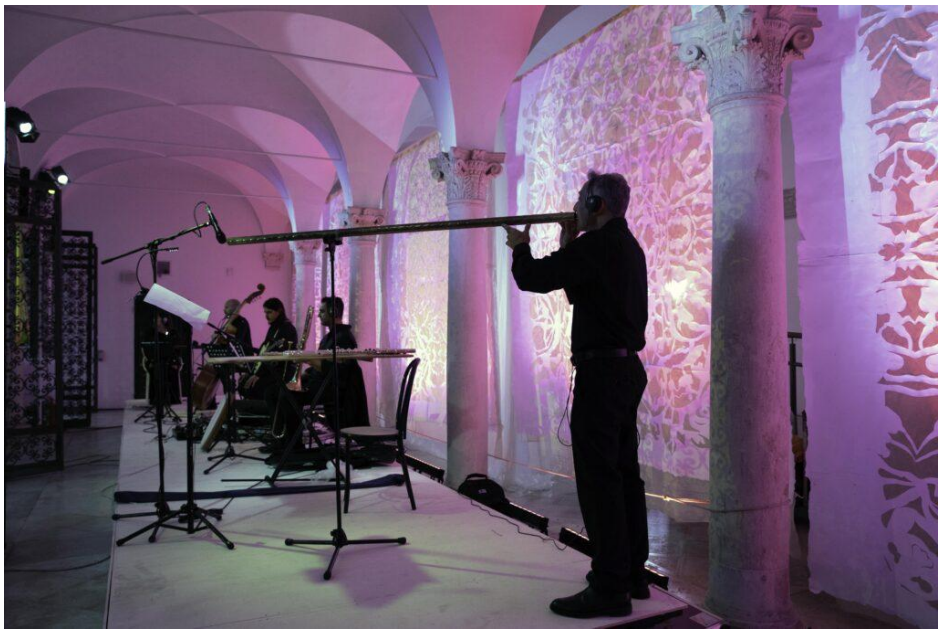

Figure 155, The music ensemble of Luigi Ceccarelli in the Loggetta. Photo credits Silvia Lelli.

Figure 156, The branch taken from Leo De Berardinis show. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

Figure 157, Piece of Paradise gifted to the audience at the end of the show. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

Figure 158, The women knitting during Paradiso. Photo credits Silvia Lelli.

Purgatorio dei poeti **workshop with Teatro delle Albe – UniTO (2025)**

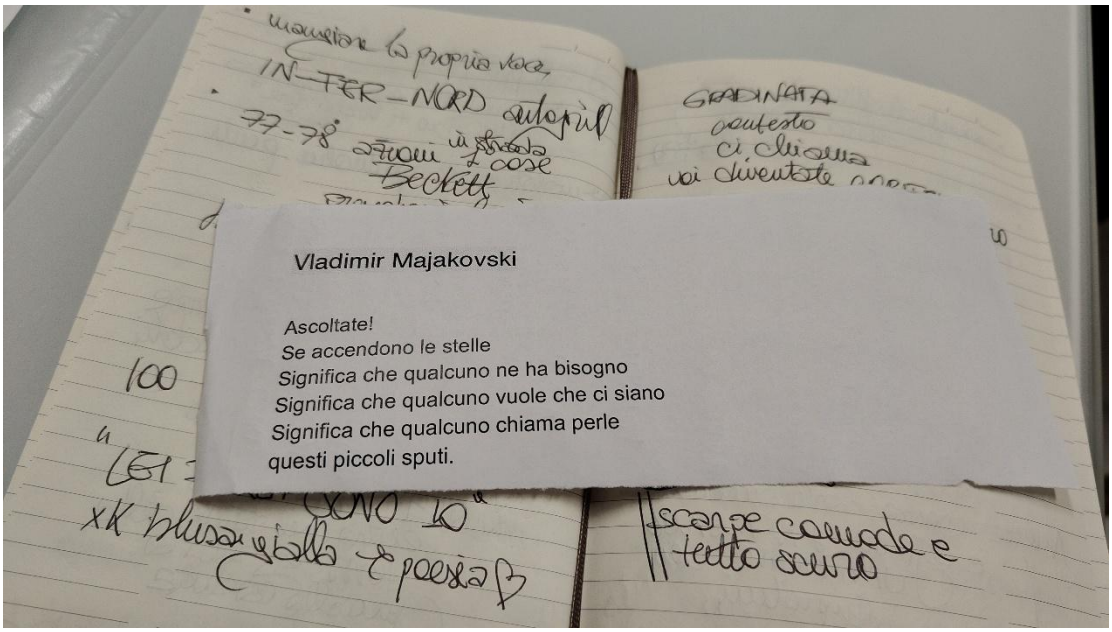

Figure 159, Poetical references for the Chorus of Purgatorio dei Poeti, workshop in Turin 2025. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

Figure 160, Marco Martinelli and the students of UniTO during Purgatorio dei Poeti, final rehearsals at Fonderie Limone, Torino, 2025. Photo credits Bruna Lorenzin.

4.6. Not only Trilogies: from music to augmented reality

4.6.1. Dante in music

4.6.1.1. Nicola Piovani

Figure 161, La Vita Nuova of Nicola Piovani. Photo credits Silvia Lelli.

Figure 162, Elio Germano in La Vita Nuova. Photo credits Silvia Lelli.

Figure 163, Rosa Feola in La Vita Nuova. Photo credits Silvia Lelli.

4.6.1.2. Simone Cristicchi

Figure 164, Simone Cristicchi in Dalle Tenebre alla luce.

Figure 165, Simone Cristicchi in Dalle Tenebre alla luce in Rome. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

