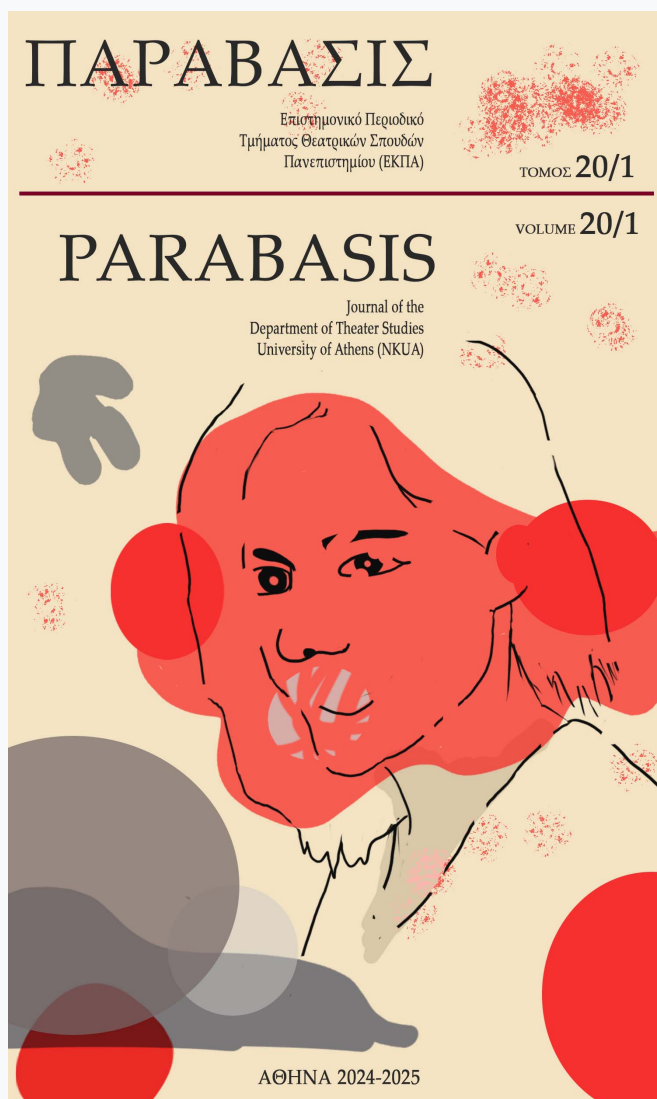


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ACTORS, SCREENS AND VIRTUAL REALITY: PIRANDELLO'S THEATRE ON THE STAGE OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM

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PAOLA RANZINI

**ACTORS, SCREENS AND VIRTUAL REALITY: PIRANDELLO'S
THEATRE ON THE STAGE OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM**

With *Sei Personaggi in cerca d'autore* (*Six characters in search of an author*, 1921, then 1925, following a major revision), Pirandello ushered the European theatre into a new era, exhibiting a type of theatre that represents itself, a theatre in which what is shown is also simultaneously commented, a theatre that is always metatheatre, too. It is precisely the discourse on the theatre that contemporary productions have focused on, continually re-actualizing metatheatre modalities, functions and meaning, while in some cases adding the theme of the mystery of creation, as set out in the famous 1925 preface to *Sei Personaggi in cerca d'autore*, with the reintegration of the figure of the author, absent in the play, here presented as besieged by the characters, who impose themselves to his imagination.

It is within this actualization of discourse on theatre and creation that a strand of productions has developed, which make use of other media (cinema, television, video, augmented or virtual reality) to explain Pirandello and unveil meanings identified beneath the folds of the text. This study proposes an analysis of some of Italian Pirandello's theatrical productions over the last fifty years, which make Pirandello's theatre react with the current media in order to test for its modernity.

1. Television: monitors, microphones, cameras and screens on stage

An early work proposing a reading of Pirandello from a combination of codes and media dates back to the 1970s. That work caused so much debate at that time that a complaint was filed by Pirandello's heirs.¹ The great artist's name is linked to this creation: on 29 January 1972, *Sei Personaggi in cerca d'autore*, directed by

¹ After the Turin premiere on 29 January, followed by an initial cycle of performances, the main newspapers inform of the lawsuit initiated by Pirandello's heirs (cf. «Buazzelli contestato dagli eredi di Pirandello», *Napoli Notte*, 29/02/1972: «Gli eredi di Pirandello contro Tino Buazzelli», *Corriere della sera*, 29/02/1972: «Per I sei Personaggi, a Torino –regia di Buazzelli– la famiglia Pirandello chiede il sequestro», *Il Giorno*, 29/02/1972). As early as 1 March, the press reported on the Court of First Instance decision, which simply asked for the adaptation work to be clarified, without prohibiting the performances (cf. «Il caso dei *Sei personaggi*. Pirandello tradito ma non "legalmente"», *Avvenire*, 01/03/1972: «Per I sei personaggi in cerca d'autore il pretore di Torino ha risolto la vertenza», *Corriere della sera*, 08/03/1972: «Gli eredi di Pirandello sono stati sconfitti dal pretore. *Sei personaggi*: assolto lo spettacolo di Buazzelli», *Gazzetta del Popolo*, 08/03/1972).

