

Rehabilitating the Spectator. For a Criticism of Participation

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English translation, Neil CHARLTON

Abstract

Throughout the 20th century, some theatre studies have focused on redefining the relations between actor and audience. The studies of anthropology, semiotics, neuroscience, and so many others, have not fully defined a method of profound analysis of these relations, which have swung between passivity and participation, between the creation of a product independent of its reception and the creation of a production in which actors and audience blur their roles. It is necessary to reformulate theatre studies in order to focus on the spectators as an object of analysis, mainly in their bodies' ability to receive communication, in a 21st century full of ambiguous borders in types of productions (we only need to think of "reality shows") and in the control of their production (theatre and political institutions).

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The Theatre Relation and its Enemies

If there is an idea, an acquisition, common to the two main stages of 20th century theatre reform, it is related to the redefinition of theatre performance, of theatre as a whole, in terms of the *actor-spectator relation*. From Meyerhold to Copeau and from Brecht to Artaud until reaching Brook, Grotowski or Barba, we always find, albeit formulated and used differently, this vision of theatre as an actor-spectator relation. But undoubtedly it was Grotowski who better formulated this idea in two well-known pages of *Towards a Poor Theatre* (Grotowski, 1971: 41, 68).

Nous pouvons donc définir le théâtre comme ce qui se passe entre le spectateur et l'acteur. Tout le reste est supplémentaire — peut être nécessaire mais supplémentaire. [...]

Le théâtre est un acte produit par les réactions et les impulsions humaines, par le contact qui s'établit entre les personnes: il est au même temps un acte biologique et un acte spirituel.

It is first worth noting a fundamental aspect: in this conception that 20th century masters produced and tried to implement in their experiences, full dignity is bestowed on the audience or, rather, the theatre spectator *as such*, stressing the active-creative character of the work of reception, which evidently can be good or less good but is, in the end, a *work* and to a certain extent also an *art*. Many theoretical productions, in particular semiological, have rightly confirmed and specified it: we are thinking, for instance, about the work of Anne Ubersfeld, whose book bore the beautiful title of *L'école du spectateur* (Ubersfeld, 1981).

Having acknowledged the key importance of this redefinition of theatre as an actor-spectator relation, which embraces the whole of the last century and that the current artistic generations have received as a legacy, we must immediately add however that from a given moment (the second half

of the 20th century, for instance, with much earlier antecedents) this acquisition was threatened by *two opposed yet concordant drifts* that challenged the spectators *as such* and on some occasions even rejected their legitimacy, the right to exist:

- 1) The first drift is that of the pure and simple *elimination of the spectator*: from the “theatre without spectacle” (that of Artaud or Carmelo Bene, for instance) to the “theatre of sources” and Grotowski’s “art as vehicle”, we have often witnessed the attempt to eliminate the audience once and for all, sometimes ambiguously recovered as a *witness*;
- 2) The second drift, much more insidious than the first, seeks to transform the spectator into a *participant*. This trend can be at the same time distinguished in two versions: *a) a moderate version*, i.e., the theatre of *involvement*, in which the spectator forms a physical part of the show and is often given a role, albeit marginal, and in any case is driven to perform, to do, to improvise, etc. — the new theatre of the 1960s provides the most outstanding examples in this respect: from the productions of Grotowski’s Theatre Laboratory (*Akropolis*, *Faust*, *Kordian*, all of them created between 1962 and 1963) to the shows of the Living Theatre, particularly *Paradise Now*, from 1968, which represents a very advanced point of arrival also from this point of view, and *b) a radical version*: the elimination either of the actors or the audience, who altogether become — without distinction, at least in theory — *participants*: the most extreme example in this respect is that of the Grotowskian “paratheatre” from the 1970s but we can also mention this mainly Italian phenomenon from the same decade called “animation” or “theatre of participation”.

I would like to examine in particular this ideology of participation, which I suggest we call “participationist ideology”, to briefly set up its genealogy and above all to show the degeneration experienced in the last thirty years and some of its perverse effects in theatre with, in the first place, the de-legitimation (discredit, loss of value) of the spectator *as such*.

The Misfortunes of an Ideology (or of a Dogma?)

At first it was Rousseau (even if the participationist ideology dates from much earlier and could be traced back to Plato, the first great enemy of theatre) and his famous *Lettre à d’Alembert sur les spectacles* (1758), in which he suggests replacing the theatre performances with civic festivals (Rousseau, edition 1946: 168):

QUOI! Ne faut-il donc aucun Spectacle dans une République? Au contraire, il en faut beaucoup, C’est dans les Républiques qu’ils sont nés, c’est dans leur sein qu’on les voit briller avec un véritable air de fête. [...] Nous avons déjà plusieurs de ces fêtes publiques, ayons-en davantage encore, j’en serai que plus charmé. Mais n’adoptons point ces spectacles exclusifs qui renferment tristement un petit nombre de gens dans un antre obscur; qui les tiennent craintifs et

immobiles dans le silence et l'inaction; qui n'offrent aux yeux que cloisons, que pointes de fer, que soldats, qu'affligeantes images de la servitude et de l'inégalité. Non, Peuples heureux, ce ne sont pas là vos fêtes.