4.6.1.3. Anagoor

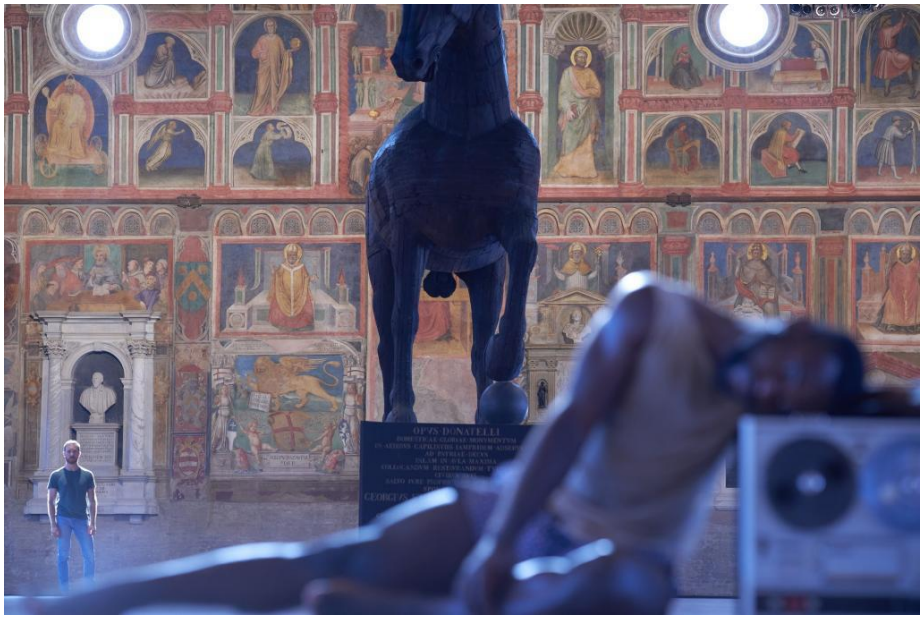

Figure 166, Paradiso of Anagoor in Padova, 2021. Photo credits Giulio Favotto.

Figure 167, The orchestra for Paradiso in Bassano, 2021. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

Figure 168, The plugged church of Bassano, 2021. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

Figure 169, the two performers of Paradiso, 2021. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

Figure 170, The stage and the recorders of Paradiso, 2021. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

Spreafico Eckly in *Bad Dante Bad English Bad Opera* (2023)

Figure 171, Bad Dante Bad English Bad Opera. Photo credits Arne Hauge.

Figure 172, Bad Dante Bad English Bad Opera. Photo credits Arne Hauge.

4.6.2. The Dante of the kids: Le Piccole Canaglie (Brussels)

Figure 173, The Angel-Greta Thunberg against Lucifer. Photo credits Roberta Cacciaglia.

Figure 174, The scene of Paolo and Francesca, with a chorus of Pia de' Tolomei behind. Photo credits Roberta Cacciaglia.

Figure 175, The artist Arlette Vermeiren who designed the scenography and some decor for the show. Photo credits Roberta Cacciaglia.

Figure 176, One of the masks created by the artist Vermeiren. Photo credits Roberta Cacciaglia.

Figure 177, One of the banners created for the Fridays for Future of the show by Piccole Canaglie. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

Figure 178, The eco-conscious decor in Commedia 3.0. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

4.6.3. Dante in natural and virtual space

4.6.3.1. In the caves

Figure 179, Hell in the cave. Photo credits Mariagrazia Proietto.

Figure 180, l'amor che move il sole, Hell in the cave. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

4.6.3.2. The city and the sound scape

Figure 181, A scene from Silent Dante around the statue of Dante in Piazza dei Signori, Verona.

4.6.3.3. Augmented reality

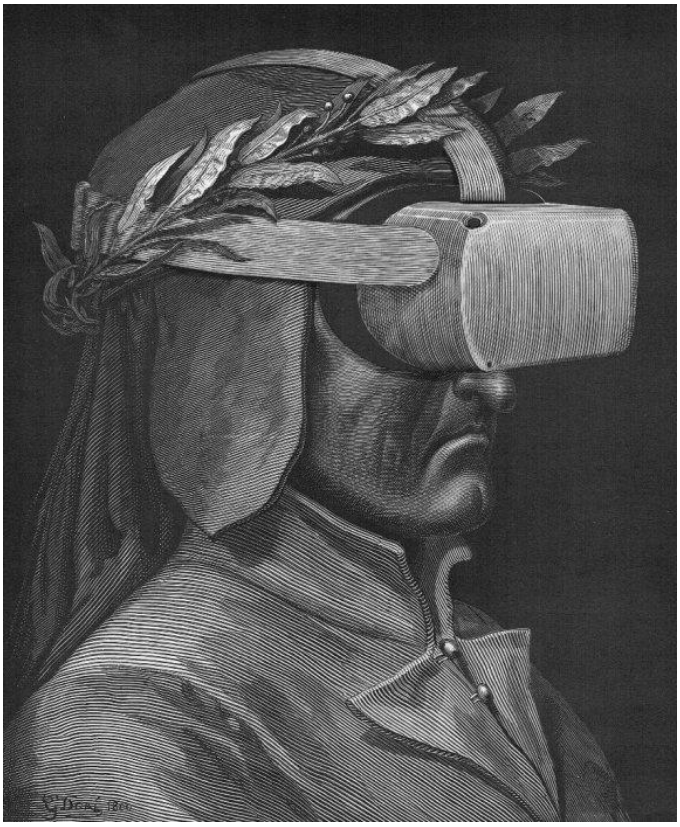

Figure 182, The illustration dedicated to the project Nel mezzo dell'Inferno with VR by Massimo Racozzi.

4.6.4. New Dantesque trilogies for the Teatri Stabili

4.6.4.1. Stabile del Veneto

Un Inferno

Figure 183, Scene from Un Inferno. Photo credits Serena Pea.

Figure 184, Scene from Un Inferno. Photo credits Serena Pea.

Figure 185, Giulio Ragno Favero (member of the band Il Teatro degli Orrori), during Un Inferno. Photo credits Serena Pea.

Un Purgatorio

Figure 186, Scene from Un Purgatorio. Photo credits Serena Pea.

Figure 187, The Alfa Romeo of Un Purgatorio at Teatro Maddalene of Padua. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

Un Paradiso

Figure 188, Scene from Un Paradiso. Photo credits Serena Pea.

Figure 189, Scene from Un Paradiso. Photo credits Serena Pea.

4.6.4.2. CSS Stabile di Innovazione di Udine (2021)

iNFERNO

Figure 190, Scene from iNFERNO. Photo credits Alisa Franzil.

Figure 191, Scene from iNFERNO. Photo credits Alisa Franzil.

Figure 192, Different mansiones in the space of pURGATORIO. Photo credits Alisa Franzil.

Figure 193, Objects and affective elements in the scenography of pURGATORIO. Photo credits Alisa Franzil.

Figure 194, The different and comprehesent mansiones of pURGATORIO. Photo credits Alisa Franzil.

Figure 195, The plexiglass panel for enabling contact during COVID time in pURGATORIO. Photo credits Alisa Franzil.

pARADISO

Figure 196, Scene from pARADISO. Photo credits Alisa Franzil.