Tino Buazzelli (1922-1980) and with a set designed by Josef Svoboda (1920-2002), premiered at the «Valdocco theatre» in Turin, in a production of the Turin «Teatro Stabile».² The creation was announced in the season calendar with the staging of Svoboda and Buazzelli, but a notice distributed to the audience on the evening of the premiere specified:

[...] a causa del rinvio di 10 giorni del debutto dello spettacolo [...], lo scenografo Joseph Svoboda non ha potuto seguire la fase finale dell'allestimento, essendo impegnato con altre collaborazioni a Berlino e ad Amburgo. Pertanto la regia dello spettacolo è da attribuire, nella quasi totalità, a Tino Buazzelli, che ha utilizzato le indicazioni scenografiche di Svoboda.³

Later, in 1984, Svoboda signed the sets for another production of the *Sei personaggi*, at the «Théâtre Jean Vilar» in Louvain, for the «Atelier théâtral» de Louvain-la-Neuve directed by Armand Delcamp, based on an adaptation by Louis Adé.⁴ A new production was then staged in 1991, again directed by Armand Delcampe, who this time also adapted the text, for a co-production with the «Boulogne-Billancourt theatre», where the premiere was held (on 15 January 1991).⁵ The set –imagined by Svoboda for the Delcampe's *Sei Personaggi*, in

² Direction by Tino Buazzelli, set design by Josef Svoboda, costumes by Paola Bassani and Angelo Delle Piane, original music by Renato Sedani. Cast: Tino Buazzelli (Il padre), Rita Di Lernia (La madre), Stefania Casini (La figliastra), Werner Di Donato (Il figlio), Enea Martini (Il giovinetto), Ester Moliterno (La bambina), Liliana Chiari (Madama Pace), Massimo De Francovich (Il direttore-capocomico), Laura Ambesi (La prima attrice), Leo Gavero (Il primo attore), Anna De Zoppi (La seconda donna), Paola Chenna (L'attrice giovane), Angelo Botti (L'attore giovane), Roberto Buffa (Il direttore di scena), Enrico Poggi (Il suggeritore), Ettore Diamanti (Il macchinista), Giuseppe Berti (Il trovarobe), Concetta Cangiullo (La sarta), Enrico Longo Doria, Nerina Bianchi, Rosalba Bongiovanni, Carla Costa and Pierluigi Gianella. The TV crew: Roberto Paoletti (Il regista), Silvana Scacchi (La segretaria d'edizione), Umberto Aquilino (L'assistente di studio), Franco Aurini (Il datore luci), Andrea Ori (L'assistente), Alfredo Bosco (Il controllo audio), Renato Sellani (L'assistente musicale), Enrico Balteri (Primo cameramen), Roberto Pavia (Secondo cameramen), Giorgio Albera (Terzo cameramen) and Claudio Dani (Il consulente culturale).

³ All documents on this creation are kept at Archives of Centro Studi of Teatro Stabile (Turin) in folders *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* (1971/1972).

⁴ *Six Personnages en quête d'auteur*, new version by Louis Adé. Direction by Armand Delcampe, set design by Josef Svoboda, costumes by Elena Mannini, music by André Burton, light design by Richard Joukovsky, Atelier Théâtral de Louvain-La-Neuve, «Théâtre Jean Vilar». Cast: Victor Garrivier (The father), Christine Caneville (The mother), Fanny Delbrice (the daughter-in-law), Philippe Volter (The son), Samuel Dupont or Bernard Heuse (The young boy), Myriam Ransart ou Jacinthe Dancot (The young girl), Madame Pace (Irène Lecarte), André Burton (The theatrical director), José Jolet (The stage manager), Gérald Marti (First major male role), Annouck Dupont (First major female role), Peter Brouns (The leading young lover) and Jean-Christophe Lefèvre (The musician).

⁵ *Six Personnages en quête d'auteur*, new adaptation by Armand Delcampe. Direction by Armand Delcampe, set design by Josef Svoboda, costumes by Elena Mannini, light design by François-Éric Valentin, musical improvisations by Didier Masseur. Cast: André Falcon (The father), Pascale

agreement with the director, who wanted to present the story of the play in a kind of show– consists of a horizontal platform with six holes, from which the six characters emerge, in a charming atmosphere created by special light and music. When Father began to speak, a projector illuminated the characters with lights of different colors, in a way that aimed to generate new colors when their trajectories met. All the set design elements, essential to the representation (namely, the tree, the garden tub, etc.) surfaced from the floor. In Svoboda's writings and in his interviews, as well as in his works catalogues, this is the only *Sei personaggi* stage design that has ever been mentioned. If the Italian work is never remembered, it is undoubtedly because the artist, who took part in the initial stages of creation, felt the work, even the set design, could no longer be called his own once all was completed. Moreover, no creative continuity can be noticed between the sets for Buazzelli (1972) and those for Delcampe (1984 and 1991).