Once the *pars destruens* is over, Rousseau next moves to the *pars construens*, to this festival that subverts step by step the mistaken communicative model of the theatre performance, transforming the spectators into participants, into actors (Rousseau, edition 1946: 169):

Mais quels seront enfin les objets de ces Spectacles? Qu'y montrera-t-on? Rien, si l'on veut. Avec la liberté, partout où regne l'affluence, le bien-être y regne aussi. Planter au milieu d'une place un piquet couronné de fleurs, rassemblez-y le peuple et vous aurez une fête. Faites mieux encore: donnez les spectateurs en spectacle; rendez-les acteurs eux-mêmes; faites que chacun se voie et s'aime dans les autres, afin que tous en soient mieux unis.

What seems particularly interesting in the *Lettre à d'Alembert* is that the criticism of theatre depends much less on the *contents* of the shows (as in the former ecclesiastical controversy) than on the *form of communication*. It is here where the real harm lies, the real corruption of theatre: on the division between actors and spectators (and between spectators themselves), on the passivity and inactivity of the latter, which it exposes as helpless to the seductive manipulations of the former — as the Jansenists, such as Pierre Nicole in the *Traité de la Comédie* from 1667, had already pointed out.

Being a spectator is, therefore, bad in itself; the good spectator cannot exist. Good spectators are those who reject themselves and become something else, participants, actors, at least in the self-performance of a festival without content other than its participants.

However, all the traps and poisons of the participationist ideology can be found in Rousseau. It lacked a favourable situation to enable it to emerge and cause all its effects, as has happened in the last thirty-four years of our era. Thus, from Rousseau to contemporary reality shows, are we possibly experiencing Andy Warhol and his prophecy of the fifteen minutes of fame at the disposal of all? Perhaps it would be too much, even for the Geneva philosopher, and yet...

In any case, we had to wait four centuries and for the emergence of protest movements in the 1960s, and more specifically May 1968, to see how accusations were hurled against the spectators and their apparent passivity. I am referring of course to the famous pamphlet by Guy Debord *La société du spectacle*, which indeed anticipates the May 1968 events given that it was published the previous year. In this text, born within this Situationist International that embodied the most ideologically radical and intransigent component of this event, the status of the spectator as an emblem or, rather, as embodiment of passivity, ascends to the rank of the individual in the contemporary capitalist society and therefore a norm of operation in the current world. Let us read some passages (Debord, 1967):¹

1. Quotations retrieved from the electronic edition by Yves Le Bail, based on the third Gallimard edition (1992), within the framework of the collection "Classiques des sciences sociales". <<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1522/cla.deg.soc>>.

Toute la vie des sociétés dans lesquelles règnent les conditions modernes de production s'annonce come une immense accumulation de *spectacles*. Tout ce qui était directement vécu s'est éloigné dans une représentation (I, 10).

Le spectacle n'est pas un ensemble d'images, mais un rapport social entre les personnes, médiatisé par des images (IV, 10).

Il [le spectacle] est le cœur de l'irréalisme de la société réelle (VI, 11).

Considéré selon ses propres termes, le spectacle est l'*affirmation* de l'apparence et l'affirmation de toute vie humaine, c'est-à-dire sociale, comme simple apparence (X, 12).

Le caractère fondamentalement tautologique du spectacle découle du simple fait que ses moyens son en même temps son but. Il est le soleil qui ne couche jamais sur l'empire de la passivité moderne (XIII, 13).

Mais le spectacle n'est pas identifiable au simple regard, même combiné à l'écoute. Il est ce qui échappe à l'activité des hommes, à la reconsidération et à la correction de leur œuvre. Il est le contraire du dialogue (XVIII, 15).

C'est la plus vieille spécialisation sociale, la spécialisation du pouvoir, qui est à la racine du spectacle. Le spectacle est ainsi une activité spécialisée qui parle pour l'ensembles des autres. C'est la représentation diplomatique de la société hiérarchique devant elle-même, où toute autre parole est bannie (XXIII, 17).

La séparation est l'alpha et l'oméga du spectacle (XXV, 18).

Dans le spectacle, une partie du monde *se représente* devant le monde, et lui est supérieure. Le spectacle n'est que le langage commun de cette séparation. Ce qui relie les spectateurs n'est qu'un rapport irréversible au centre même qui maintient leur isolement. Le spectacle réunit le séparé, mais il le réunit *en tant que séparé* (XXIX, 20).