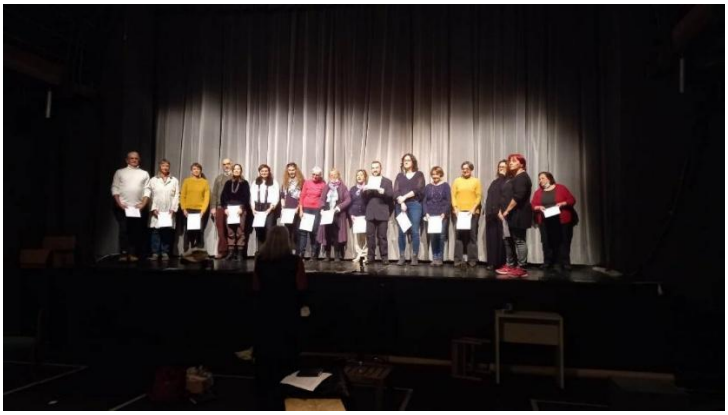

Figure 197, The director Rita Maffei and the participants of the Trittico Teatro Partecipato during rehearsals. Photo credits Alisa Franzil.

FIFTH CHAPTER

Dante and dance: contemporary choreographic examples between Italy and Europe

WARNINGS: SOME OF THE FOLLOWING CONTENTS CONTAIN NUDITY, EXPLICIT SCENES AND BODY FLUIDS.

5.1. International Dantesque reception in twentieth-century dance

5.1.1. Choreographic prodromes

5.1.2. The Tetralogy of the ICK Amsterdam

***Double Point: Hell* (2005)**

Figure 198, Double Point: Hell at Avignone Festival, 2005. Photo credits Christophe Raynaud de Lage.

Figure 199, The Grin of the Shadow, performed by Emio Greco in Double Point: Hell. Credits to the Archive of ICK Amsterdam.

Figure 200, Je suis sang, Jan Fabre at Avignone Festival, 2005. Photo credits Christophe Raynaud de Lage.

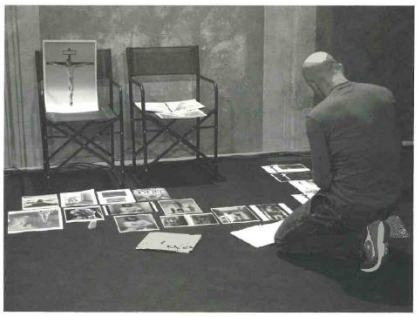

Figure 201, Greco and Scholten in residence at CANGO, Firenze, with Purgatorio, 13 may 2008. Photo credits Carlo Cuppini, Jacopo Jenna, Virgilio Sieni.

Figure 202, Greco working on Purgatorio at CANGO. Photo credits Carlo Cuppini, Jacopo Jenna, Virgilio Sieni.

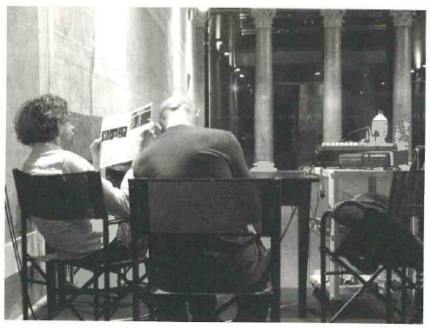

Figure 203, Greco and Scholten in residence at CANGO. Photo credits Carlo Cuppini, Jacopo Jenna, Virgilio Sieni.

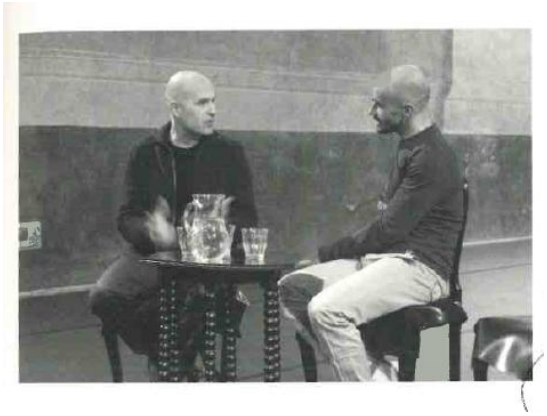

Figure 204, Virgilio Sieni and Emio Greco in dialogue at CANGO, 2008. Photo credits Carlo Cuppini, Jacopo Jenna, Virgilio Sieni.

Hell **(2008)**

Figure 205, Suzan Tunca in HELL during the MTV moment. Photo credits Christophe Raynaud de Lage.

Figure 206, The mirror lights Leitmotiv. Photo credits Christophe Raynaud de Lage.

Figure 207, Dancers with the Godot tree behind. Photo credits Christophe Raynaud de Lage.

[purgatorio] Popopera **(2008)**

Figure 208, The rock guitars in [purgatorio] Popopera. Photo credits Christophe Raynaud de Lage.

Figure 209, Scene from [purgatorio] Popopera. Photo credits Christophe Raynaud de Lage.

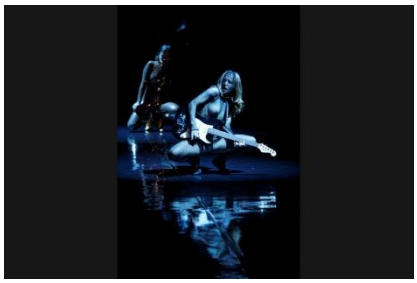

Figure 210, Guitar scene in [purgatorio] Popopera. Photo credits Christophe Raynaud de Lage.

You Paradiso **(2010)**

Figure 211, The luminous souls of you-paradiso. Photo credits ICK Archive.

Figure 212, Scene from you-paradiso. Photo credits ICK Archive.

Figure 213, The led-Leitmotiv in you-paradiso. Photo credits ICK Archive.

Figure 214, Anselm Kiefer, I Sette Palazzi Celesti at Pirelli Hangar Bicocca, MI. Photo credits Agostino Osio.

La Commedia **(2011)**

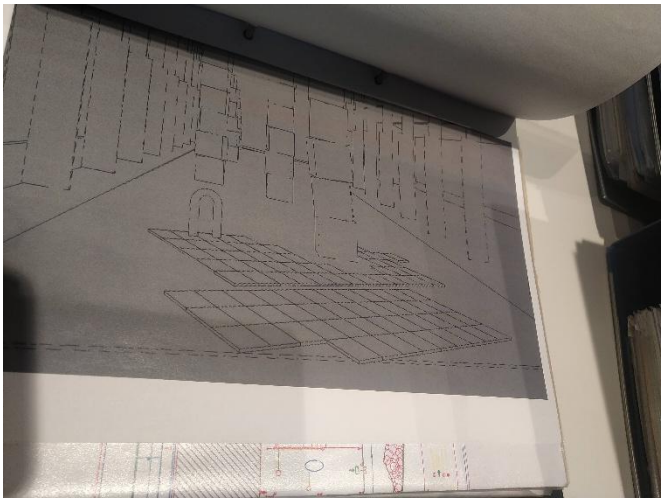

Figure 215, Some preliminary renderings for the set design of La Commedia in the Pirelli Hangar Bicocca space. ICK Archive.

