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Ten Years of Short Theatre. Rome and Its 'Short' Festival

Abstract

This article focuses on the analysis of a ten-year old festival of performing arts called *Short Theatre* which has been organized in Rome since 2006. Initially hosted at the India Theatre and later on at *La Pelanda*, *Short Theatre* represents one of the most topical and up-to-date Italian occasions to explore and celebrate contemporary international experimental theatre. Moving from the investigation of the festival's own constituting idea, its main characteristics and locations, the meaning of its title, *Short Theatre*, is investigated in relation to the types of performances staged during the many editions of the festival. In the last part of this essay, two shows performed at *Short Theatre* in 2013 are analysed in detail as significant examples of short theatre: *Pentesilea* [*Penthesilea*], produced by Lenz Rifrazioni, and *La semplicità ingannata* [*Simplicity Deceived*] starring Marta Cuscunà. These two shows have not been chosen for being substantially 'better' than others, but because they efficaciously, clearly, and even emblematically exemplify the Festival's characteristics as illustrated in this analysis.

1.

There is a famous quarter in Rome called Testaccio, known to have developed close to a mound of many thousands of *cocci* (*testae* in Latin), fragments of amphorae that used to contain grains, oil or other liquid fit for human consumption. Amidst its busy roads, not so distant from the river Tiber, there stands a huge fascinating construction built by Gioacchino Ersoch between 1888 and 1891 as a slaughterhouse, which was in use from the late nineteenth century until 1975.¹ Nowadays, after an important restoration, it is an example of industrial archaeology that houses several institutions: a branch of the University of Roma 3 (Department

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¹ See http://www.museomacro.org/macro_testaccio/macro_testaccio (last access 21 July 2015).

of Architecture), one of the two locations of the *MACRO – Museo d'Arte Contemporanea di Roma* [Museum of Contemporary Art of Rome] and other various Associations specifically intended to encourage and disseminate interest in and appreciation for culture and contemporary art.

Within the cultural reality of Rome, the *MACRO* manages to have an international physiognomy, though maintaining its civic identity and reinforcing the participation and relationship with the community in all its artistic, cultural, and intellectual fields. Among the various projects handled by the *MACRO* today there is also the management of *La Pelanda*, a centre of cultural productions, educational activities and workshops, originally conceived by the association *Zoneattive*.² The site where the centre operates covers an area of 5,000 square metres in the ex-slaughterhouse and includes the same structures once used both for the *pelanda dei suini* [skinning of pigs] and as water tanks. Following restoration, the main part of the structure now consists of a large nave with a truncated cone smokestack, some metallic equipment and many large windows to enhance the volume and perspective of the place. The nave is surrounded by five areas. In addition, space was created for two theatre halls, a rehearsal room, a recording studio, a control and directing room, a two-storey apartment, a kitchen area, some dressing rooms and toilets. The entire architectural complex was imagined as a modular system, fully accessible to the public and meant to become an innovative performing space, flexible enough to stage different kinds of events.

Since 2010 *La Pelanda* (together with the India Theatre) has been one of the most spectacular and intriguing venues and it is where *Short Theatre* has mainly been held so far. *Short Theatre* is a recurring festival, now in its tenth edition, usually organized in Rome during the first weeks of September (at least from the third edition onwards).³ This event was conceived by AREA06 (a multidisciplinary corporate association of artists and operators whose aim is to produce cultural activities based on the interrelation of

² See http://www.museomacro.org/macro_testaccio/la_pelanda_centro_di_produzione_culturale (last access 21 July 2015).

³ The first two editions of *Short Theatre* took place during the last decade of June in 2006 and 2007, whereas the third edition was held at the beginning of September 2008 (see Di Giammarco 9 June 2006; De Sanctis 9 June 2006; Di Giammarco 9 June 2007; Di Giammarco 18 June 2007; De Sanctis 9 June 2007; Di Giammarco 3 September 2008; Di Giammarco 12 September 2008; [Editorial Staff] 5 September 2008). From September 2010, the newly opened space of *La Pelanda* became one of the official sites of the festival (see R.C. 3 September 2010 and [Editorial Staff] 8 September 2010). The tenth edition took place from 3 to 13 September 2015 (for further information see <http://www.shorttheatre.org/>, last access 25 September 2015).

artistic languages)⁴ and *Accademia degli Artefatti* (a Roman theatre company active since the early 1990s).⁵ After organizing and financing it for the first two years,⁶ from the third edition on the institution *Teatro di Roma* [*Theatre of Rome*]⁷ has been a fundamental partner for this exhibition, together with *MACRO-Testaccio* (from the fifth edition on) and other associations. Since its inception, Fabrizio Arcuri has been the Art Director of this fascinating project,⁸ financially supported by the Regione Lazio, the District and the City of Rome, and, in turn, many other different institutions over the years.

Since in the last decades many scholars – like, for instance, Paolo Ruffini and Silvia Mei – have already offered an exhaustive and broad analysis of short forms in the Italian contemporary theatrical panorama, my analysis will not include a general overview of the Italian spectacular context⁹ – to which both Rome *Short Theatre* Festival and other similar initiatives promoted by Fabrizio Arcuri (see, for instance, Turin *Anteprima* festival)¹⁰ belong. I will indeed specifically investigate the only festival that, starting from its very title, programmatically claims to provide its audience with a selection of short dramas and spectacles.

