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Author || Valentina Solinas  
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Number of pages || pag 1 di 3  
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## made in italy (2007)

*By and with* Valeria Raimondi, Enrico Castellani  
*Scenography* Babilonia Teatri/Gianni Volpe  
*Costumes* Babilonia Teatri/Franca Piccoli  
*Light and sound* Luca Scotton  
*Stage movements* Luca Scotton  
*Organisation* Alice Castellani  
*Stage photographer* Marco Caselli Nirmal  
*Illustrations* Ilaria Dalle Donne  
*A co-production of* Babilonia Teatri / Operaestate Festival Veneto  
*With the support of* Viva Opera Circus/Teatro dell' Angelo  
*Year of production* 2007  
Winner: Premio Scenario 2007, Premio Vertigine 2010  
Nominated for Premio Ubu 2008 for best Italian newcomer / prize for dramaturgical research

## Babilonia teatri. made in italy (2007)

by *Valentina Solinas*<sup>1</sup>

*made in italy* is the performance that marked the emergence of Babilonia Teatri's style. It's composed of eight actions for the stage interrupted by two musical interludes and by a scene change in full lighting. Similarly to *Panopticon Frankenstein*, the company's second performance, the piece addresses issues from the media, consumerism and racism.

The show's pretext comes from an episode from real life, experienced by Valeria Raimondi: the group's co-founder was in a pizzeria in Verona as the TV news showed images of a wall separating the Moroccan neighbourhood of the city of Padova from the rest of the town being knocked down. She witnessed explosions of anger, insults and curses towards the immigrants, and eventually left the pizzeria feeling disconcerted. Her need to express her rage towards the closed-mindedness of these people gave birth to *made in italy*, a whole scene of which is dedicated to Italy's racial problem and to the perils of its provincial mentality. The performance is sparse and only uses a few scenographic elements: garden gnomes are used to construct the last image, and other images are fabricated using glowing coloured threads – at the beginning of the piece, a red apple hangs from one of such threads behind Raimondi and Castellani, framing the apple as a symbol of sin and the two artists as Adam and Eve. The performance is a theatrical *Blob*<sup>2</sup>: it incorporates elements that differ in register and in tone, including street language, vulgar gestures, music, dance, light.

### *Music and sound*

Examples that set the tone for the show are the recordings of the live radio broadcasts of Pavarotti's funeral and of the Italy football game at the 2007 World Cup. These are used respectively in the fifth and sixth scenes of the performance, which focus solely on action and image. In a perfect pop style, the songs used for the musical interludes are by Italian outfits popular with teenagers of different eras, such as Prozac +, the Steve Rogers Band and singer/songwriter Antonello Venditti<sup>3</sup>.

### *Lighting*

Light is fundamental in the structure and visual effect of the individual scenes, because it picks out the shapes of the bodies on stage; this is clear, for example, in the opening Adam and Eve scene, in which the naked and static figures of the performers resemble life-size polyester sculptures from early 1970s American Hyperrealism. The artists are illuminated separately in the following scene, in which Castellani and Raimondi stand at opposite edges of the stage in the position of two athletes ready to start a race. Other scenes, such as the music and dance interludes, exploit full lighting; other still use lighting from above – an example of this is the third image, in which the artists construct the Christian icon of the holy family, and hold it as a static tableau for the whole duration of the scene. Also noteworthy is the fourth scene, which uses a combination of light and darkness

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<sup>1</sup> V. Solinas, *Il rapporto tra l'attualità e il teatro e lo studio dei nuovi linguaggi attraverso la performance the end*, tesi di laurea, Università degli studi di Pisa, Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, Corso di laurea in Cinema, Musica, Teatro, a.a. 2012-2013, rel. A. Barsotti.

<sup>2</sup> Translator's note: *Blob* is a long-running Italian television show that montages TV images from the day before, usually with ridiculing, tragicomical effect.

<sup>3</sup> The tracks used are: Prozac+, *Acida*, in *Acido acido* (EMI Music, 1998); Steve Rogers Band, *Alzati la Gonna* (CBS, 1988); Antonello Venditti, *Dalla Pelle al Cuore*, in *Studio* (Heinz Music, 2007). Prozac+ is an Italian pop-punk band popular in the 1990s; the single *Alzati la Gonna* ('Raise your Skirt') is considered one of the trashiest pop songs of the Italian 1980s.

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to flatten the shapes in the background and resize the objects on stage, an effect which makes the props look like grotesque figurines or like cartoon characters.

#### *Text and enunciation*

Text is fundamental in the company's work from *Panopticon Frankenstein* onwards, and in *made in italy* it has a crucial role. The entire script is a montage of sentences taken from everyday city life: street talk, platitudes, Veronese dialect, journalistic gossip and racist invective, all fragmented and mixed together in an uninterrupted flow of public speech, which originates in Northeastern Italy but extends to the whole peninsula. The second scene, set in the pizzeria, exemplifies this clearly: the attacks heard by Raimondi are reproduced with precision and in Veronese dialect, and the performer deliberately omits any pauses to catch her breath – everything in the pizzeria scene occurs in a flow of words, at an extremely fast pace<sup>4</sup>.