Figure 216, La Commedia, 2011. Photo credits Viola Berlanda.

Figure 217, Clownerie in La Commedia. Photo credits Viola Berlanda.

Figure 218, The LED-Leitmotiv in La Commedia. Photo credits Viola Berlanda.

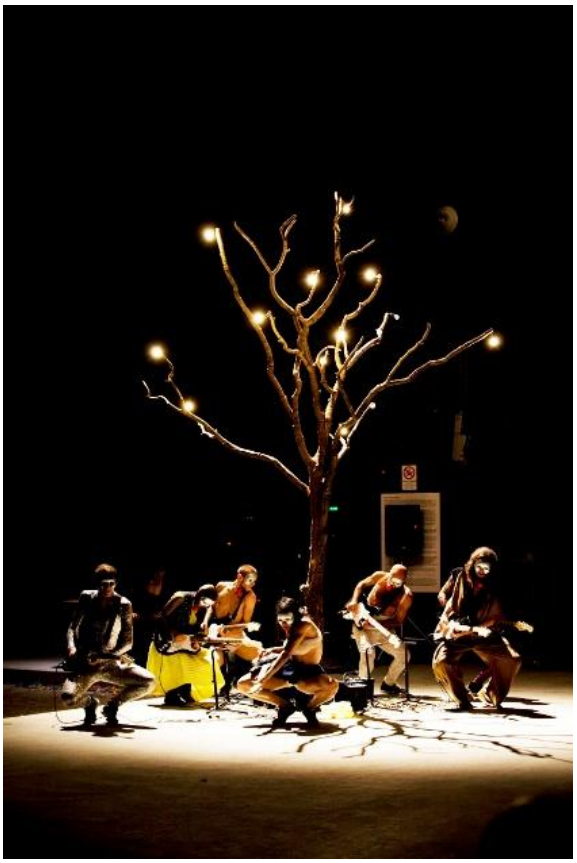

Figure 219, The Beckettian tree in La Commedia. Photo credits Viola Berlanda.

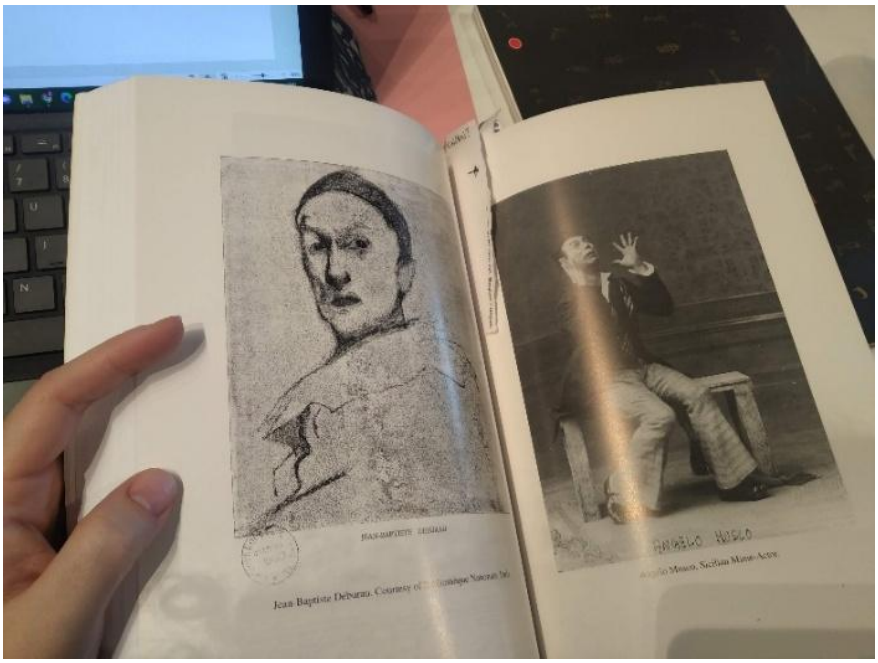

Figure 220, Post-it notes inserted in the text to refer to a specific quality of facial expressions or gestures for a particular performer in La Commedia. ICK Archive.

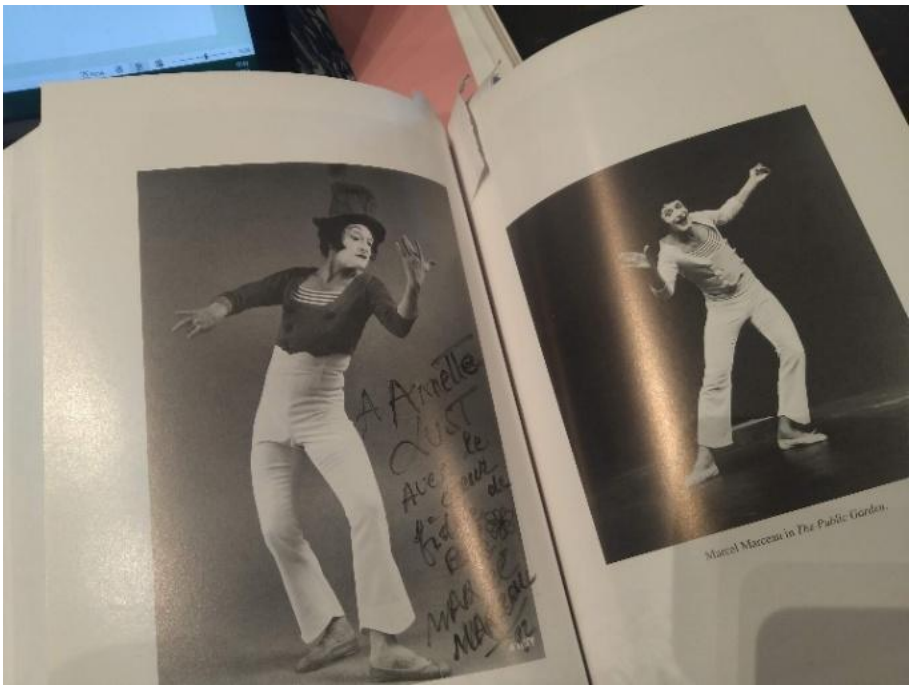

Figure 221, Post-it notes inserted in the text to refer to a specific quality of facial expressions or gestures for a particular performer in La Commedia. ICK Archive.

Figure 222, We want it all. Photo credits Alwin Poiana.