From its very beginning in June 2006, *Short Theatre* has been something more than usual festivals or exhibition of contemporary theatre. It is a sort of non-stop ensemble of theatre and dance performances (sometimes at their debut, sometimes already staged somewhere else), conferences, workshops, deejay sets, vee-jay sets, concerts, art installations and public conversations, increasing and developing their mutual interactions over the years.¹¹ As can be read in the programmes of the different editions,

⁴ AREA06 was founded in 2001. In the course of fifteen years, the association has conceived and arranged at its best a very specific, innovative and nationally recognised way to organize and produce cultural events (see <http://www.jobssoul.it/SoulWeb/schedaAzienda.action?idAzienda=C1D417BC-334F-424C-93DE-3B345B-F1A313&modale=true>, last access 25 July 2015).

⁵ See <http://www.artefatti.org/ita/index.html> (last access 25 July 2015).

⁶ At the end of April 2008, the city of Rome had a new Mayor and due to the widespread economic crisis many cultural project received less funding than expected. Consequently the programme of *Short Theatre* was reduced from twelve to eight days of performances (Del Fra 5 September 2008). The following year the reduction was even worse: only three days of performances focused mainly on local groups of theatrical avant-garde (Di Giammarco 13 September 2009).

⁷ See <http://www.teatrodiroma.net/> (last access 25 July 2015).

⁸ For further information on his activities, see <http://www.artefatti.org/ita/biografia/2/componenti-compagnia.html> (last access 25 July 2015).

⁹ See on this at least Ruffini 2005; Mei 2012.

¹⁰ See Arcuri 2011; Arcuri and Godino 2011.

¹¹ See Di Giammarco 9 June 2006; Di Giammarco 31 August 2011; Bandettini 2

every year, in a special place and at a specific moment in time, artists of different practices, spectators and operators coming from various parts of the world get together not only to see the many new shows, or to perform them, but also to compare and discuss their ideas on Art, Contemporary Theatre and Performance. It is a very particular meeting place, a sort of 'Arts agora'.

Although in recent editions *La Pelanda* has seemed to better fit the multifunctional needs of the various exhibitions of the festival, the initial choice of organising *Short Theatre* at the India Theatre was undoubtedly the winning one. The India Theatre is located in the group of buildings of the former Mira Lanza soap factory (a large industrial site on the banks of the river Tiber not far from the ex-slaughterhouse). It has three theatre halls of different sizes, but also several modular spaces, in which it is easy to set even the most complex contemporary performing actions.¹² Mario Martone, the Art Director of *Teatro di Roma* from 1999 to 2000, who strongly supported the acquisition and requalification of the structures where today this theatre is placed,¹³ once said of Arcuri's choice:

Arcuri aveva realizzato diverse edizioni di un festival chiamato Short Theatre al Teatro India di Roma, la mia creatura amatissima realizzata con furia e passione quando ero stato per due anni direttore dello stabile capitolino: e con Short Theatre avevo visto utilizzati gli spazi dell'India al meglio, vivificati da un rapporto dialettico e stimolante tra pubblico e artisti. (Martone 2011: 9)

[Arcuri had been in charge of several editions of a festival called Short Theatre at the India Theatre in Rome, my beloved creature realized with fire and passion in the two years when I was the director of Teatro Stabile of Rome: with Short Theatre I had seen the spaces of the India Theatre used at their best, enlivened by a stimulating relationship between the public and the artists.]

During *Short Theatre* Festivals a special focus is also laid on many various contemporary artistic languages thanks to several collaborations and intersections established, year after year, with other international festi-

September 2012; Di Giammarco 6 September 2012; Bandettini 9 September 2012; Di Giammarco 3 September 2013; Di Giammarco 31 August 2014; Cordelli 31 August 2014 and also <http://www.shorttheatre.org/archive/2014/index.html#/presentazione> (last access 25 July 2015).

¹² See Groppi 2 July 2007 and also <http://www.teatrodiroma.net/adon.pl?act=doc&doc=3118> (last access 30 July 2015).

¹³ See <http://www.teatrodiroma.net/adon.pl?act=doc&doc=1331> (last access 30 July 2015).

vals, embassies and cultural institutions. Among the projects realized in collaboration with these organisations, the following are worth remembering: *IYME - International Young Makers Exchange*, a European project conceived by a network of theatre and dance festivals from all over Europe especially sustaining young artists; *Iberscene*, a permanent window on Iberian contemporary creativity in Spain and Southern America promoted by Instituto Cervantes of Rome and Institut Ramon Llull of Barcelona; *FranceDanse*, a biennial festival of contemporary dance supported by the Embassy of France and the Institut Français of Italy; *Fabulamundi, playwrighting Europe*, a project on contemporary dramaturgy supported by the European Community, aiming at creating cooperation and exchange of ideas among actors, directors and authors coming from different countries, and to produce *mises en espace* of translated plays.¹⁴