However, Svoboda's collaboration for the production of the Turin «Teatro Stabile» already existed in the months prior to the premiere, and is documented in particular by a typescript –dated Thursday 7/10/1971– that refers to the early stages of creation, when the casting was not yet completed. This document bears evidence of a discussion held via a correspondence: on the second sheet of the typescript, a list of requests for the set is introduced with a «would ask» (perhaps implying Svoboda), including:

...un'altra macchina da presa, banco di regia in platea (ad ogni buon conto l'ho convinto a non mostrare gli schermi-monitors al pubblico, nella previsione che si accontenti di una macchina sola funzionante;⁶ due schermi ai lati palcoscenico, più il grande centrale, in alto (quest'ultimo per le parti registrate); illuminazione con lampade quarzo, sala accesa, pianoforte in scena; polaroids per fotografare pubblico e proiettare foto a fine spettacolo (Svoboda già allora era incerto sulla riuscita dell'episcopio: penserebbe a dispositivo a pronto sviluppo: esistono?); buca del suggeritore.⁷

Audret (The mother), Fanny Delbrice (The daughter-in-law), Pascal Elso (The son), Hugo ou Rodolphe (The teenager), Tiphaine ou Hélène (The young girl), Madame Pace (Rose Thiéry), Yves Pignot (The theatrical director), Stéphane Excoffier (First leading female role), Daniel Sarki (First leading male role), Alessandra Terni (Second leading female role), Nathalie Hugo (The naive ingenue), William Bégot (The leading young lover), Lucien Pascal (The stage manager), Antoine Malaquias (The stagehand-accessorist), Catherine Leriche (The secretary), Didier Massein (The musician), Nicole Chollet (The female prompter), Christophe Estorgues, Marco Ferré, Laurent Gaultier, Carole Rochet (set personnel).

⁶ Concerning the function as monitors: cf. «*I sei personaggi* di Pirandello al Nuovo. Sempre meglio l'autore del regista», *Avvenire*, 9 March 1972. Odoardo Brentani explains: «Buazzelli ha voluto ai piedi del palcoscenico cinque monitors: su uno vanno in onda i normali programmi televisivi; gli altri quattro ripropongono in circuito chiuso quanto sta avvenendo sulla scena».

⁷ This typescript is kept at Archives of Centro Studi of Teatro Stabile (Turin) in folders *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* (1971/1972).

This is followed by a list of the material required for TV technical equipment,⁸ introduced by the formula «according to what I have heard», as if the list took up requests not yet clearly expressed by Svoboda. Thus, a list records what still needs to be done, like the texts that are to be written for the television team and the films to be recorded in advance for projection during the performance. As for the creation process, it is specified that, after a few days at the table, they would immediately go to the stage to rehearse i movimenti di camere, giraffe, ecc. A final note specifies that Pirandello's text will remain practically unchanged. The idea of the play now seems fixed (although the document does contain a question about Svoboda's contribution):

Il mezzo tecnico dovrebbe servire a demistificare quasi tutto, ma diventare anche, in certi punti (Madama Pace, morte del giovinetto, ecc.) autentico testimone di «eventi».⁹

Clearly, the television's set and the images reproduced by video projections were used in a critical way towards the media itself, whose neutrality was emphasized in observing reality tacitly, without any interpretation, like Serafino Gubbio's camera in the Pirandellian novel. This neutrality is exhibited in the climaxes of the characters' drama (the father/daughter encounter in Madama Pace's back room and the young man's suicide), to dampen their emotional significance and create a distance effect. A letter by Svoboda, dated 24 November 1971 and addressed to the «Teatro Stabile» di Torino management (producer of the play), shows the collaboration was still a genuine one at that time. In this letter, Svoboda formulates a request for the purchase of projectors necessary for the show's technical production. This equipment was actually purchased.¹⁰

At about the same time, Buzzelli sent Svoboda a Director's Plan (Piano di regia) he had drafted on 25 November 1971.¹¹ The plan clearly presents the idea behind the staging, mainly to show a theatre stage prepared for a television set. Such a setting implied introducing new characters: the technicians preparing the cameras for the filming; a professor entrusted with a presentation of the play and

⁸ «3 chassis di telecamere (una -o due- funzionante): una mobile (jolly) e due fisse: una con brandeggio; un microfono mondato su giraffa; un bancone regia, contenente: almeno 6 monitors, quadro mixage regolatore luci, magnetofono. Il tutto forzatamente fasullo perché sarebbe l'attrezzatura del pulmino di ripresa TV portato in studio; due circuiti fonici, uno con interfonico (uno per musiche di scena, l'altro per bancone di regia); 2 schermi laterali, che fingano due monitors ingranditi (probabilmente collegati alla macchina da ripresa); uno schermo grande al centro per le parti filmate (con relativo proiettore)», *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ The theatre archives have the invoice for the purchase of a projector (1 5kw Projektor, 1 objectiv 18 cm, 2 Lampen 220v). The purchase was made in Austria for a total of about one million lire.

¹¹ This «Piano di regia», kept at Archives of Centro Studi di Teatro Stabile (Turin) in folders *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* (1971/1972), consists of 6 typed and numbered pages.

the author, also filmed. The theatrical performance opened with these scenes that transpose the Pirandellian play preparation stage from theatre to television. Especially concerning the recording of the professor's lecture: the preparation, on sight, involved some staff (in fact some actors) at the back of the stage setting up three Pirandello giants photographs, with a table and a chair arranged in front of them.