5.2. Dante and dance in Italy: preludes to the 2021 centenary and two case studies

Fura del Baus (2002)

Figure 223, Fura del Baus at Palazzo Pitti, Florence, 2002. Photo credits Fura del Baus.

Figure 224, Fura del Baus at Palazzo Pitti, Florence, 2002. Photo credits Fura del Baus.

No Gravity (2007-2021)

Figure 225, Tableau from Divina Commedia. Photo credits No Gravity.

Figure 226, The illusionistic technique of No Gravity. Photo credits No Gravity.

Figure 227, The illusionistic technique of No Gravity with the mirror behind. Photo credits No Gravity.

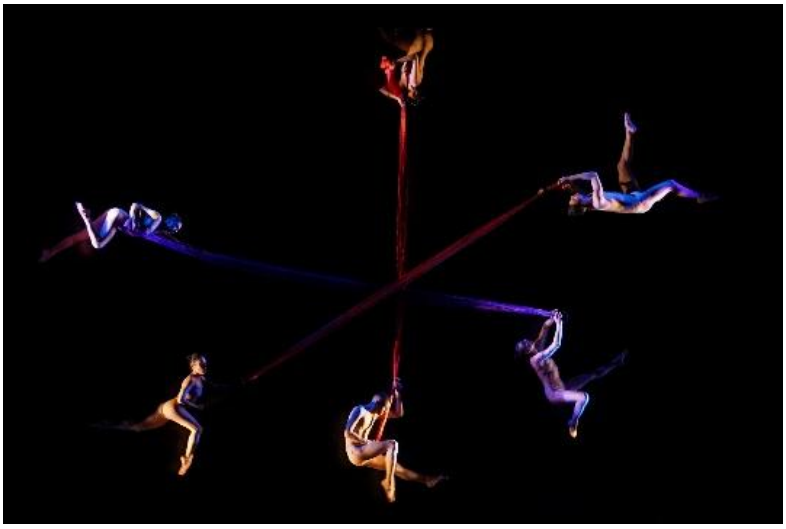

Figure 228, Another scene from Divina Commedia Reloaded. Photo credits No Gravity.

Paradiso by Gruppo Nanou (2021)

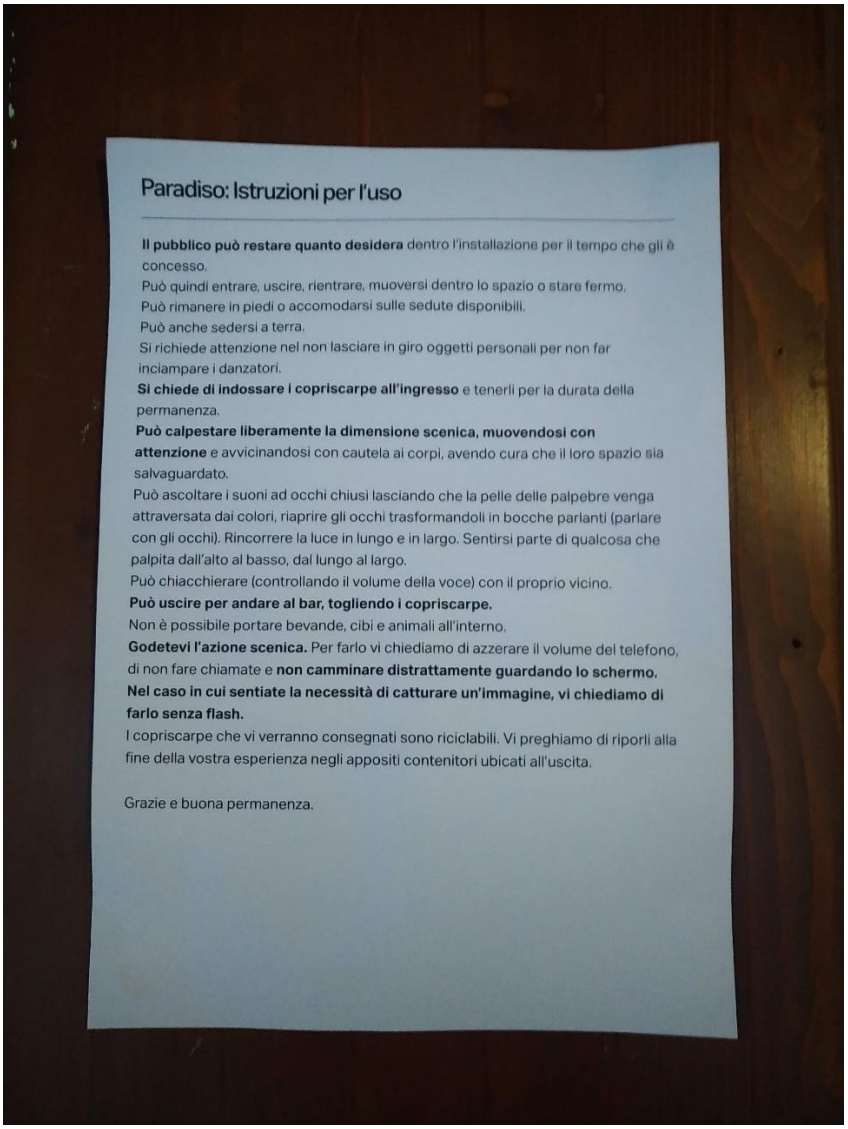

Figure 229, The instructions given to the public for Paradiso by gruppo nanou. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

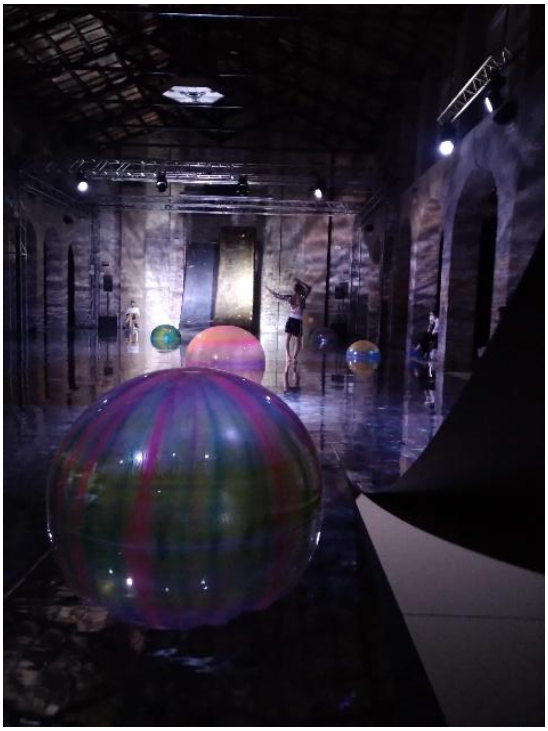

Figure 230, The stage design of Paradiso. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