Moreover, since 2012 the exhibition which usually opens on the last day of the festival has been dedicated to the final presentation of the work created by the *École de Maîtres*, an international and itinerant course of theatrical specialisation. The masters involved in these courses in the past three years were Rafael Spregelburd (2012), Costanza Macras (2013) and Ricci/Forte (2014).¹⁵ In 2015, for the twenty-fourth edition of the *École de Maîtres*, the master involved was Ivica Buljan, and one possible final outcome was again staged within *Short Theatre*, at the India Theatre on 13 September 2015.¹⁶

Each edition of *Short Theatre* was distinguished by a subtitle, which helped people to orient themselves through the marathon of events. In 2010, for instance, after partially recovering from the drastic drop in funding and the reduction in days suffered the previous year, Arcuri chose this subtitle for his festival: *Effetto farfalla. Battiamo le ali non le mani* [*Butterfly Effect. Let's clap our wings not our hands*]. Evoking a very famous example taken from the theory of chaos and metaphorically ascribing it to the Italian theatrical system, he suggested that, if you are determined, you can produce long-term variations even with small changes (or little money!). Indeed, only through the patient efforts of its organizers the

¹⁴ Every edition of *Short Theatre* presents a detailed programme (also available on line) which includes a special section called *progetti* [projects] dedicated to these collaborations.

¹⁵ See the programmes of the last three editions: <http://www.shorttheatre.org/past-editions/> (last access 25 July 2015). For more details on the performances, see Trigo 22 September 2012; [Editorial Staff] 18 September 2013; Bandettini 31 August 2014; Di Giammarco 22 September 2013; [Editorial Staff] 25 September 2014.

¹⁶ See http://www.cssudine.it/progetti_scheda.php/ID=38/menu=1/anno=2015 (last access 7 October 2015).

festival could survive the great recession endured the two previous years.¹⁷

Another effective subtitle was *West End*, chosen for the 2012 edition. On the one hand, the West End is a very famous quarter which hosts a large number of theatres in London and is undoubtedly a symbol of a certain Western idea of theatre. On the other hand, after 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York in 2001, it may also signify the End of the values upheld by the West which has become a recurrent topic since then. Therefore, alluding to this double meaning, the Art Director of *Short Theatre* gathered for his festival quite a number of performances, in which the representation of reality was a matter of close investigation, in relation to languages, characters and spectators, as well as from a geographical point of view.¹⁸ The following concise list shows the different subtitles of all the editions, together with locations and dates:

SHORT THEATRE EDITIONS:

- 2006 1 *Radicali trasformazioni in atto* [*Radical changes underway*] / India Theatre, 20 June-1 July.
- 2007 2 *Fuori formato* [*Outsize*] / India Theatre, 19 June-1 July.
- 2008 3 *Ai confini della realtà* [*The Twilight Zone*] / India Theatre, 7-13 September.
- 2009 4 *Senza tetto né legge* [*Homeless and Lawless*] / India Theatre, 14-16 September.
- 2010 5 *Effetto farfalla. Battiamo le ali non le mani* [*Butterfly Effect. Let's clap our wings not our hands*] / India Theatre, 3-5; *La Pelanda*, 8-11 September.
- 2011 6 *Politiche della visione. Se non vedi non credi* [*Policies of Vision. If you don't see it you don't believe it*] / *La Pelanda*, 5-7; India Theatre, 8-18 September.
- 2012 7 *West End* [*West End*] / India Theatre, 5-8; *La Pelanda*, 11-15 and Argentina Theatre, 22 September.
- 2013 8 *Democrazia della felicità* [*Democracy of Happiness*] / *La Pelanda*, 5-8, 11-14 and 18 September.
- 2014 9 *La rivoluzione delle parole* [*The Revolution of Words*] / *La Pelanda*, 4-13; Argentina Theatre, 13-14 and India Theatre, 25 September.
- 2015 10 *Nostalgia di futuro* [*Nostalgia for the Future*] / *La Pelanda*, 3-12; Vallicelliana Library and India Theatre, 13 September.

¹⁷ See Scarpellini 14 September 2008; Di Giammarco 27 August 2010; De Santis 31 August 2010; and [Editorial Staff] 3 September 2010.

¹⁸ See Bandettini 2 September 2012; Di Giammarco 4 September 2012; and Distefano 5 September 2012.

The main aim of this essay, though, is not to look closely at each performance staged over the ten seasons of the festival (quite a long and in some way captious task), but to try to inquire into the multifarious meanings of the adjective 'short' contained in its title and to relate it, when possible, to the *pièces* shown. In fact, if at first sight the spirit of this recurrent programme of events could be considered similar to other contemporary Italian festivals, after further consideration it becomes clear that the principles underlying this enterprise are strictly connected with that type of definition. Therefore, first, I will discuss some implications connected with the choice of the festival's own title. Secondly, I will consider the meanings which best suit the performances there proposed. Finally, I will briefly analyse two examples among the many possible ones that, from our point of view, identify this perfect match.

2.

If we consider that *Short Theatre* was born as a ten-day non-stop exhibition of different kinds of performing events, lasting from six pm until past midnight, the adjective 'short' does not seem to be related with its length as a whole, but with something a bit more specific. Still, if we compare the duration of this festival with a regular theatrical season, which usually starts more or less at the end of September and goes on until the middle of June of the following year, we can affirm that *Short Theatre* is certainly shorter.