Some photographs preserved in the Theatre's Archives and a recorded audio document testify that the beginning of the theatrical performance exactly followed these direction plan details, written by Buazzelli in November. The recording of the professor's lecture (preserved in its entirety in an audio document) demonstrate the multiple interruptions by the staff, that made him resume his speech from the beginning. The television director's voice gives orders to the professor and technicians. Impossible to say with certainty whether the preserved audio recording was made live, during a performance, or whether it is one of those recordings prepared beforehand and then broadcast, as the Plan requested. Anyway, the photographs show the character of the professor on stage, not in a video projection. In the Director's Plan, Buazzelli explains:

L'intento di questa scena è denunciare la strumentalizzazione che la televisione fa degli uomini di cultura e come questi siano disposti e felici di mettersi a suo servizio, per vanità ed interesse.¹²

Both preserved scripts do not report these first scenes and, moreover, provide contradictory information that is difficult to interpret. Some photocopies of scenes from *Berretto a sonagli* and *Così è se vi pare* are conserved together with both scripts, as if the rehearsal within the rehearsal, instead of being about Pirandello's play *Il gioco delle parti*, was about one of these plays. Both preserved scripts open with the author (Pirandello) conversing with his six characters, rewritten from the 1925 Preface. It is not clear how this part could fit into the theatrical performance, especially as the playbill does not attribute the stage role of Pirandello to any actor. Could it be the projected recordings? The Director's Plan makes no mention of it.

This plan recalls the essential function of the three screens on stage when the six characters step on it, as they must show them from three different points of view and then stop on the close-ups of the characters themselves. The importance of this scene is underlined by its repetition: «Il regista televisivo interromperà per provare due o tre entrate diverse per un effetto "magico maggiore"».¹³ The director's plan then details the alternation of sequences between total framing (in this case what is happening on the stage is filmed with a fixed camera and retransmitted via a monitor) and sequences that the audience sees projected on the screen placed center-stage. These sequences, in some cases,

¹² *Ibid*, p. 1.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 2.

have been recorded beforehand, some of which display details of the scene (close-ups, isolated objects, etc.).

Madama Pace's materialization occurs as if by «magic» and indeed almost by accident. It is generated by images filmed almost randomly: while the actors are in pause mode, the cameramen continue to frame for fun: «...e come per caso verrà scoperta in panoramica dal basso l'attrice che interpreterà Madama Pace...».¹⁴

The backroom scene is projected onto the big screen, probably pre-recorded. An audio recording confirming what the Director's Plan indicates: the TV director asks to see the scene again and this is repeated three times. The Plan specifies the meaning of this repetition, which is to create a «demifistic effect».

When action starts again after an interval, in addition to the alternation of screen-sequences and monitor-sequences, the Director's Plan indicates scene changes that occur «mechanically» (i.e., elements necessary for the action such as the small garden tub are brought on stage).

The performance ends with the sequence of the young man's death – projected on the big screen, probably recorded beforehand. Then everything disappears: «Si sentiranno rumori di sirene... dovrà essere accentuata la verità del gesto...».¹⁵ Only the young man's body remains. The prompter then comes out of his hole: «Si guarderà smarrito intorno, guarderà il cadavere... poi getterà il copione che ha in mano nella buca».¹⁶ The Director's Plan ends on this sequence. It makes no reference to the presence of the director-capocomedian nor to the reappearance of the six characters.

The documents preserved¹⁷ on the produced performance confirm most of the details included in the Plan. The photographs enable us to observe the arrangement of the larger screen installed center-stage in vertical display, and two smaller side screens. On either side of both cameras, stand the giraffes and the technicians in white blouses. The (mostly negative) reports that appeared in the press add details on the actual use of the screens on stage:

Invano, a sottolineare la sopraffazione della «macchina» il grande schermo di un «eidophor» mostra ingrandite, rovesciate, sfasate, rallentate, accelerate, deformate o a colori (si tratta infatti di un finto eidophor sul quale vengono proiettati spezzoni di film) alcune delle immagini che vediamo sulla scena. Invano [...] il regista televisivo fa ripetere su questo schermo il drammatico finale del secondo atto con l'irruzione e il grido della Madre nell'atelier di Madama Pace.¹⁸

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 3.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 6

¹⁶ *Ibid*.

¹⁷ Among the documents preserved is the SIAE bulletin for Renato Sellani's original musical compositions (*Un vecchio cinese a Parigi, Esasperazione, Il piano in una botte, Patetico*).

¹⁸ Alberto Blandi, «Pirandello in cerca dei suoi personaggi», *Stampa Sera*, 31/01/1972.

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The TV staff's added dialogues and the reduction of Pirandello's text have been deplored. In the newspaper *L'Unità*, Arturo Lazzari criticizes the unclear stylistic choices, which he attributes to Svoboda's non-cooperation with Buazzelli. The critic deemed it suggestive to use the television medium:

...per un discorso sulla comunicazione di massa, sul livellamento o appiattimento dell'opera d'arte che si svuota dei propri contenuti [...] per ridursi alla stessa stregua del mezzo neutro (o pseudo-tale) che se ne fa portatore.¹⁹

Lazzari points out that this critical discourse does not appear clearly, the show being only an «accostamento vanificante tra televisione e Teatro».²⁰ That its intention was precisely to criticize the television medium; and the transformation it brings about on content is also indicated in the title: *Prove per la registrazione televisiva di Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore di Luigi Pirandello* [Rehearsals for the television recording of *Six Characters in search of author* by Luigi Pirandello].