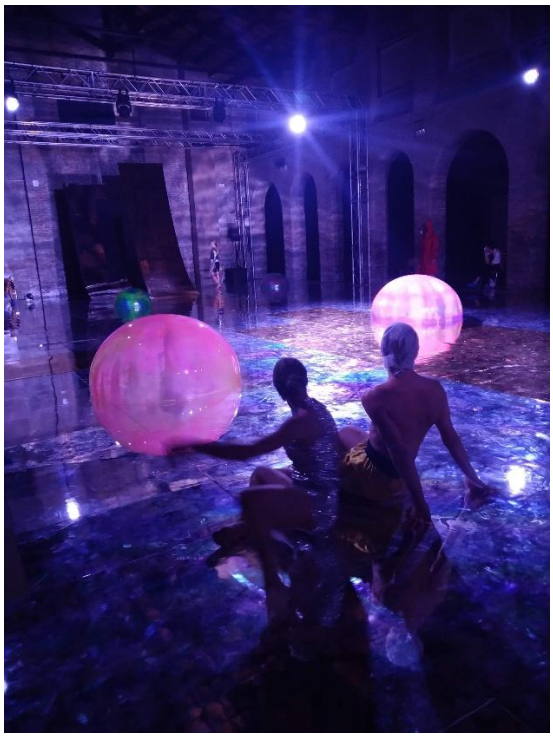

Figure 231, Dancers of Paradiso and Dante in red under the arch. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

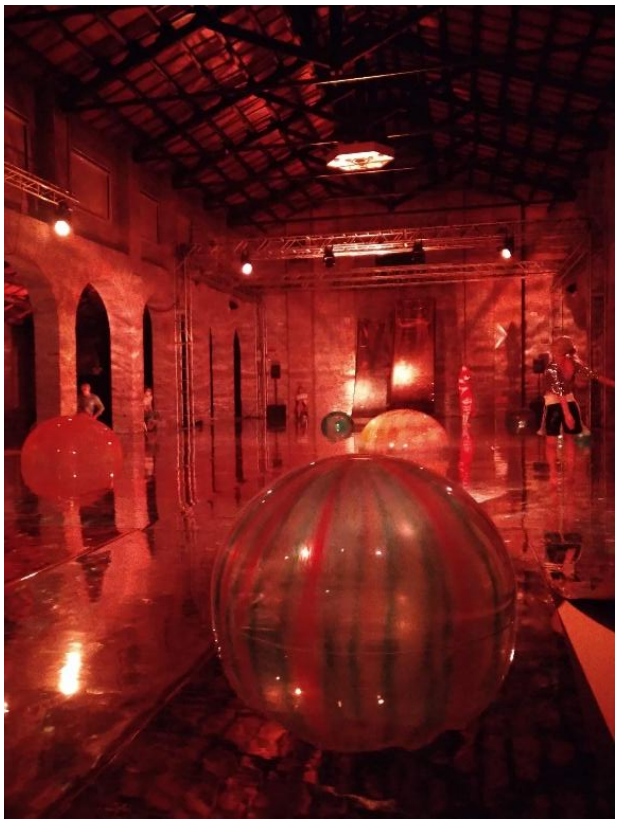

Figure 232, Different lights in Paradiso. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

Figure 233, Dante in Paradiso. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

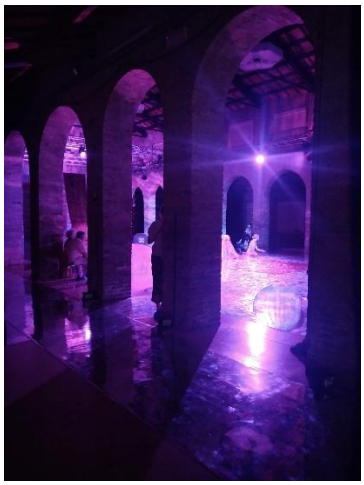

Figure 234, The audience and the performance. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

Figure 235, Paradiso [giardino]. Photo credits Lorenzo Placuzzi.

Figure 236, Paradiso [giardino]. Photo credits Lorenzo Placuzzi.

5.2.1. Sergei Polunin

Figure 237, Curtain call in Ravenna for Polunin, the singer and the three pianists. The piano is on the left side. The mega screens of the scenography are visible in the background. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

Figure 238, Dante and Beatrice. Photo credits Silvia Lelli.

Figure 239, Dante-Polunin in Inferno. Photo credits Silvia Lelli.

Figure 240, Dante in Inferno. Photo credits Silvia Lelli.

Figure 241, Dante in Purgatorio. Photo credits Silvia Lelli.

Figure 242, Dante in Paradiso. Photo credits Silvia Lelli.

Figure 243, Polunin-Dante collecting all the masks for the grand finale of Paradiso. Photo credits Silvia Lelli.

5.2.2. Virgilio Sieni

Figure 244, Virgilio Sieni and the father Fosco Sieni in Osso, at Avignone Festival 2008. Photo credits Christophe Raynaud de Lage.

Vita Nova (2014)

Figure 245, Vita Nova in Bruxelles, 2014. Photo credits Yves Gervais.

Divina Commedia_Ballo 1265 (2015)

Figure 246, Divina Commedia Ballo 1265 at Palazzo Vecchio, Salone dei Cinquecento, Florence.

Figure 247, Close up of the participants, amateurs and professional dancers together. Photo credits Centro Nazionale di Produzione della Danza Virgilio Sieni.

Figure 248, Example of trovarobato session in Purgatorio. Photo credits Ela Bialkowska.

Paradiso **(2021)**

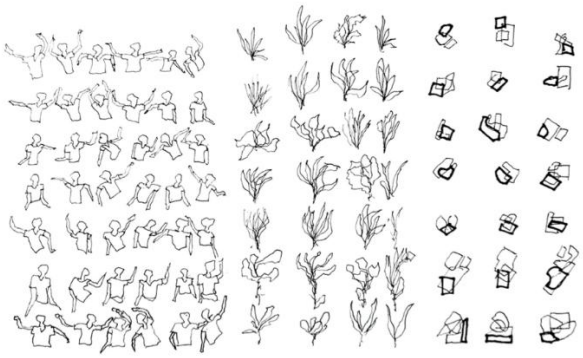

Figure 249, Some drawings of Virgilio Sieni for Paradiso. Photo credits Centro Nazionale di Produzione della Danza Virgilio Sieni.