Although there is no official declaration in this regard, it is an almost obvious assumption to connect the title of this festival with the definition of 'short film' (i.e. any movie which is not long enough to be considered a feature film). The boundary between short and feature films is flexible: sometimes it is drawn at a running time of forty minutes, sometimes thirty, or even at a lesser span. Similarly, in the first two editions of *Short Theatre* both Arcuri and Giorgio Albertazzi (the Art Director of *Teatro di Roma* at that time) underlined that each performance was not meant to last more than one hour.¹⁹ Afterwards, as we will see, many of them were definitely shorter (or only in very few cases just a little longer). Thus, a piece of 'short theatre' may be not only a theatrical performance actually conceived from a script shorter than a regular drama composed of three or more acts, but also any kind of non-verbal show, provided it does

¹⁹ See [Editorial Staff] 9 June 2006 and Di Giammarco 20 June 2006.

not last too long.²⁰ Therefore a one-act play (like Pirandello's, Beckett's and those of many twentieth-century authors)²¹ could be as perfect for *Short Theatre* as an original script or a reduction of a longer text (like a Shakespearean play or a novel),²² but also, with some obvious distinctions, as choreography,²³ or as every other form of non-verbal performance. And the festival programmes have kept confirming this through the years. On 8 September 2010, for instance, Rodolfo Di Giammarco wrote:

La sempre intraprendente manifestazione di tendenze, progetti e percorsi di nuovo culto 'Short Theatre' si trasferisce da stasera alla Pelanda, al Macro Testaccio, e annuncia oggi ben 11 appuntamenti. Per i seguaci di Ricci/Forte c'è il loro *Pinter's Anatomy* che scannerizza le violenze e le insinuazioni del grande autore inglese (35', dalle 18 alle 2 in loop), ma di 'teatrale' c'è pure *L'uomo dal fiore in bocca* di Pirandello con Sandro Lombardi e Roberto Latini (55', alle 21:15), e *Commedia* di e con Giorgio Barberio Corsetti (1h, alle 22:45). Di coreografico c'è *Nel disastro* di Aldes / Roberto Castello (1h 30', alle 19:30), e *Il gioco del gregge...* di Fabrizio Favale Le Supplici (20', alle 22:15). (Di Giammarco 8 September 2010)

[Starting today, 'Short Theatre', the ever resourceful show of trends, projects and paths of new worship, will move to La Pelanda at Macro Testaccio, and eleven events have been announced for tonight. For the followers of Ricci/Forte there is their *Pinter's Anatomy*, which scans the violence and insinuations of the great English author (35 min., from 6 pm to 2 am, continuously). But on the theatrical side there is also Pirandello's *L'uomo dal fiore in bocca* (*The man with a flower in his mouth*), starring Sandro Lombardi and Roberto Latini (55 min., at 9.15 pm), and *Commedia* (*Comedy*) by and with Giorgio Barberio Corsetti (60 min., at 10.45 pm). On the choreographic side, there is Aldes/Roberto Castello's *Nel disastro* (*In the disaster*) (90 min., at 7.30 pm), and Fabrizio Favale Le Supplici's *Il gioco del gregge...* (*The game of the flock...*) (20 min., at 10.15 pm).]

As already pointed out, apart from the choreographic piece *Nel disa-*

²⁰ For a first approach to this subject, see De Marinis 2004 and Mango 2003.

²¹ See Cordelli 22 June 2007; [Editorial Staff] 19 June 2007; Di Giammarco 6 September 2011; Cordelli 27 September 2011.

²² For instance, in 2011 Manuela Cherubini realized a forty-minute version of *La stupidità* [*Stupidity*], a text by Rafael Spregelburd lasting more than three hours (see Di Giammarco 13 September 2011), while in 2014 Roberto Latini staged an adaptation of the first act of Pirandello's *I giganti della montagna* [*The giants of the mountain*] (see Bandettini 14 September 2014; Cordelli 20 September 2014).

²³ See [Editorial Staff] 20 June 2006; Di Giammarco 9 June 2007; Battisti 9 September 2012; Torriero 5 September 2013; [Editorial Staff] 7 September 2013; [Editorial Staff] 4 September 2014.

stro, that evening each performance lasted less than one hour. Among the many interesting issues, though, what immediately captures the attention is also that some shows are repeated several times during the same night.

Even if it does not seem a fixed rule, the concept of 'short in time' sometimes appears to go together with the need to create more intimacy with the public and the need for a smaller place in which to perform. In these circumstances, 'repetition' becomes indeed an essential part of the exhibition itself, because only a few persons at a time can see it.²⁴ The above-mentioned Ricci/Forte's performance, for instance, was repeated six times in a row each day for four days.²⁵ However, if you repeat seamlessly the same thing several times in the same evening, can your exhibition be called short? Is it really possible to consider a piece repeated six times in a row as something finished in itself? It is true that one spectator is meant to see only a fragment of it in one evening, but ultimately it is a short piece of something that, as a whole, actually lasts a few hours. This kind of mechanism provides also an unexpected insight into the deep meaning of the structure of *Short Theatre*, to which I shall return later.