The key word of *made in italy* is “trash”, repeated four times in succession in the third holy family scene, in which the text is constructed by combining groups of phrases containing the number three: “for we are three the three Hail Marys the three little pigs [...] the three Venices, the tricorn, the triple entente, the tripod, three in a row *trash trash trash trash*.”<sup>5</sup> *Trash* and *kitsch* are the terms that best describe some typical aspects of Italian society, obsessed with the horrors of news and with feel-good advertising, but known abroad for the excessive use of blasphemy – this is the concept around which Castellani builds the pizzeria scene cited above: “I heard Russians swearing in Italian, Croatians and Albanians swearing in Italian, Germans, Austrians, reds yellows and blacks cursing in Italian, I heard of them in their language, but cursing in Italian. We’ve got the Pope, and we’ve got blasphemy as well.”<sup>6</sup>

#### *Action*

Enrico Castellani calls the work of Babilonia Teatri a “physical theatre of speech”<sup>7</sup>, because the verbal dimension of the Veronese company's theatre is always accompanied by gesture used to describe images: actions are used as if they were words. Babilonia Teatri appear to *communicate* through gesture and *act* through the voice: a distortion of reality that is reflected in the scenic pictures of their performances. Babilonia Teatri's actions are few and simple, designed to emphasise a certain concept, or to momentarily arrest the spoken form<sup>8</sup>.

The gestures used in *made in italy* are strong, provocative, rhetorical, and extreme; this is a use of gesture similar to that found in Rodrigo García's theatre, appreciated and to an extent internalised by Babilonia, along with the theatre of other artists such as Armando Punzo, René Pollesh, Pippo Delbono and Teatro Sottoraneo, especially their performance *11/10 in apnea*.

In the first scene of the show Valeria Raimondi and Enrico Castellani are naked: Raimondi's standing at three-quarters in front of Castellani, and both cover their private parts with their hands as they look toward the audience, with expressionless faces. Behind them, the bright red apple with a bite taken out of it: the emblem of Adam and Eve's transgression and of their fall from Paradise. In the performance, Adam and Eve embody the respectable face of the middle class, ready to “swear” on a set of principles with the same ease with which they transgress those principles. Indeed, the figures of Adam and Eve are iconic figures used to support a text constructed around the verb “I swear”: “I swear to be faithful, always, in joy, in sorrow, in sickness and in health, I swear I didn't mean to, I swear I'll stop, I swear I'll try, I swear I won't.”<sup>9</sup> The image of the naked actor exposing a social issue through text closes *made in italy* to some of Rodrigo García's performances, such as *Arrojad mis cenizas sobre Mickey* (2006) and *Aproximación a la idea de la desconfianza* (2006), both of which feature two naked actors, a man and a woman, producing monologues about experiences taken from real life.

For Babilonia Teatri, the best dramatic solution of *made in italy* is the use of the radio recordings used instead of speech. This dramaturgical choice characterises the entire second half of the show, and produces an increase in physical movement. The fifth scene is based on the news reports following the 2007 World Cup: Enrico Castellani mimics the possessed fans, he strips and gesticulates and yells until he is red in the face and falls to the stage exhausted, in a shower of white cotton buds. Again, the scene is reminiscent of *Arrojad mis cenizas sobre Mickey* by García, in which a naked actress, covered in sticky liquid, throws herself to the floor covered in brown cotton.

The transition from the fifth to the sixth scene takes place in a fade-out, as if the performance were a music video: Enrico Castellani is lying on the ground motionless, still wearing the image of the out of control football fan, as Valeria Raimondi begins to sweep the stage floor to prepare for the funeral of the famous tenor Luciano Pavarotti. In the background, we hear the recording of the commentary of the funeral; Castellani's body becomes the body of Pavarotti, gazed upon by the multitude of

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<sup>4</sup> The text of this scene – perhaps as an act of the authors' self-censorship – is not included in the performance's script; thus I am unable to report it word by word.

<sup>5</sup> *made in italy*, text available on Babilonia Teatri's website: [http://www.babiloniateatri.it/wordpress/?page\\_id=406](http://www.babiloniateatri.it/wordpress/?page_id=406)

<sup>6</sup> I have transcribed these words from the performance's video, available to download at <https://vimeo.com/38123481>

<sup>7</sup> E. Castellani, interview for *The Rerum Natura* at Palladium 2013: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qWksdoi2eRU>

<sup>8</sup> J. Lanteri (ed), *Iperscene 2*. Editoria & Spettacolo, Riano 2009, p.102.

<sup>9</sup> *made in italy*, text available on Babilonia Teatri's website: [http://www.babiloniateatri.it/wordpress/?page\\_id=406](http://www.babiloniateatri.it/wordpress/?page_id=406)

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famous guests, mourning more out of duty than out of interest<sup>10</sup>. The scene goes on to riff, with pungent irony, on the motifs taken from trash culture: white wings are placed on the fat body of the stage-hand Luce Scotton<sup>11</sup>. The final scene is an installation created with garden gnomes positioned to fill the space of the stage; one of the dwarves is positioned next to Snow White, as if the two marble statues were taking the place of the authors.

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<sup>10</sup> All the mourners at Pavarotti's funeral are embodied by the sole Valeria Raimondi, who is seated in dark sunglasses over Castellani's body.

<sup>11</sup> Luca Scotton joined the company as a stage-hand and technical manager on *Panopticon Frankenstein*, and has remained with the company ever since.