Figure 250, Agorà Paradiso in Piazza SS Annunziata, Florence, 2021. Photo credits Renato Esposito.

Figure 251, Some scene from Paradiso. Photo credits Renato Esposito.

Figure 252, Some scene from Paradiso. Photo credits Renato Esposito.

Figure 253, Curtain call for Paradiso at Politeama Naples, 2021. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

5.3. The German season: the Ballett Dortmund

Die göttliche Komödie I: Inferno (2018)

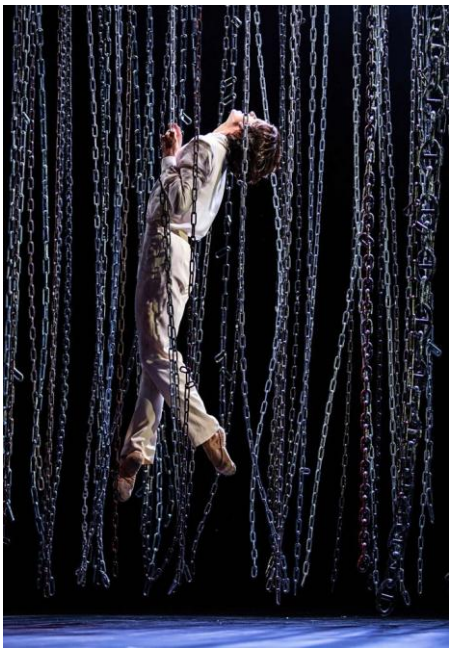

Figure 254, Dante in Inferno, Ballett Dortmund. Photo credits Maria-Helena Buckley.

Figure 255, Virgil in Inferno, Ballett Dortmund. Photo credits Maria-Helena Buckley.

Figure 256, Caron and the sinners of Inferno. Photo credits Maria-Helena Buckley.

Figure 257, Scene from Inferno. Photo credits Maria-Helena Buckley.

Figure 258, The Trikot, the base costume of the souls. Photo credits Maria-Helena Buckley.

Die göttliche Komödie II: Purgatorio **(2019)**

Figure 259, Balkan Baroque ekfrasis in Purgatorio. Photo credits Maria-Helena Buckley.

Figure 260, The mezzo-soprano Kate Moore. Photo credits Maria-Helena Buckley.

Figure 261, The Erzengel interpreted by the dancer Guillem Rojo-i Galiego. Photo credits Maria-Helena Buckley.

Figure 262, Rehearsal moment for Purgatorio displaying the Bodhi Qi Gong practice used during the ballet. Tape taken from the video available online.

Figure 263, Dante and Beatrice reunited in Purgatorio. Photo credits Maria-Helena Buckley.

Figure 264, Dante and Beatrice in Paradiso. Photo credits Leszek Januszewski.

Figure 265, The circular mirror inserted in the lightdesign of Paradiso. Photo credits Leszek Januszewski.

Figure 266, Dante in Paradiso. Photo credits Leszek Januszewski.

Figure 267, The light design of Paradiso. Photo credits Leszek Januszewski.

Figure 268, The light design of Paradiso. Photo credits Leszek Januszewski.

Figure 269, Souls of Paradiso. Photo credits Leszek Januszewski.

Figure 270, Beatrice in Paradiso. Photo credits Leszek Januszewski.

5.4. The English panorama: *The Dante Project* by Wayne McGregor

Figure 271, Thomas Adés, Tacita Dean and Wayne McGregor. Photo credits New York Times.

Act I: Inferno-Pilgrim

Figure 272, Inferno by Tacita Dean. Photo credits Andrej Uspenski.

Figure 273, The damned souls of Inferno. Photo credits Andrej Uspenski.

Figure 274, Sandro Botticelli's reference for colours. Divine Comedy illustrated by Sandro Botticelli present in the Vatican Library (Reg.lat.1896.pt.A, 100 r, referring to If. X).

Figure 275, William Blake's reference for colours. William Blake, Dante running from the Three Beasts (1824-1827), illustration for The Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri (Inferno I, 1-90), Medium pen and ink and watercolour over pencil and black chalk, 37.3 × 52.8 cm (image and sheet), National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Felton Bequest, 1920.

Figure 276, Virgilio and Dante in Inferno. Photo credits Andrej Uspenski.

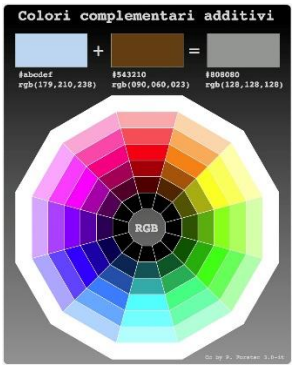

Figure 277, Colour wheel.

Figure 278, Paolo e Francesca. Photo credits Andrej Uspenski.

Figure 279, Dante and Lucifer. Photo credits Andrej Uspenski.

Act II: Purgatorio-Love

Figure 280, The jacaranda tree of Tacita Dean for Purgatorio. Credits of the artist.

Figure 281, Part of the exibition of Dean's artworks for The Dante Project. Credits of the artist.

Figure 282, Virgil and Dante in Purgatorio. Photo credits Andrej Uspenski.

Figure 283, Watson-Dante and the young Dante. Photo credits Andrej Uspenski.

Figure 284, Dante and the souls of Purgatorio. Photo credits Andrej Uspenski.

Figure 285, Souls of Purgatorio. Photo credits Andrej Uspenski.

Figure 286, Dante and Beatrice in Purgatorio. Photo credits Andrej Uspenski.

Act III: Paradiso-Poema Sacro

Figure 287, The atmosphere of Paradiso. Photo credits Andrej Uspenski.

Figure 288, Souls of Paradiso. Photo credits Andrej Uspenski.

Figure 289, Beatrice before leaving Dante for the last vision. Photo credits Andrej Uspenski.

5.5. A final contemporary case study: Dante for Florentina Holzinger 434

5.5.1. From the beginnings to *TANZ*

Figure 290, Portrait of Florentina Holzinger. Photo credits Apollonia Theresa Bitzan.