Another aspect that could be considered similar in both 'short films' and 'short theatres' is related to means, languages, and contents. Short films are usually centred on original subjects and, because of their lower production costs, they can more easily address alternative and unconventional topics or use new narrative techniques. On the one hand, short films may be the first stage of a greater future movie (as happens, for instance, to some authors, who write a short story to develop a subject for a forthcoming novel). On the other hand, there are professional actors and film crews who choose to create short films as an alternative form of expression, something very different from longer and more commercial films.

As far as the Italian experimental theatre is concerned, after a first season of avant-garde theatre in the 1970s and 80s (related to the work of internationally acknowledged great masters such as Julian Beck and Judith Malina, Jerzy Grotowski, Eugenio Barba and, later on, Peter Brook),²⁶ since the late 1990s, with the success of new media, there has been a growing and pervasive tendency to use on stage a synthesis of various communication tools and artistic means of expression (such as multimedia

²⁴ See, for instance, the performance of *Fanny&Alexander* staged in the 8 edition of *Short Theatre*. Cordelli 16 September 2013. On the activities of the group see <http://fannyalexander.e-production.org/> (last access 14 August 2015).

²⁵ See Sassi 8 September 2010 and Bandettini 11 September 2010.

²⁶ For further readings on their work, see at least De Marinis 1987 and 2013; Perrelli 2007 and 2015.

projections, visual art, etc.) together with gesture, dialogue and movement. From that period on, a relatively short performance without pauses has seemed the best way to mingle and highlight those different techniques.

Considering that many performances usually presented at *Short Theatre* were of this kind,²⁷ we can say that a piece of 'short theatre' is basically a concentrated and concluded experimental representation. It is worth noting, though, that sometimes it may even be an excerpt from a longer and more traditional play,²⁸ or the initial stage of a major extensive project (exactly as happens between a short film and the production of a movie). For example, in 2007 Teatro delle Albe company staged Werner Schwab's *Sterminio* [*Extermination*] as the second part of a diptych dedicated to Evil,²⁹ while in 2012 at *Short Theatre* the group MOTUS presented *Who*, a nocturnal choral act, the third part of triptych called *W. 3 atti pubblici* [*W. 3 public acts*]. This cycle of three shows (*Where*, *When* and *Who*) was conceived within a broader and more complex political project called *2011>2068 Animale Politico* [*2011>2068 Political Animal*].³⁰

Unlike a film, though, a theatrical piece can partially change its form after some performances and be transformed into something else. Then, a piece of 'short theatre' can be conceived as work in progress, although questions on the opportunity of this practice have sometimes been raised by critics.³¹ At the India Theatre at the end of June 2006, for instance, the representation of Thomas Bernhard's *Prima della pensione* [*Before retirement*], staged by the group Teatro Aperto (today Teatro i) and directed by Renzo Martinelli, was somewhat different if compared to the exhibition seen the previous May in Milan. From Franco Cordelli's point of view, it was as if in June they were quoting the play seen in May, telling the story of a disappeared performance, a performance that could not be staged any more.³²

In 2010, instead, Beckett's *Senza parole* [*Act without words*], directed by Andrea Adriatico, was initially played by the porn star Carlo Masi and an actress (Rossella Dessu). In the new version presented on 4 and 5 September of the same year at *Short Theatre*, however, Masi worked with

²⁷ See Costantini 11 June 2006 and Novelli 13 June 2007.

²⁸ See Di Giammarco 25 June 2006.

²⁹ See Di Giammarco 9 June 2007; Di Giammarco 25 June 2007; Bernocco 29 June 2007. For further information on the activities of Teatro delle Albe see <http://www.teatrodellealbe.com> (last access 12 August 2015).

³⁰ See Cordelli 20 September 2012; for further information on this cultural Association see <http://www.motusonline.com/> (last access 7 August 2015).

³¹ See Cordelli 11 September 2010 and Cordelli 7 September 2014.

³² See Cordelli 2 September 2006; on the activities of the group see <http://teatroi.org/it/> (last access 12 August 2015).

an actor (Marco Matarazzo). In this re-run of the play the traditional couple became a gay couple, a solution which helped investigate the manifold aspects of desire and the need for the other.³³

Another type of exhibition seen at *Short Theatre* is also a recital composed of several small fragments written by the same author, like Martin Crimp or Ivan Vyrpaev.³⁴

However, one of the most interesting shows made of scattered parts conceived for the festival is certainly the “parasitic performance”, a performance within another performance. In 2011, for instance, every show endorsed the MK-*Grand tour* project: an outside performer (Michele di Stefano) intruded in every show and built creative chaos within it.³⁵

Grand Tour is a parasitic performance and a touristic enquiry into the circumscribed world of contemporary performing arts festivals. Its model is the Grand Tour, the traditional travel of Europe undertaken from the second half of XVII century by mainly upper-class European young men of means ... The project starts from the determination of a festival suitable to be transformed into the itinerary of the Tour. Every single performance, theatrical piece or choreography in the programme will be analysed for its spatial character and dynamics. The author/director/choreographer of every piece will be asked to host the passage, the crossing, the stay or even the camping of an external traveller during the time of the performance. The duration of this interference will be negotiated previously.