Separation, inequality, passivity, lack of authenticity. It is surprising to see how Debord's analysis is much closer point by point to Rousseau's.

Faced with *La société du spectacle* by Debord, and the *Commentaires* he added twenty years later (Debord, 1988), at least two stances seem possible. A first stance is, for instance, that of the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, who, in 1990, proposed considering these two books as prophecies (or rather forecasts or diagnoses), whose accuracy has been validated by successive world events (Agamben, n. d. [ma 1990]: 240-241). A second stance, which interests us more here, is that which considers the 1967 pamphlet as the formidable pretext, or the theoretical justification, if you like, for the production of an ideology, that of participation, which prevailed during the following decades in the most advanced, innovative and progressive sectors of western politics, the economy, culture and art.

Participation in all fields, at all levels and at any price, becomes the motto in the post-May 68 decades (without any direct responsibility by Debord, we should stress: he never considered the possibility of actually overcoming this state of things that he had called "society of the spectacle"). The passivity of the spectator or, rather, the status of the passive spectator, thus becomes the evil and the mistake par excellence, the cause of all the evils that afflict the

contemporary world, based on the division of roles, delegation, professional specialisation, exclusive skills... in a few words: a knowledge that is power (Foucault).

However, certainly it is not about rejecting the importance of so many positive outcomes produced by this participationist ideology in countless fields, from politics to social life or artistic practices. I do not share the stances that make a negative undifferentiated summary judgement in this respect.

Nevertheless, after half a century of participationist ideology, two critical considerations prevail.

In the first place, it is necessary to note how all this participationist frenzy has not managed to dismantle the public and private system prevailing at all levels and in all fields: from politics to the economy, from culture to art. From this point of view, it is difficult to refute the fundamental accuracy of apocalyptic analyses and forecasts such as that of Debord (or Pasolini, in Italy). So many years of decentralisations, privatisations, self-managements, etc., have caused very limited effects from the point of view of a *real* democratisation and a real involvement of people in the management of the political, economic, social and cultural processes (we should now add the big mistake of the network: the 5 Stars Movement in Italy).

What has been produced, in general, is rather an *illusion* of democracy, a *sham* of participation that has never changed the actual state of things in depth. Or at least, not in my view.

In contrast, unfortunately, the participationist ideology has caused — far *beyond* the aims of its promoters and even against these aims — many *negative effects* that have been very visible for some years.

The criticism of passivity and separation has often been transformed — as I said before — into a depreciation of the skills, professionalism, specialisation and talent, into the dissemination of the pernicious idea, in its more general effects, that everyone can do everything, that it suffices to wish it or have the opportunity to do it: in the society of the spectacle everyone can become an actor, artist, protagonist, celebrity (and not only for the fifteen minutes of Warhol's prophecy) provided they are able to leave aside any kind of shame.

The postmodernist form of the society of the spectacle is that of the society of reality shows and the social networks, in which — in contrast to the former, theorised by the French philosopher — there are no longer spectators but only actors. It is the grotesque, derisory, realisation of the Marxist utopia: if Marx and Engels wrote in *The German Ideology* (1846) that “in a communist society there are no painters but men who, among other things, paint” (Marx and Engels, translation 1971: 230), it could be argued that in the society of the reality shows and of the social networks there are no longer politicians, intellectuals, artists, poets, musicians or actors but people who, among other things, do politics, paint and sculpt, play music, write poems or perform.

However, we could discuss the causes of all this at length: we could say, for instance, that it is a degeneration or a denaturalisation of the real ideology of participation or we could suspect, on the contrary, that these poisoned fruits had already been there, at least potentially, since the origin.

It is a current debate in Italy, where many contributions have appeared that try to find in the period of May 1968, in its slogans and proposals (based on the best known: “all power to the imagination”), the distant yet effective roots of the political-media system that has prevailed in Italy for no less than twenty years, and that could be summarised in the name of Berlusconi (Periola, 2011; Magrelli, 2011; Ferraris, 2012).

Everybody Is an Actor! The Shame of Being (Mere) Spectators

However, to examine our topic in depth, it is indeed in the field of theatre where the participationist ideology has caused more damage. And rightly so, given that theatre is the artistic medium more exposed from the outset to the temptations and the risks of wild amateurism and spontaneity, the medium in which technique, skills and even talent have very often been regarded with suspicion.

