The president's speech

by *Maria Grazia Gregori*

In the context of the summer festival «Da vicino nessuno è normale», a very important event for Milan, which takes place at the theatre of the former psychiatric hospital Paolo Pini, the new, interesting project of Ravenna's company Fanny & Alexander, *Speech*, conceived by Luigi De Angelis and Chiara Lagani, has made its debut. A serialized project with six different actors, from Marco Cavalcoli to Chiara Lagani, from Lorenzo Gleijeses to Francesca Mazza, from Fabrizio Gifuni to Sonia Bergamasco. An extraordinary journey which will end in 2014, dedicated to words and more specifically to speech in all its forms: political, pedagogical, religious, trade-union, legal, military, in order to face the power, so fascinating and yet often similar to that mortuary molasses wrapping everything, built on the rhetoric of hackneyed phrases, of a one-way (if not phoney) communication. A color for each context, from grey to red, which will symbolically fill, from time to time, the whole scene, on the other hand almost empty.

The first stage is called *Grey speech* and deals with politics, its way of talking and its breaks which pass for «novelties» but are just populism. A word involving everyone and everything in a chaos of sounds, apparently senseless. In this *Grey speech* whose protagonist is a funambulatory, very skilfull Marco Cavalcoli, everything is grey: the scene which seems a darkroom, the suit with white shirt and tie of the absolute protagonist, the President who is about to make an important speech. The President looks like an actor doing some training and warm-up exercises in his dressing room, preparing himself for a physical and emotional test which we realize to be important: sprints, broken movements, piercing sounds coming from who knows where, almost an abstract ballet while blasts of voices, immediately recognizable, enter from the outside. Voices of our today and our yesterday. These voices fill the constantly interrupted preparation of this kind of Charlot from modern times. Because the President is a mask, indeed the Mask.

Here he is telling us about his «entering the field» and while he speaks his voice changes: he is Berlusconi, but also Bossi, Bersani, La Russa, Casini, Bertinotti, Napolitano, Grillo in an impossible dialogue with Monti... and there's the past coming back with the voice of Berlinguer and, more distant, Churchill's one. Real words, from real speeches, for a disturbing setting.

The actor is crossed by these voices, he is the mask and megaphone of all these voices, he «embodies» all of them in a physical and sound delirium: a microphone stand is all he needs. Because this is the place of the words which interrogate themselves on the sense of their belonging, on their possibility to be shared, lived. To become public, in short, while they dangerously become a form of power if they're just a fascination, if they're not shared. Actually – the actor shows us – power is alone, almost reduced to aphasia, an illusionist with white gloves still capable of capturing the audience. But here is a clown with his big yellow rubber hands moving in whirls to emphasize a falsely popular speech, like a second-life comedian, where everything seems real but everything is false, exaggerated. A world of puppeteers for one man with a big cardboard head stolen from some carnival which has the flabby features of Berlusconi... The actor takes off his mask, he suddenly shuts up, he silently stares us. Darkness. But here we come, back to the beginning, to that waiting for the important speech which will take place, made by a man who, however, isn't here, he doesn't exist: I bequeath all my properties to the State, he says. Between fiction and reality, disturbing.