The performer, who is always the same person, will cross or visit the different performances hosted by the festival as different stages of his journey; he will not produce relevant or controversial acts, being a mere presence coming from elsewhere to have a look into the wherever. He will come [*vis*] back to his elsewhere without hesitation, eager to reach a new stage. He is not a ‘signature’ nor an actor nor a witness. He is a collision in time, a coincidence that will transform the formal tension of a performance into an ordinary everywhere, just for a moment. (MKGT)

Moreover, the raids invented in 2010, 2012 and 2013 by Tony Clifton

³³ See [Editorial Staff] 4 September 2010b and Sassi 4 September 2010. On Andrea Adriatico’s theatrical research on Beckett see Casi 2010 and also the Teatri di Vita’s website (<http://www.teatridivita.it>, last access 12 August 2015).

³⁴ See Di Giammarco 29 June 2006; Di Giammarco 30 June 2007; De Sanctis 30 June 2007.

³⁵ See Di Giammarco 8 September 2011 and Bandettini 17 September 2011. MK was at *Short Theatre* also in 2013 with *Impressions d’Afrique* (see Di Giammarco 11 September 2013 and Bandettini 15 September 2013). On MK activities see <http://www.mkonline.it/> (last access 12 August 2015).

Circus, a sort of experiments of comical extremism, can be counted in this kind of classification.³⁶ In particular, the *Missione Roosevelt* [*Roosevelt Mission*] project is worth mentioning. *Missione Roosevelt* was conceived as a wheelchair race aiming “at crossing an urban space, making a journey and leaving a trace, a coloured mark on the ground”, (TCCMR), during which the actors invited the public “to enjoy the forbidden pleasure of using a taboo object”, that is, the wheelchair which was intended as “a metaphor for disadvantage by which conquering the city” (ibid.).

The types of performances examined so far prove that the criterion of brevity underlying the idea of ‘short theatre’ inevitably brings together the concepts of the instantaneous, synthetic and fragmented, but also those of intimacy, dynamic space and, from a certain point of view, repetition. An entire festival called *Short Theatre*, though, must also adopt a special *ad hoc* criterion to arrange the sequence of this kind of shows. The solution pursued by Arcuri seems to consist in creating a patchwork of different fragments bound together not only by a very full daily programme, but also by one’s own curiosity and taste. Since the personal experience of the audience is another very important dimension that enriches the complex mechanism of the programme, some events are free, while others can be accessed on payment of a single or daily ticket. Therefore, diversified and customized participation in the events can be chosen every day, also thanks to their repetition or dissemination.³⁷ The basic idea is to let the public experiment a bit of everything, instead of exploring only a single show. In fact, alongside and amidst the various performances there might be meetings with art, and entertainment experts,³⁸ readings, conferences, and book launches,³⁹ art exhibitions; vee-jay and deejay sets, and concerts, etc.⁴⁰

After all, the most intriguing aspect of *Short Theatre* is the continuous negotiation of sense between the compact surface of every single

³⁶ See [Editorial Staff] 5 September 2010; Distefano 5 September 2012; Battisti 5 September 2012; [Editorial Staff] 12 September 2012; De Sanctis 14 September 2012; Di Giammarco 11 September 2013; De Sanctis 17 September 2013. On Tony Clifton Circus raids and activities see <http://www.tonycliftoncircus.com/> (last access 12 August 2015).

³⁷ See Di Giammarco 9 September 2010; Bandettini 11 September 2010; Battisti 5 September 2012; Cordelli 15 September 2012.

³⁸ See Di Giammarco 30 June 2006; [Editorial Staff] 18 June 2007; [Editorial Staff] 11 September 2012.

³⁹ See [Editorial Staff] 18 June 2007; [Editorial Staff] 11 September 2010; Di Giammarco 5 September 2011; [Editorial Staff] 6 September 2012; [Editorial Staff] 11 September 2013.

⁴⁰ See [Editorial Staff] 18 June 2007; [Editorial Staff] 4 September 2010a; Bandettini 11 September 2010; Battisti 28 September 2012.

self-contained creation and the general meaning of the whole experience, a process that supplies new information throughout its development. In a sense, in order to appreciate an evening at *Short Theatre* in full, we need much more time than what we would usually dedicate to a performance.

3.

In 2013, *Short Theatre* was entirely held at *La Pelanda*. It was a special edition, with an emblematic subtitle *Democrazia della felicità* [*Democracy of Happiness*], which Arcuri started off with a reflection on the state of the culture in Italy in that period.⁴¹ Among the thirty-nine shows offered that year it is worth focusing on two different performances, which I think perfectly respond to some of the criteria of shortness underlying the conception of the festival: *Penthesilea* [*Penthesilea*], produced by Lenz Rifrazioni, with Sandra Soncini, and *La semplicità ingannata* [*Simplicity deceived*] with Marta Cuscunà.⁴² In particular, the choice of these two spectacles does not respond to aesthetic criteria (these performances are not 'better' than others from a merely aesthetic point of view), but it serves a clear identification of two possible constructive modalities of a 'short' spectacle which follow different and even decidedly antithetical routes.