The press release, also kept in the theatre's archives, mentions the new reading of Pirandello's text that this operation suggests: the «neutrality» of the new media removes all the encrustations of the critical tradition from Pirandello's language. The weight of «deep» meanings is also lost, since reproduction on a screen results in smoothing out any problematic roughness in the text. The Pirandellian theme of the impossibility of tapping into truth is then expressed by the obvious limitations of the modern medium, which limits itself to the surface of things, and indeed transforms things and people into images devoid of depth and concreteness. It is no coincidence that critic Raul Radice says he is annoyed by the fact that «la parola [...] sia sottoposta alla distorsione di una immagine che inutilmente aspiri ad aggiungere significazione a significati già compiutamente espressi».²¹ The non-truth of the image duplicates what Pirandello's text already masterfully states. More severe is Roberto De Monticelli's assessment, who considers the entire dramaturgical operation –in which he sees nothing but the useless projection on a screen of «out-of-phase» films– has failed.²²

Thanks to the preserved documents and critics' reports of the impact of such dramaturgical experimentation based on the hybridization of languages, it is possible to draw a balance. The attempt to use the current media, namely television and screen projections on stage, to construct a parallel commentary to the one carried out, from the inside, by Pirandello's metatheatre fails to make itself clear, or at least is not understood at the time. This insight, however, is remarkable, since, albeit negatively, some critics recognize it by suggesting that

¹⁹ Arturo Lazzari, «Sperduti sul video», *L'Unità*, 31/01/1972.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Raul Radice, «I sei personaggi in scena al Nuovo», *Corriere della sera*, 09/03/1972.

²² Roberto De Monticelli, «Telecamere di disturbo per smontare I sei personaggi», *Il Giorno*, 09/03/1972.

the repetitive, meaningless image, is apt to express Pirandello's conclusions about the elusive and unattainable truth. The belief that the «modernity» of Pirandello's theatre can be expressed through 'modern' media will therefore not go unheeded.

2. Screens and cinema

During the following decades, screens on stage return in other Pirandello productions, with reference, however, to the cinema, a reference in a certain sense authorized, for the *Six Characters*, by the rewrites of the play for the cinema that Pirandello made himself: the *Prologo* (1926 or 1927), a Filmnovel in German written with Adolf Lantz (1928) and a screenplay in English written with Saul C. Colin (1933).²³ These screenplays, which remained at draft-stage, rather than a discourse on theatre, propose a discourse on the mystery of creation, reintroducing the author's figure in dialogue with the characters conceived in imagination and not yet made the protagonists of an artistic work, therefore not yet risen to the eternal life assured by art.

Inspired by the cinema and more directly by Pirandello's Filmnovel is French director Stéphane Braunschweig's *Six personnages en quête d'auteur* (Festival d'Avignon – «Théâtre de la Colline», Paris, 2012),²⁴ which introduces the key scene of the author besieged by his characters in two interludes. Proposing to consider the strange story of the characters rejected from the author's perspective, the company actor who was assigned the part of the father becomes the author himself, in these interludes. So, in these interludes, a screen on stage reveals, in a projection, what is going on in the author's imagination: gradually freed from a thick fog, the images of the six characters stand out clearly, as if imposing themselves forcefully.

Like Pirandello's screenplay from *Sei personaggi*, Stéphane Braunschweig's staging is based on the relationship between characters and author, rather than on the characters and actors' confrontation.

Another staging of *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* that integrates cinema techniques is Luca De Fusco's («Teatro Stabile di Napoli», 2017).²⁵ As happens in

²³ Dina Saponaro – Lucia Torsello (eds), «*Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore: progetti filmici mai realizzati: dal Prologo al Treatment*», «In cerca d'autore da Pirandello a Ronconi», *Ariel* 1, (2012), p. 59-129; Simeone Marialaura, *Il palcoscenico sullo schermo. Luigi Pirandello: una trilogia metateatrale per il cinema*, Franco Cesati, Roma 2016.

²⁴ *Six personnages en quête d'auteur*. Adaptation and direction by Stéphane Braunschweig, costumes by Thibault Vancraenenbroeck, set design by Stéphane Braunschweig, light design by Marion Hewlett, sound Xavier Jacquot, video Sébastien Marrey. Coproduction: «Théâtre national de la Colline» and Festival d'Avignon, with: Christophe Brault, Caroline Chaniolleau, Claude Duparfait, Anthony Jeanne, Maud Le Grévellec, Anne-Laure Tondu, Manuel Vallade, Annie Mercier.

