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La Gaia Scienza. Gli insetti preferiscono le ortiche (1982)

With Giorgio Barberio Corsetti, Aurelio Cianciotta, Guidarello Pontani, Marco Solari, Alessandra Vanzi

Stage and poster design by Adriano Vecchiotti

Filmed by Alessandro Violi

Premiere: Rome, Padiglione Borghese, May 17, 1982.

Repeat performances: July/August 1982: Sydney (Australia), Seymour Center. – October 1982: London, I.C.A. – November 1982: Florence, S.M.S. di Rifredi.

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by *Stefano Scipioni*

La Gaia Scienza set *Gli insetti preferiscono le ortiche*, from the novel by Tanizaki Junichiro, in the vast scenery of nature, choosing, by a congenial arrangement, the magic of the nocturnal dimension. The earthy component, already clear in their previous play, *Scintille*, takes shape in the evocation of a forest swarming with strange life forms, part human, part vegetable, part animal, in constant metamorphosis.

Staged nature is at once real and artificial, a poetic, imaginary space that includes several places continually breaching toward their outer reaches, both illusionistic (films and slides) and real, such as when with a final coup de theatre, after the backdrop partition has fallen, the theater area swells to include the landscape scenery of a Villa Borghese lightly veiled by night fog. The organization of the traditional spatial boundaries between the stage and the auditorium marks a turnabout with regard to the past. The stage is developed in depth along divergent, contrasting lines of perspective, cut diagonally, that break up and scatter in a centrifugal splay the single-centered point of view. This obliquity is emphasized by the triangular layout of the set materials projected in vertical dynamic tension. The sets and the actors exchange roles with each other. Thus we witness a transformation of the scenic properties, which disappear, get sucked upwards or, with a bewildering reversal, into a bush which comes alive, replacing the actor in the lead role. The images, the music, the lighting, the props, the solo speeches of the actors create a fragmented space that coalesces around emerging hubs of energy in which even words become vectors of movement. The action breaks up into various parts of the stage in a continual misalignment of spatial-temporal planes created by visual effects, but above all by sound tracks and the gestural repertory. The music evokes distant echoes of rural settings through succulent oriental melodies and the obsessive beating of African drums, in sharp contrast to each other, with electronic sounds and sweeping rhythms of disco music.

Playing as usual on dynamic bodily employment, the actors let themselves go in a set of passages, variations and fugues, duets and orchestrations, developing a gestural vocabulary tied still more than in the past to the language of dance and especially to the choreographic repertory of the primitive cultures of the Far East. This attention to the body's physical aspects is expressed also verbally with a series of monologues and dialogues focusing on the enumeration of anatomical attributes and sense organs often juxtaposed and mingled with images drawn from the natural world: "stone-eyed, tree-eyed, mountain throat, branch-neck". With levity and poetry, through allusions and playful reinventions, La Gaia Scienza shies away from civilization to celebrate in a "midsummer night's dream" atmosphere its renewed contact with nature.