The Lenz Rifrazioni group is led by Maria Federica Maestri and Francesco Pititto and has long been one of the undisputed protagonists of Italian contemporary experimental theatre. They normally use an extreme and always conceptual language, often compared with the rugged physicality of marginality and diversity.⁴³ The Heinrich von Kleist's bewildering expressionistic drama *Penthesilea* (1808) was translated and reshaped as a monologue of about forty minutes by Pititto. In the performance actress Sandra Soncini, directed by Maestri, pronounced her soliloquy in front of the camera of a Macbook, which captured her foreground image, multiplied it and magnified it on a background screen. Her monologue is "un racconto che si fa delirio, ossessione, auto-dialogo di chi disperatamente cerca nel bagliore dello schermo tracce di vita, aiuto, ascolto" (Porcheddu 14 March 2013) ["a

⁴¹ See Di Giammarco 1 September 2013; Di Giammarco 3 September 2013; [Editorial Staff] 5 September 2013; Bandettini 8 September 2013; [Editorial Staff] 8 September 2013; Petroni 9 September 2013; [Editorial Staff] 13 September 2013; Cordelli 17 September 2013; De Sanctis 17 September 2013.

⁴² See [Editorial Staff] 6 September 2013.

⁴³ See Porcheddu 14 March 2013. On the activities of the group see <http://lenzrifrazioni.it/?lang=it> (last access 14 August 2015).

story that becomes delirium, obsession, the self-dialogue of those who desperately seek traces of life, help, consideration in the glow of the screen”].

At *La Pelanda* only a small group of people, sitting on a narrow structure of benches, was allowed in to watch Soncini’s performance. Penthesilea/Soncini was alone in front of her laptop with a glass of water. She was an unarmed Queen, torturing herself by chatting online. Against a background of words, music and sounds created by Andrea Azzali_Monophon, she produced and projected a series of images of herself one after the other in which her face and parts of her body were distorted and discomposed.⁴⁴ If in Kleist’s drama the Amazon Queen is trapped by conflicting and destructive emotions, in this performance the pictures made with ‘photo booth’ are the arrows used in the fight between the woman’s two different selves: the physical body, which the people see and hear talking behind the computer, and the virtual body, framed and deformed in the projected images.

The revisited Myth of Penthesilea – here she kills and devours her beloved and then commits suicide – was chosen by Lenz Rifrazioni also as an unusual way to investigate the never-ending conflicting relationship between flesh and words in the body of the actor:

L’attore espone il corpo, la parola è lì dentro, rinchiusa muta e ci guarda dal corpo, dagli occhi ci spia e ci avverte che potrebbe non uscire mai. Quando e come lo decide lei. Il corpo dell’attore la contiene soltanto e dentro rimbalza, scalcia, si nasconde, gli provoca sofferenze terribili, lo mastica tutto, ora in fretta ora lenta, la lotta è iniziata e l’attore lo sa. Sa che una volta fuori scomparirà nel suo vuoto, che sarà l’unica e l’ultima, che lo abbandonerà lì, solo, involucro innocuo come un pupazzo ... Quando tutto il corpo è sprofondato all’altro mondo, quello vero del teatro, allora è uscita bella e pulita, sacra e pura, sfrontata e giusta. Il corpo dell’attore ha aperto la porta, ha varcato la soglia, le ha permesso l’ingresso, si è reso trasparente per lei, le si è offerto. (LRPNT)

[The actor exhibits his body. The word is inside him, locked up and silent; it looks at us from inside his body, it spies from his eyes and warns us that it might never come out. [The word itself] will decide when and how. The actor’s body just contains it, and inside of him it bounces, kicks, hides itself, causes terrible sufferance, it chews him up, sometimes fast, sometimes slow. The struggle has begun, and the actor is aware of it. He knows

⁴⁴ Changing the perception of body was the topic of many other performances at *Short Theatre* (see, for instance, [Editorial Staff] 5 September 2010).

that once the word is out, he will disappear in his own emptiness; it will be final and unique, it will abandon him, alone, a shell as harmless as a puppet ... When the body has sunk in another world, the real world of theatre, the word can come out beautiful and clean, sacred and pure, shameless and right. The actor's body has opened the door, crossed the threshold, allowed it to enter, become diaphanous to it, and offered itself to it.]

Thus, thanks to the particularly intriguing use of the 'photo booth', in the staging of *Penthesilea* it is possible to detect the literalization of some of the basic ideas of *Short Theatre*: synthesis, fragmentation, and repetition. On the one hand, in each single image framed on the screen by the actress there is a small concentrated sign of the more general theme of the drama (the discomposed body, the struggle between real and virtual selves, etc.). On the other hand, the general meaning of the whole experience (flesh *vs* spirit, body *vs* word) is created during the process of obsessive projection of those images in succession.

Unlike Lenz Rifrazioni, Marta Cuscunà apparently adopted a more traditional approach to create her performance, mixing narrative theatre and puppetry, and thanks to the experiments developed by the sound designer Hubert Westkemper, on 6 September 2013 for her *pièce* she could also use the Wave Field Synthesis (WFS), an amplification system in which spectators can perceive space, depth, and volume in relation to the movement of the actors on stage and of their own position in the stalls.

