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## The "West" of Fanny & Alexander

by Rodolfo Sacchettini

We've come to the end, to the last cardinal point of the long project on *The Wizard of Oz*, on which Ravenna's company Fanny & Alexander has worked for about three years. *West* comes after *Dorothy. Disconcert for Oz, Him, Kansas, There's No Place Like Home, Emerald City, East, South and North*, and maybe it represents a limit, a margin already projected on new horizons and inquiries. Among all the works, *West* is the only one where the figure of Oz, the cheater and charlatan wizard, doesn't appear in any form, neither as an icon, nor as a "statuesque" actor, nor as a small trace like Hitler-style moustache to be placed on Dorothy's face. Here Oz is invisible, because he is present everywhere, or rather he determines the device on which the whole show is founded. But Oz's power has never been so present and effective like in this case, and maybe only *West* with its archetypes could show the ambiguous and underhanded nature of power.

*West* is different from the other works even in the relationship with the audience, and maybe it's similar to *Him* only. In both cases the centre of the scene is completely dedicated to one actor only, making a kind of crazy monologue, nearly a marathon, a furious race, which appears like a real contest against someone who's not present, or at least cannot be seen. The audience, following the frantic rhythm of the voice, join the athletic performance of the actor, turning into supporters instead of attentive spectators. In fact, at the end of the shows, the applause is something liberating and definitive, it seems like a finish line or a victory. The "race" of *Him* consists in dubbing live the whole Victor Fleming's *Wizard of Oz*, claiming the right to give voice to all the characters and even to the movie's sounds and music. So the main instrument of this incredible challenge is precisely the voice of Him (Marco Cavalcoli), ceaselessly repeating the movie's sounds to which he and he only listens in his earphones.

In *West* there's a similar participative dimension, even if this time it's completely declined in the feminine. Dorothy is alone on stage, sitting behind a small table and watching the audience. After a while, supported by some musical tracks which persist during the whole show, she begins an incoherent and attractive monologue. At the beginning, it can seem like a normal conversation by an anxious woman coming to grips with lots of thoughts which constantly pile up and become hazy. Then the rhythm increases and so do the repetitions, the changes of pitch, the frantic pace, immoderately. The gestures of the actress create more and more friction, recalling some movements of daily life (for example the way she drums with her fingers on the table, or the way her foot dances), which seem to be independent from the flow of the speech. This double discrepancy becomes more and more marked as the rhythm of the music grows, till the situation seems to be unbearable and the actress on stage seems possessed by a mysterious and overwhelming power. It's at this point that the device of the show is clearly revealed. The actress, by means of earphones, carries out some orders referring to the gestures she has to perform, and at the same time she repeats the words which are addressed to her. During the whole show it's like the extraordinary Francesca Mazza's brain was divided into two and capable of answering to different stimuli at the very same time. A device of ferocious other-directedness is imposed on her on stage: she finds herself to repeat texts which not by chance pertain to the hidden power of media and advertising. But they also refer to the persuasions to which everyone is subjected in daily life and love affairs, to the difficulty in saying «no» to a complicated and treacherous system, which at the same time appears to be engaging and pervasively widespread in human wishes. *West* pertains to all of this, but even more to its opposite. Francesca Mazza carries out all the orders transmitted to her earphones, but somehow she always tries to reinterpret them, to make them of her own. For this reason, more than to other-directedness, *West* pertains to a form of resistance to be carried out within a system which doesn't seem to contemplate any way of escape. To sum up, the actress, although bombarded by the external stimuli, although caged in a closed room from which it seems impossible to go out, stubbornly fights in order to keep a small residue of humanity, a vibration, a clear sign of a presence which doesn't want to resign itself.