²⁵ *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*, direction by Luca De Fusco, set design and costumes by Marta Crisolini Malatesta, light design by Gigi Saccomandi, music by Ran Bagno, video Alessandro Papa, choreography by Alessandro Panzavolta. Coproduction: Teatro Stabile di Napoli, Teatro Nazionale

some of Woody Allen's films, the six characters appear as images projected on a giant screen and then materialize, emerge from the screen and transport themselves onto the stage. The director explains that he naturally thought of the cinema for the story that the six characters are trying to tell, each from their own points of view: a story, full of memories, visions and minute, precise details, whose realism, at times crude, is hardly suitable for a theatre performance. In De Fusco's staging, the scenes that are reconstructed piecemeal in the contradictory discourse of the characters themselves become fragments of «possible» films to which the spectator ascribes the same degree of truth. Only the scene of the father and stepdaughter in the back room of Madama Pace is represented on stage and not in a film fragment.

Another reference to the cinema is in the depiction of the six characters, dressed in black and whose faces are white, illuminated by a bluish light, like the actors in the 1920s and 1930s silent films: this is also a way of alluding to the cinematographic treatment for which Pirandello had intended his play.

De Fusco, like Braunschweig, stages *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* by resorting, through quotations or allusions, to other Pirandello material. However, the significance of the hybridization of languages, both theatrical and cinematographic, that De Fusco has achieved in his direction lies above all in highlighting Pirandello's theatre modernity, showing how its themes can be effectively expressed in the languages of other arts and other media.

3. Stage and virtual reality

In the 2000s, it is the new technologies and virtual reality that offer themselves as instruments to express Pirandello's vision of the world and theatre, exasperating its relativism as regards «truth» and offering an immediate perception of the multiplication of vision perspectives and, therefore, of interpretation.

In Pirandello himself, it is possible to find a link that justifies using such instruments in the dramaturgical work on the texts. In his last, unfinished, 1936 play, *I giganti della montagna* (*The giants of the mountain*), Pirandello opposes two types of theatre: Ilse's theatre, which goes out to the people, which cannot do without this essential and founding link with society and the real world, even if it means risking her life; and another theatre, that of the magician Cotrone and the arsenal of apparitions, which exalts the creation of fantasy, free of all ties with reality, that is the immediate projection of the imagination which produces works made of the same material as dreams. Unlike the theatre, which has to come to terms with all the limits imposed by the materiality of performing, and which must necessarily resort to the mediation of actors, this mental theatre freely creates its

di Genova, with: Eros Pagni, Federica Granata, Gaia Aprea, Gianluca Musiu, Silvia Biancalana, Maria Chiara Cossia, Angela Pagano, Paolo Serra, Maria Basile Scarpetta, Giacinto Palmarini, Alessandra Pacifico Griffini, Paolo Cresta, Enzo Turrin, Carlo Sciacaluga.

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Guardando sul telefono. Madonna... certo il terremoto ha fatto un bel casino da quelle parti...

[...] il terremoto ha distrutto tutto... Quelle immagini che abbiamo visto al telegiornale... Mostruoso.³⁴

Social media emphasize the obsessive search for truth, globalizing it:

Iniziano tutti a parlottare tra loro. Qualcuno tira fuori il telefonino. Dina e Amalia soprattutto, spippolano a tutto andare, mandano messaggi a gente connessa, aggiornano il pubblico on line.

[...]

DINA: Sui social oggi non si parla d'altro...

[...] Sul gruppo in molti sono per quello che dice il signor Ponza e credono alla sua versione. Il Prefetto non è certo il solo.

[...] *Mostrando il telefono.* Il pubblico cresce in continuazione.³⁵

Even the decisive invitation of the key witness, Mr Ponza's wife, uses a means of communication from a distance:

IL PREFETTO: Basta una telefonata. In vivavoce.

DINA: Videochiamata sarebbe meglio...

[...] *Già in piedi ad attaccare il televisore.* Ecco, possiamo collegare il computer qua, così la vediamo tutti.

[...] *Urlando.* Dagli il link papà! così appena hanno fatto ci chiama lei direttamente sul mio computer qua, che è già collegato allo schermo.³⁶

The final appearance of the veiled woman entrusted with the task of revealing the truth takes place through a technological means and is mediated by a screen: «Sullo schermo ecco la Signora Ponza, rigida, col volto nascosto da un fitto velo nero, impenetrabile».³⁷

In *Così è (o mi pare)*, the actualization of the pirandellian play is much more than the setting of the scenes and the costumes, and more than reference to today's technologies. The new media do not simply provide the current model of facade presentability and the fragile wall behind which to spy on the private, but are the instrument on which is based the dramaturgical work that Elio Germano has conducted on the text of Pirandello.

The show was in fact designed for producing it in virtual reality, so as to place in the center the audience, the individual spectator who, thanks to a virtual reality headset, can walk into the living room where the story is taking place, changing

³⁴ Elio Germano, «"Così è (o mi pare)"», script, *Archives*, «Teatro della Toscana», Florence 2023, p. 11.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 19.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 22.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 23.

perspectives and point of views at will. As the show unfolds, the spectator then discovers they themselves have indeed a body, which is to be one of the guest characters in the living room, the Commendator Laudisi, Lamberto Laudisi's elderly father, sitting in a wheelchair. So, the Pirandellian «raisonneur» Laudisi appears split into two characters: in addition to Lamberto Laudisi (played by Elio Germano) there is the character of Laudisi father, absent in Pirandello, who must embody the spectator in VR. The experience the spectator is invited to enjoy is the usual collective experience of being with other spectators in the theatre.³⁸ However, to this experience is added the individual experience of deciding where and what to look at in VR.