Nevertheless, once again we need to clarify some aspects. I do not intend to challenge the importance of so many experiences undertaken in theatre since at least the 1970s in the name (or under the sign) of participation and overcoming of the spectator’s passivity, above all those by the masters, i.e. the leaders of the second major stage of reform of contemporary theatre. They are, moreover, experiences and proposals that extremely differ from each other: they include – to limit myself to the aforementioned names – the very Italian phenomenon of “animation”, or “theatre of participation”, with a big original and highly valuable pioneer such as Giuliano Scabia; Grotowski’s “paratheatre” experiments and his Teatr Laboratorium, with the underlying notion of “active culture”; Peter Brook’s anthropological research after his legendary trip to Africa in the years 1972-1973; the expeditions and stays almost everywhere of Eugenio Barba’s Odin Teatret with his proposal of *exchange* as a means to renew and intensify the actor-spectator relation in abnormal situations and territories, sometimes exceptional and in any case outside the theatre institution (and we should recall once again the Living Theatre, Richard Schechner and his experiments with the Performance Group in the period of *Dionysus in '69*, Augusto Boal, the Pole theatre association Gardzienice, and many others).

In particular, I would like to focus for a moment on some experiences by Giuliano Scabia, truly revolutionary in his time, such as the experiment of decentralisation (the first conducted in Italy) led by Scabia and his team in the worker’s neighbourhoods of FIAT in Turin during the famous “hot autumn”, between 1969 and 1970, with the residents of these areas encouraged to participate in an immense attempt at collective dramaturgy, which lasted for months and suffered all the social and political tensions of the period, and therefore ran the risk of escaping the control of the municipal institutions (theatrical and political) that had organised it. A recent book by Stefano Casi explains this extraordinary adventure (Casi, 2012). And in a classic book, recently republished (*Marco Cavallo*), we find the account of another pioneering experience by Scabia, undertaken in a mental institution in Trieste, led by Franco Basaglia, the father of Law 180, which abolished asylums

in Italy (Scabia, 1976; Scabia, edition 2011). It was in the months between 1972 and 1973 and was the first proposal of theatre activity, in the broad sense of the term, in a global institution, at least in Italy. Some years later the Living Theatre entered a prison for the first time, in Volterra...

When the book on the experience in Trieste was published in 1976, the most outstanding or, at least most renowned, Italian intellectual (Umberto Eco) published in the most important newspaper in Italy (*Corriere della Sera*) an article that was a kind of recognition (Eco, 1977). And today this article, reprinted in the new edition of *Marco Cavallo* (Scabia, 2011: 219-222), seems to validate what I call the participationist ideology. Driven by an enthusiasm quite unusual in him, Eco asked himself (Scabia, 2011: 222):

How could the exercise of [*inventive*] creation and play become a matter for specialists (also considered a little crazy) to which the wise are only admitted as passive listeners? How can an artist who believes in what he does still adapt to producing objects that others will look at without knowing how they were born, instead of delving into situations of participation in which the others learn to make the objects with him or her?

However, the poison of the participationist ideology as a spread ideology, as common sense I would say, began to work slowly and in depth from the 1970s, as an involuntary side effect or repercussion in most cases of the big experience of theatre of participation but also of a mass phenomenon (at least in Italy) as “group theatre”, internationally better known as the “third theatre” (Barba) (Giacchè, 1991). But it was only later, let’s say from the 1980s, that this poison began to fully reveal its negative consequences, which, put briefly, could be summarised as follows: exponential increase of the range of actors, candidates to be actors or who see themselves as such, and de-legitimisation of the mere spectator, that is of “seeing theatre”, understood forever more as a second option, as a solution of replacement in relation to “doing theatre”. Everybody is an actor? Not exactly; this would be impossible. As Piergiorgio Giacchè, one of the experts of this phenomenon in Italy, has explained very well, we rather become *consumers*, not of shows anymore, or in any case not so much, but of “theatre activity”. In an article from 1999 Giacchè points out (49-50):

The fact is that from that moment [late 1960s-early 1970s], clearly and irreversibly, theatre began to be proposed to the audience — or rather to consumers — as [the] “stage of performance” rather than the “place of seeing”, also because the many revolutions of the stage had already put into crisis and smashed the previous rigid separation between the passivity of the audience and the activity of the artists. [...] Only the fact of “doing theatre as consumption” can explain the quantitative disproportion between the dissemination of the range of “doing theatre” and the weakness of the demand for “seeing theatre”.

And in a more recent reflection on Italian “animation” (2011: 51):

Indeed — as everybody knows — with the years and because of the effects of the first animation, “doing theatre” has become more widespread and more important than “seeing theatre”, and this change has fed many spectators and re-educated many others.