La semplicità ingannata was conceived and directed by the interpreter herself. The subtitle defined it a "Satire for an actress and female puppets about the luxury of being women" (MCSN). The text was freely inspired by several critics' works – like Giovanna Paolin's *Lo spazio del silenzio* [*The Space of Silence*] – and by the writings of Arcangela Tarabotti, a seventeenth-century Venetian nun who, as many young girls at that time, entered a convent against her will because of economic reasons.⁴⁵ Being the second phase of a project on female Resistance in Italy,⁴⁶ *La semplicità ingannata* mainly tells the story of the monastery of the *Ordo Sanctae Clarae*

⁴⁵ On Marta Cuscunà and her work see <http://martacuscuna.blogspot.it/> (last access 16 August 2015); Cuscunà 19 December 2012 and Paolin 1996. Arcangela Tarabotti (1604-52) is considered one of the most important women writers of her time. For further details see at least Tarabotti 2007. It is worth mentioning that on 29 October 2012 Cuscunà received the twenty-seventh Eleonora Duse prize for the best emerging Italian actress during the theatrical season 2011-12 (see Cuscunà 17 December 2012).

⁴⁶ First stage of this project was the performance *È bello vivere liberi!* [*It is beautiful to live free!*], focused on female Resistance in Italy during the Second World War and, in particular, on the biography of the partisan Ondina Pateani (see Cuscunà 23 December 2012).

nuns in Udine. In mid-sixteenth century these Poor Clares carried out a truly unique form of resistance: “they transformed their convent into a place of antiestablishment activity, freedom of thoughts, desecration of religious dogmas and male culture. They fought with a cultural fervor unconceivable for the female universe at that time” (Cuscunà 21 December 2012).

After more than a year of successful representations (the show had its debut at Bassano del Grappa, near Vicenza, on 31 August 2012), Cuscunà arrived at *Short Theatre* with a performance lasting one hour and fifteen minutes as a result of a careful construction of three smaller fragments: a prologue and two parts called *Libro I* and *Libro II* [*Book I* and *Book II*].⁴⁷ This particular structure quite clearly reveals that *La semplicità ingannata* is a blend of originally separate parts. At first, in the prologue, the actress explains in a satirical way that in the sixteenth century the problem of giving a dowry to noble daughters was solved either by marrying them to a man of minor claims, or by sending them to a convent. Afterwards, in *Libro I*, Cuscunà tells of the childhood and youth as a girl until she becomes a cloistered nun. At the end, in *Libro II*, Cuscunà relates how six nuns succeeded in putting up an organized form of rebellion in the monastery of Udine, reading books and adhering to innovative ideas.

Apart from its length, civic contents, and dramaturgical conception, I think that what makes *La semplicità ingannata* a wonderful example of ‘short theatre’ is the skilful ability of the interpreter, who disassembles the usual codes of narrative theatre in order to offer, sometimes with great wit and sarcasm, a gallery of accents and characters. Her acting makes use of an extraordinary stratification of theatrical genres, and also recovers the tradition of puppetry and contaminating it with the contemporary taste for visual theatre.⁴⁸ In particular, following the latest trends in puppetry,⁴⁹ in *Libro II* she manipulates six puppet-nuns and the head of a puppet-Cardinal in plain sight, creating a joyful and kaleidoscopic symphony of voices. With her natural talent she mingles puppetry and *Commedia dell’Arte* techniques with narrative and more traditional theatre. The result is a fabulous performing mixture, which offers ‘in short’ a shot of the most conven-

⁴⁷ See http://www.shorttheatre.org/archive/compagnie_2013/Marta_Cuscuna.html (last access 20 August 2015); and at least Santini 24 November 2012; Cova 10 September 2013. For an analytical press review of the show see MCSN.

⁴⁸ On this argument see, in particular, Norese 23 November 2012 and Santini 24 November 2012. On new trends in drama see also De Marinis 2000 and 2013.

⁴⁹ See Vilardo 4 April 2014; Canziani 2013; and Plassard 2014.

tional and traditional theatrical techniques, revivifying them from their roots.

All in all, leaving aside both the theatrical techniques there employed (word, image, video, etc.) and the contents of the single spectacles (be they political, social, literary, cultural or other), the feature that lets *Short Theatre* emerge in the Italian contemporary panorama is the fact that within different and multi-functional spaces and during a decade this festival has managed to create a structure/container/model in which the idea of brevity convincingly works as a multifariously articulated foundation and emblem of the whole event.

Abbreviations

- LRPNT “Intro”, in <http://lenzrifrazioni.it/creazioni/archivio-creazioni/pentesilea/> (last access 14 August 2015).
- MCSN <http://www.semplicitaingannata.blogspot.it/> (last access 21 August 2015).
- MKGT http://www.mkonline.it/Grand_Tour_eng.html (last access 6 August 2015).
- TCCMR <http://www.tonycliftoncircus.com/index.php?cmd=spettacoli&show=mr> (last access 6 August 2015).

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