The playbill of Elio Germano's show, which depicts an eye peeping through the keyhole, in frontal view, indicates the spectator-«voyeur's» position but could also suggest, reversing the roles, that an eye is spying on the beholder. Here is evoked the particular immersive experience that is proposed to the audience: starting from a chosen observation point, they end up entering the scene where, as a bodiless gaze, they can finally split into two, and see themselves as one of the characters on stage.

The title that emphasizes the first person –the Pirandellian «se vi pare» becomes «o mi pare»– highlights this individual spectator's participation in establishing «one» truth (their truth) in a procedure that unites them to the bourgeois who attend the Agazzi living room. For this reason, they become one of them and, indeed, the other characters can interact with this new character to which the spectator gives life in virtual reality. This procedure allows the spectator to live the Pirandellian man's identity crisis who, in the gaze of others, discovers himself to be different from the image he has of himself. The identity crisis, the division of the ego, becomes a direct experience, because the spectator, who has the impression of having «entered» the scene with their own selves, their own bodies, suddenly materializes in another self, in a foreign body. Significantly, the element that brings about such a consciousness of the fracture between the image of oneself and the image that one reflects of oneself to others is the mirror:

Lamberto guida la nostra sedia a rotelle portandoci non lontano, appena appartati dal gruppo, che non vediamo più, siamo in un corridoio o qualcosa del genere.

LAUDISI: Ti annoi papà?

NOI: No, no... anzi... tutto molto divertente... solo non sopporto l'accanimento...³⁹

³⁸ The theatre has no stage, just chairs and benches ready for the audience. All you have to do, however, is put on your visor and headphones to find yourself seated in the red velvet seats of a large theatre with an ornate ceiling, crystal chandeliers and the buzz of the audience intent on taking their seats.

³⁹ There are the spectators who participate and have become, one by one, the old Laudisi.

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LAUDISI: Sì infatti... Ora cercano le prove... i fatti concreti... come se quello che siamo fosse nei fatti concreti...

NOI: Siamo tutti... quello di cui ci convinciamo, Lamberto... Ognuno crede nel mondo che vive, artificiale o reale che sia...

Suonano al citofono.

LAUDISI: O dio ma chi è adesso? Scusa papà... *Continua a spingerci lasciandoci di fronte ad uno specchio, poi va via.*

[...]

Nello specchio intanto vediamo finalmente chi siamo. Una persona molto anziana molto ben vestita, probabilmente un vecchio letterato o filosofo, un intellettuale riconosciuto. Ora piuttosto malandato ma con l'occhio ancora vispo. (Potremmo vagamente somigliare a Pirandello. In una possibile versione novantenne).

NOI: Eccoci qua. *(Ci parliamo allo specchio)*... Chi è il pazzo tra noi due? Quale dei due è quello reale? Ahahahha... Eh, lo so: io dico: tu - e tu dici: io! - Tu! tu! - Io? No! Tu,tu,tu,tu! Ahahahah... Meno male che gli altri non ti vedono, né t'hanno mai visto, per come ti vedo e t'ho visto io... Noi, caro mio, non esistiamo! Esiste solo quello che di noi vedono gli altri... quello che si raccontano, quello che si ricorderanno...⁴⁰

What is a Pirandellian theme par excellence is thus explained and multiplied in *Così è (o mi pare)* by virtual reality. It is worth noting how this mirror scene refers and alludes to similar scenes in the novel *Uno, nessuno e centomila*. The resemblance to Pirandello ageing superimposes the dimension of critical interpretation (with reference precisely to the identity theme (a Pirandellian favorite) on the dimension of fictional history. But the spectator's entry onto the stage (while still firmly seated in the theatre) leads to another observation: that scene on which their gaze has materialized them does not 'represent' the living room, but actually «is» the virtual living room. Mental projection erases the limits of real space. That reality created by the mind is the only one that can exist and no demonstration could be more apt to express Pirandello's assumption:

LAUDISI: E no, amica mia, e qui sei tu che hai torto! Per lui le cose stanno esattamente come te le dice.

SIRELLI: Come sono in realtà! come sono in realtà!

SIGNORA SIRELLI: Nella tua realtà...

SIRELLI: Sei te che vivi nella tua di realtà e non vuoi credere a quello che è vero!

[...]

LAUDISI: [...] Cos'è la verità? È quello che viviamo, quello che vediamo. Se lo vivo, se lo vedo, è vero, è reale. Ma se io mi metto qua, nel mezzo della stanza, ognuno vedrà di me solo una parte, e sarà convinto che io sia solo così, come mi vede lui... e se doveste descrivere cosa avete visto, nessuno di voi direbbe

⁴⁰ Germano, «"Così è (o mi pare)"», p. 12.