However, we must admit that the loss of value of *seeing* to the exclusive benefit of *doing* is one of the distinctive features of our times. *Doing* (unfortunately without other nuances: ability, talent, skills, study, etc.) is considered the only possibility of leaving — although as an illusion and for little time in most cases — anonymity, invisibility, which is — apparently — the only certain shame of the contemporary individual (Belpoliti, 2012; Turnaturi, 2012). And therefore it is not so surprising that theatre, and more generally performance, has suffered more than other artistic fields this frantic need for doing, performing, expressing oneself, even creating, in any case, for leaving invisibility. In the end, are not we all actors in life? Do not we always perform everywhere? Why would it not be possible do it on the stage (theatre, cinema, television and today also Internet) and thus leave anonymity?

Rehabilitating the Spectator

I therefore find it absolutely necessary to start rehabilitating the spectator, beyond the dogma of participation and the misunderstandings about their supposed passivity.

Let's put it plainly: the spectator is not a failed actor, and therefore frustrated, someone who is not capable of reaching the audience (just as the reader is not a failed writer, or the listener to music a failed musician). Spectators — let's return to the acquisitions of 20th century masters mentioned at the start of the article — are, together with the other essential component of theatre as a relationship, the other leading characters of the theatre event. And in their role there is nothing, a priori, of the shameful laziness and inactivity that too often have been assigned to them, as a pretext to transform them into something different: participants, witnesses, judges, and so on. As I said before, we can speak, and in fact we have spoken, of *work* and even of *art* to qualify what the theatre spectator does, feels and understands as such.

Although it is true that today, for several reasons, the art of the theatre actor seems threatened, in danger, we should add that the art of the spectator is also under threat and in danger of extinction. We would need both good spectators and good actors. But to achieve this, it is essential to first rehabilitate the spectator and the fact of “seeing theatre”.

Continuing in Italy, a master of theatre like the actor and director Leo de Berardinis, who died in 2008 after a long illness, was one of those who most insisted on the essential contribution that an undifferentiated audience makes to any serious attempt to enable a theatre that is not just performance and show but also event (De Berardinis, 2000: 56):

The theatre event — explained De Berardinis in 1995 — is a process that develops in a real space-time in which everybody is a participant, both actors and spectators.

Behind these words there is the noble and old idea (original, perhaps) of theatre conceived as a “means of knowledge”, a “cultivated technique of meeting”,

a “primordial art of collective knowledge, of horror and the joy of being” (De Berardinis, 2000: 59). From this perspective, the audience, or rather the spectator, cannot be — once again according to De Berardinis’ words — “the other essential pole so that theatre takes place, is produced” (1999: 153). But this involves — our director explains — a clear distinction of the roles, in which the actor plays the role of actor and the spectator plays the role of spectator. “It is possible to express oneself even by listening,” he liked to repeat;² and it is very wise advice that we should meditate on in depth in an era like ours, dominated — as we have just seen — by confusing manias of leadership, by anomalous and manipulated forms of aesthetic subjectivity, by this will to participate at all costs, in the spirit that “everybody is an actor, everybody is an artist.” Let’s again listen to De Berardinis (2000: 58):

Unfortunately, in the name of a vague desire to express oneself, common to all men, we have confused spontaneity, which can be reached through study and rigour, with spontaneism, with what is regarded as natural, quotidian, and false originality: on the contrary, we become spontaneous when we are no longer ignorant of the scenic knowledge. [...] [Because of] a wrong concept of democracy, we have confused the right to express ourselves with the duty to know how to express ourselves. We will need democrats in life and aristocrats in art, as Arturo Toscanini used to say.

The right to express oneself is a sacred and democratic right that can be exercised in different ways in life without the need to go on the stage. If we really feel the need to express ourselves artistically and, in particular, theatrically, then we should get rid of vanity and personalism [individualism, narcissism] to be in keeping with the artist: we can express ourselves even by listening.

Anyone can do theatre but to go on the stage you need vocation and ability, because it is necessary to relate to the strength of a whole group.

“We can express ourselves even by listening.” Let’s explain this: we can express ourselves even as spectators, by looking at a show. Why has the undeniable truth of such statements been forgotten or asserted?

Going to the root of the question, everything seems to depend on the indestructible prejudice that unites spectator and passivity, which even identifies them, making one a synonym of the other. Decades of theatre theory, and in particular of semiotics of theatre, have not managed to put into crisis the commonplace that sees in the reception of the theatre spectator just a more or less mechanical reflection of the purposes of the actors of the performance and, consequently, imagines that, for this reception to be autonomous, active and creative, it must be somehow rejected and transformed into something completely different: participation, etc.

2. And today Marco Martinelli seems to respond to him when, in a recent poetic-political text, *Canzone dei luoghi comuni* [Songs of Commonplaces], praises the “art of listening”: “The kingdom of the surprising and difficult art, / the hardest to find in the market / the most avant-garde of all / like those that call themselves avant-garde / who exhibit themselves everywhere / the diligent publicists of everything that is new and in vogue / these make fun of it / of such a courageous and sacred art / the art of listening / the art by which the ears / are never too big. / This art is the secret of any art / [...]” (*Passione e ideologia. Il teatro (è) politico*, edited by Elena Di Gioia and Stefano Casi, e-book published Teatri di Vita, in print at Editoria&Spettacolo, Rome).