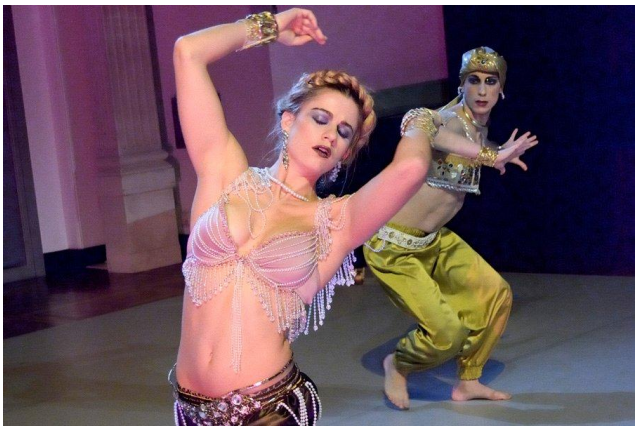

Figure 291, Scene from Schönheitsabend (2015) with Vincent Riebeek. Photo credits Maurice Korbel.

Figure 292, The Apollon of Holzinger. Photo credits Radovan Dranga.

Figure 293, Explicit scene from Apollon. Photo credits Radovan Dranga.

Figure 294, Portrait of Beatrice Cordua. Photo credits David Burghardt.

TANZ (2019)

Figure 295, Scene from the lesson part. Florentina Holzinger is on the right. Photo credits Eric Hong.

Figure 296, Scene from lesson 3: how to leave the floor. Photo credits Georg Wendt.

Figure 297, The adoption certificate for the forest of Sylphs. Credits to Florentina Holzinger.

Figure 298, The second act of TANZ. Photo credits Eric Hong.

Figure 299, The creatures of TANZ. Photo credits Eric Hong.

Figure 300, The birth of the rat. Photo credits Nada-Žgank.

Figure 301, The Sylphis flying. Photo credits Eva Würdinger, courtesy of Neon Lobster.

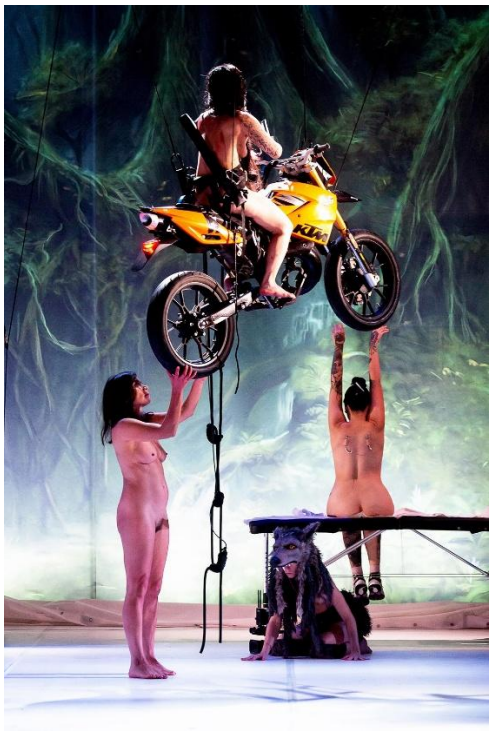

Figure 302, The piercing moment. Photo credits Eva Würdinger, courtesy of Neon Lobster.

Figure 303, Curtain call for TANZ.

Figure 304, The cast of TANZ.

Figure 305, Etude for an Emergency, with the car. Photo credits Nicole Marianna Wytyczak.

5.5.2. *A Divine Comedy*

Figure 306, The stage design of A Divine Comedy at the Kraftzentrale in Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord, Ruhrtriennale. Photo credits Katja Illner.

Figure 307, Miranda van Kuilenburg with some stage decors. Photo credits to the artist, Instagram account.

Figure 308, Annina Machaz as Dante in A Divine Comedy. Tape from the video available at TanzForum Berlin.

Figure 309, Beatrice Cordua in A Divine Comedy. Tape from the video available at TanzForum Berlin.

Figure 310, Cordua and the dancers. Photo credits Katja Illner.

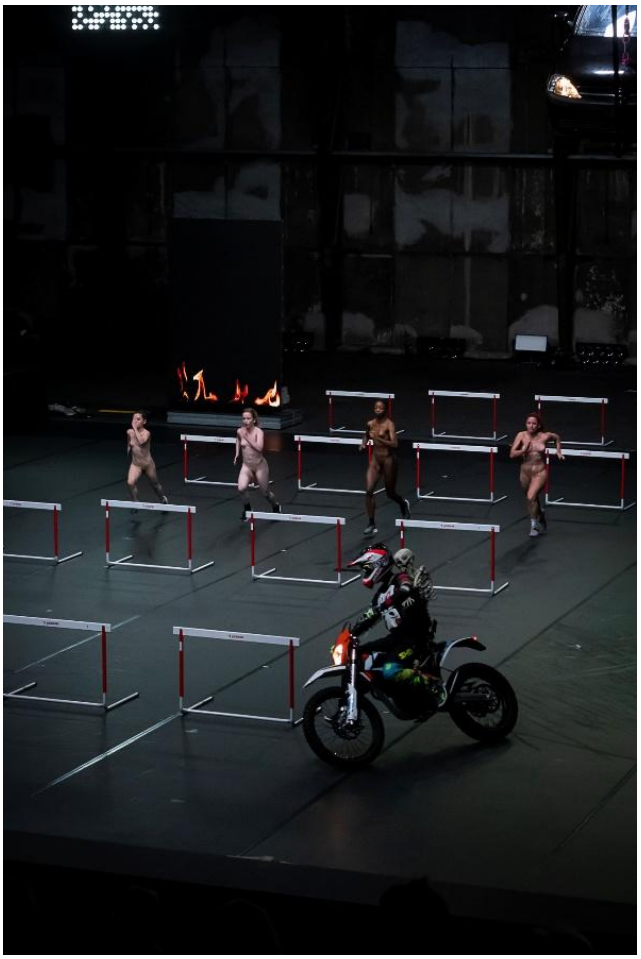

Figure 311, The race between humans and motocross. Photo credits Katja Illner.

Figure 312, The moment of cutting wood on the logs. Photo credits Nicole Marianna Wytyczak.

Figure 313, The moment of cutting wood on the logs. Photo credits Nicole Marianna Wytyczak.

Figure 314, Cordua, Cotraij, and the dancers of the tableau vivant. Photo credits Nicole Marianna Wytyczak.

Figure 315, The musicians of A Divine Comedy.

Figure 316, The action painting session. Photo credits Katja Illner.

Figure 317, The action painting session. Photo credits Nicole Marianna Wytyczak.

Figure 318, The petit mort of Cordua. Tape from the video available at TanzForum Berlin.

Figure 319, The levitas in A Divine Comedy. Photo credits Katja Illner.

Figure 320, Machaz-Dante faces the skeletons. Tape from the video available at TanzForum Berlin.

Figure 321, Curtain call of A Divine Comedy, Antwerpen. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

Figure 322, The stage of Antwerpen, De Singel. Photo credits Sara Fontana.

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