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la stessa cosa. Se ognuno mi dovesse descrivere per come mi vede, gli altri gli direbbero che si sbaglia. Ma tutti direbbero la verità. E il primo a non essere d'accordo con la descrizione che viene fatta da ciascuno, vi assicuro, sarei io. Ma se dicessi di sapere io la verità su di me, sarei altrettanto presuntuoso. Se reale è solo quello che vediamo, quello che sento io non è reale: anche io sono nient'altro che quello che gli altri vedono. Nient'altro.

SIGNORA CINI: Quindi... non dobbiamo più credere a ciò che vediamo... quello che vediamo non è reale?

LAUDISI: Ma per l'amor di Dio se lo è signora! Dico soltanto di imparare a rispettare il mondo degli altri, ciò che vedono gli altri, perché è altrettanto reale, anche fosse il contrario esatto di quello che vediamo e prendiamo per reale noi!⁴¹

After the silence that follows what is the final replica in Pirandello's text («...per me io sono io... per gli altri, sono solo colei che mi si crede»), in *Così è (o mi pare)* by Elio Germano, a comment by Laudisi father/spectator serves as the border of the play:

NOI: Che meraviglia, che meraviglia (*ci avviciniamo lentamente allo schermo*)... per me sono io, per gli altri, solo colei che mi si crede... ecco, signori miei come parla la verità. *Abbiamo raggiunto lo schermo* Io la finirei qua. *Lo schermo si spegne. Ci giriamo verso il pubblico.* Arrivederci.⁴²

At this point, the characters vanish «as if they were only holograms»; the last to disappear is the spectator's «body».

The story of *Così è (o mi pare)* follows the broad outlines of Pirandello's original. Above all, the play re-proposes the great themes of the play, reinforcing them and rooting them in the present time. Virtual reality makes immediately evident the multiple identities Pirandello's text speaks of, and shifts reflections on the truth about creating a virtual reality.

While Pirandello questions the objectivity of the real, virtual reality creates a universe in which it is possible to move, leading the spectator into their own personal illusions arsenal. As in the *Giganti della montagna*, mental theatre surpasses traditional theatre in freedom and unscrupulousness, it is creation without any limits. But it saves the collective dimension of the traditional theatre: once the performance is over, and headsets removed, the spectators find themselves seated in their red seats: now is the time to compare their visions and discuss their experience.

These recent stagings, experimenting with new languages and new technologies to interpret Pirandello, show the eternal relevance of this theatre and the issues it raises. They intend to show that using screens, the cinema or even

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 4.

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 23.

virtual reality is justified thanks to the ideas that can be found in the same Pirandello, thus finding his work nerve centers have not yet been fully clarified.



ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

ΗΘΟΠΟΙΟΙ, ΟΘΟΝΕΣ ΚΑΙ ΕΙΚΟΝΙΚΗ ΠΡΑΓΜΑΤΙΚΟΤΗΤΑ: ΤΟ ΘΕΑΤΡΟ ΤΟΥ PIRANDELLO ΣΤΗ ΣΚΗΝΗ ΤΗΣ ΝΕΑΣ ΧΙΛΙΕΤΙΑΣ

Η παρούσα μελέτη εξετάζει κάποιες από τις τελευταίες παραστάσεις των έργων του Pirandello, του συγγραφέα που με το τρίπρακτο δράμα *Έξι πρόσωπα ζητούν συγγραφέα* (1921) ανανέωσε εκ βάθρων το σύγχρονο ευρωπαϊκό θέατρο. Η νεωτερικότητα του θεάτρου του Pirandello θα αποδειχθεί και από τις παραστάσεις για τις οποίες θα γίνει λόγος, οι οποίες σχολιάζονται με χρονολογική σειρά από τη δεκαετία του 1970 έως και το 2021. Πρόκειται να κατανοηθούν καλύτερα και σε βάθος τα φιλοσοφικά νοήματα για τα οποία διακρίνεται το πιραντελικό θέατρο και στα οποία καταφεύγουν συχνά οι σκηνοθέτες προκειμένου να πλάσουν νέα εργαλεία και θεατρικές φόρμες. Πιο ειδικά, το άρθρο μελετά τις παραστάσεις που κάνουν χρήση video, κινηματογράφου και εν γένει, εικονικής πραγματικότητας για να ερμηνεύσουν τον, επί σκηνής, πιραντελικό κόσμο. Ωστόσο, τα καινοτόμα αυτά θεατρικά εγχειρήματα δεν είναι απολύτως αυτοδύναμα και δεν διαπνέονται από ακραίο μεταμοντερνισμό, εφόσον βασίζονται στα λόγια του ίδιου του Pirandello...



ABSTRACT

ACTORS, SCREENS AND VIRTUAL REALITY: PIRANDELLO'S THEATRE ON THE STAGE OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM

This contribution studies some of the recent staging initiatives of Pirandello's theatre. With *The six characters in search of an author* (1921) this author has completely renovated the European theatre. Pirandello theatre's modernity is such that –as evidenced by the shows studied, which are arranged on a chronology ranging from the 1970s to 2021, to better understand it and to give substance to the philosophical questions that animate it– filmmakers often resort to new tools and languages. The article covers scenes that use screens, television, cinema and virtual reality to interpret Pirandello and stage his creations. However, these experiments are not random since they are based on statements taken from the works of Pirandello himself...