From this point of view, we must celebrate the publication, some years ago, of the book by Jacques Rancière *Le spectateur émancipé* (2008), which indeed rehabilitates the common, simple, anonymous spectator, by briefly reviewing the history of this judgement that he calls “la paradoxe du spectateur” (Rancière, 2008: 10):

Ce paradoxe est simple à formuler; il n’y a pas de théâtre sans spectateur [...]. Or, disent les accusateurs, c’est un mal que d’être spectateur, pour deux raisons. Premièrement regarder est le contraire de connaître. Le spectateur se tient en face d’une apparence en ignorant le processus de production de cette apparence ou la réalité qu’elle recouvre. Deuxièmement, c’est le contraire d’agir. La spectatrice demeure immobile à sa place, passive. Être spectateur, c’est être séparé tout à la fois de la capacité de connaître et du pouvoir d’agir.

Ruinous consequences of this paradox, according to Rancière (2008: 10):

Il faut un théâtre sans spectateurs, où les assistants apprennent au lieu d’être séduits par des images, où il deviennent des participants actifs au lieu d’être des voyeurs passifs.

This means, moreover, that the major reforming proposals of the 20th century — according to these words — “ont prétendu transformer le théâtre à partir du diagnostic qui conduisait à sa suppression” (Rancière, 2008: 11).

By briefly reviewing the history of this spectator’s paradox, Rancière stresses the fundamental point, the prejudice of the passivity of looking and the distance (between actor and spectator) as an evil that that must be abolished. But, he argues, “la distance n’est pas un mal à abolir, c’est la condition normale de toute communication” (Rancière, 2008: 16). And concerning the supposed passivity of looking, he asks himself (2008: 18):

Qu’est-ce qui permet de déclarer inactif le spectateur assis à sa place, sinon l’opposition radicale préalablement posée entre l’actif et le passif? Pourquoi identifier regard et passivité, sinon par la présupposition que regarder veut dire se complaire à l’image et à l’apparence en ignorant la vérité qui est derrière l’image et la réalité à l’extérieur du théâtre? Pourquoi assimiler écoute et passivité sinon par le préjugé que la parole est le contraire de l’action?

It is by questioning all the conceptual apparatus of what I call here participationist ideology that Rancière can achieve the spectator’s emancipation (2008: 19):

L’émancipation, elle, commence quand on remet en question l’opposition entre regarder et agir, quand on comprend que les évidences qui structurent ainsi les rapports du dire, du voir et du faire appartiennent elles-mêmes à la structure de la domination et de la sujétion. Elle commence quand on comprend que regarder est aussi une action qui confirme ou transforme cette distribution des positions. Le spectateur aussi agit, comme l’élève ou le savant. Il observe, il

sélectionne, il compare, il interprète. Il lie ce qu'il voit à bien d'autres choses qu'il a vues sur d'autres scènes, en d'autres sortes de lieux. Il compose son propre poème avec les éléments du poème en face de lui. Elle participe à la performance en la refaisant à sa manière, en se dérobant par exemple à l'énergie vitale que celle-ci est censée transmettre pour en faire une pure image et associer cette pure image à une histoire qu'elle a lue ou rêvée, vécue ou inventée. Ils sont à la fois ainsi des spectateurs distants et des interprètes actifs du spectacle qui est leur proposé.

C'est là le point essentiel: les spectateurs voient, ressentent et comprennent quelque chose pour autant qu'ils composent leur propre poème, comme le font à leur manière acteurs ou dramaturges, metteurs en scène ou performers.

Fully accepting it means placing oneself outside this logic of supposed stupefying equality between cause and effect, according to which "[the artist] suppose toujours que ce qui sera perçu, senti, compris, est ce qu'il a mis dans sa dramaturgie ou sa performance." Accepting this involves, without confusing them, "deux distances bien différentes" (Rancière, 2008: 20):

Il y a la distance entre l'artiste et le spectateur, mais il y a aussi la distance inhérente à la performance elle-même, en tant qu'elle se tient, comme un spectacle, une chose autonome, entre l'idée de l'artiste et la sensation ou compréhension du spectateur.

To conclude, here is Rancière's idea of performance as a "third thing" (2008: 21):

Elle [the performance] n'est pas la transmission du savoir ou du souffle de l'artiste au spectateur. Elle est cette troisième chose dont aucun n'est propriétaire, dont aucun ne possède le sens, qui se tient entre eux, écartant toute transmission à l'identique, toute identité de la cause et de l'effet.

All this, it should be stressed, is not completely new. They are things that theatre theory, in particular semiology, had attempted to say on several occasions at least from the 1980s. In any case, it is very well said (although I do not share everything) and we can base ourselves again on these words by Rancière to reassign to the spectators the place that corresponds to them as such: mere spectator, any spectator, anonymous (Sacchi, 2009 [ma 2012]: 91-92; Sacchi [n. d.]).

Some of the most beautiful praise of the spectator is by Romeo Castellucci (Sacchi, 2009 [ma 2012]: 129):

The *involvement* of the spectator... is already in itself a horrible word. Involving presupposes that the spectator is outside. That he is already outside. I don't need to involve him; he is everything, everything is in him. What remains of a show is what someone has felt in front of him, how it resonates in himself, how he has experienced it, how it has transformed him. It is the spectator, with his person, that gives life to the unanimated things he has just seen, listened to or felt. It falls on him, on the spectator, to give them life.

To Conclude: Studying the Spectator

To conclude, I would like to refer to the possibility of *studying* the spectator and in particular the actor-spectator relation, which for some time I have simply called the theatre relation.

Despite the extensive interdisciplinary bibliography on this subject, from the 1970s, we have the impression that the spectator continues to escape any attempt to turn him into a theoretical object and study him scientifically.

Having said this, I confess that I do not share these stances that currently try to propose again, once revised and corrected, the old and somewhat mystical idea of the spectator's experience as something totally ephemeral and ineffable, linked to a completely irrecoverable moment, lost forever by those who have experienced it, because later they could only speak as witnesses and therefore only through the inevitably falsifying intermediary of (their) memory (Pustianaz, 2011).

However, we need to make a distinction. The fact that the theatre event, and therefore also the actor-spectator relation that is its core if not its essence, is in itself unrecoverable, lost forever despite the possible documents and testimonies, is very evident and therefore banal. But this fact does not at all impede being able to study this phenomenon and, consequently, the theatre relation that it constitutes and that constitutes it, thanks to the historical, socio-cultural, anthropological coordinates, and of many other kinds, in which it takes part and thanks to the *presuppositions* of this event (by the spectator: expectations, habits, skills, socio-cultural composition, motivations, etc., everything that I have defined on other occasions as a "system of previous receptive conditions") and thanks to its *consequences* or *effects* in the short, medium and long term. Studying the presuppositions and the consequences of a theatre event, i.e. the *past* and *future* of the actor-spectator relation, also enables us to approach its *present*, and therefore the theatre experience itself, and address it in any way, although always in an asymptotic way so to speak (De Marinis, 55-56; –1985: 5-20; –1987a: 100-114; –1987b: 57-74; –1989: 173-192).

It is in this sense that the new theatrology has for some time made the actor-spectator relation its fundamental theoretical object. But it is possible to argue that this relation is a real test bench for what I call today an embodied theatrology, that is a theatrology in which the body of the researchers, and therefore their subjectivity, is somehow put at stake.

Indeed, from now on it may seem banal to state that the theatre relation puts at stake both the body and the spirit no less than the thought and feelings and the nerves as much as the imagination or the emotions, both concerning the actor and the performer. It may be argued that theatre people have always known this, but theatre theory and teatrologists have come to it more recently.

It was not until during the 20th century that the theatre theory began to fully and explicitly accept within it the body dimension of the theatre experience, of both sides of the stage, beyond the disembodied, logocentric and cultural paradigms in which it had been confined since Aristotle.

Moreover, the delay that teatrology experienced when assuming the body and corporeity in its theoretical discourse must be put in relation with the delay and the difficulties that human sciences, including semiotics, linguistics and anthropology, have reported in relation to the body and corporeity for a long time.

When I speak of delay and of difficulties I am not referring only to the body as an object but I rather think of the body as an *agent-patient subject* (to quote Greimas) or, rather, I think of the body as a constitutive dimension of any cultural and social phenomenon.

Of course, now the situation has deeply changed and sometimes we could have the impression that excessive emphasis is placed on the issues of body, from biopolitics to neuroaesthetics. In any case, notions such as body-mind, embodiment, corporate knowledge, embodied knowledge, somatic societies, and so on, show that the body has become a real protagonist in the theoretical discourse of human and social sciences.

It has been particularly important to be aware that the spectators — no less than the actors — are also endowed with a body as well as a mind and encyclopaedic and intertextual skills, and that it is *with* their body and *within* their body that they experience the show; in other words, that they perceive it, live it, understand it and respond to it in an affective and intellectual way (we might speak, perhaps, of “body techniques”, in the sense of Marcel Mauss, both for the real work and for the accomplished theatre spectator as such).

In any case, here we also find ourselves faced with a truth known forever by theatre people but which teatrology has realised quite late, only in the second half of the 20th century, thanks above all to the experiments of the New Theatre (Living Theatre, Grotowski, Brook, Odin Teatret, Open Theatre, Performance Group, etc.) and to the contributions of human sciences, including semiotics, of course, and life sciences.

With respect to life sciences, and neurosciences in particular, their contribution has proven to be valuable to research the biological bases of the actor-spectator relation, for instance what in the 1980s was the “preperformance” of the theatre spectator, a state corresponding to the pre-expressive state of the actor theorised by Barba’s theatre anthropology.³

Bearing in mind what I have set out so far, it becomes clear that we have the possibility of rethinking in depth the theatre relation and the experience of the spectator, rehabilitating, for instance, these “preinterpretative reactions” (proposed during the 1980s in the scientific medium of theatre anthropology), which theatre semiotics had dealt with earlier in an overly

3. Cf. Gabriele Sofia's doctoral thesis, *La relazione attore-spettatore. Storia, ipotesi e sperimentazioni per lo studio del livello neurobiologico*. Rome, Università di Roma 1 La Sapienza, 2011; and also the volumes of the proceedings of the three conferences organised in Rome by Clelia Falletti and Gabriele Sofia on the dialogue between theatre and neurosciences: *Dialoghi tra teatro e neuroscienze*. Rome: Edizioni Alegre, 2010; *Nuovi dialoghi tra teatro e neuroscienze*, edited by C. Falletti and G. Sofia. Rome: Editoria & Spettacolo, 2011; *Prospettive su teatro e neuroscienze. Dialoghi e sperimentazioni*, edited by C. Falletti and G. Sofia. Rome: Bulzoni, 2012. For the notion of “preinterpretative of the spectator”, cf. Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese: *L'arte segreta dell'attore. Un dizionario di antropologia teatrale*. Bari: Edizioni di Pagina, 2011, p. 210 [consulted in the French edition: *L'énergie qui danse. L'art secret de l'acteur*. Montpellier: L'Entretemps, 2008].

efficient way, perhaps;⁴ or by incorporating in the competence of the spectator a “motor heritage”⁵ on which the entity of the activation of mirror neurons in a spectator faced with specialised performative actions (mime, dance, etc.) would depend and therefore also the “motor comprehension” itself of these performances.

For instance, we can easily suppose that a classical dancer, faced with a classical dance performance, will be capable of producing a better motor comprehension and, by far, compared with a spectator deprived or almost deprived of the practices in this respect. And the same discourse would serve, of course, for a modern dancer faced with a modern dance performance. But are we really sure that a better motor comprehension always guarantee a better intellectual understanding and a stronger emotional and emphatic reaction?

Certainly, it would be necessary to avoid moving from a determinism (cognitive, semiotic, logocentric) to another (biological or neurobiological). But there is no doubt that it is now necessary to rethink in depth the models of competence of the spectator available and leave more room for the body, for instance for this motor heritage I have mentioned, in this “theatre system of receptive preconditions” that I had previously proposed (De Marinis, 2008: 55-56).⁶

In any case, it is clear that the benefits in teatrology of the findings summarised in the brief preceding glossary might be very notable. We can think, from now on, of an embodied teatrology, in which the body of the researchers, and therefore subjectivity, is somehow put at stake.

Also for teatrologists the time has come to seriously face what the American David Chalmers has defined as “the hard problem” of consciousness studies (“the really hard problem of consciousness is the problem of experience”) and that Gabriele Sofia sought to transfer to the field of theatre studies. “Both in the theatre and in the neuroscience laboratories, scientific analysis cannot exclude the subject. The real problem is *how* to integrate it.”⁷



4. As for me, in my book *Capire il teatro*, cit., in particular in the chapter “Antropologia”, p. 189-196. See also, Clelia Falletti, *Lo spazio d'azione condiviso*, in *Dialoghi tra teatro e neuroscienze*, cit., p. 23, according to her “the actor's pre-expression corresponds to the spectator's pre-reflection, ‘that way of understanding which, before any conceptual and linguistic mediation, gives shape to our experience of others’” (the sentence between commas comes from G. Rizzolatti and C. Sinigaglia, *So quel che fai. Il cervello che agisce e i neuroni specchio*. Milan: Cortina Editore, 2006).

5. I am referring here to a proposal anticipated by Elodie Verlinden during her presentation in the last conference held in Brussels. By the same author, see also *Danser avec soi, dans Performance et savoirs*, cit., p. 157-169.

6. See De Marinis 1985, 1987a, 1987b i 1989.

7. Gabriele SOFIA. “Ritmo e intenzione scenica. Ipotesi su teatro e neurofenomenologia”. In: *Nuovi dialoghi tra teatro e neuroscienze*. Rome: Editoria & Spettacolo, 2011, p. 83.

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