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Motus. Nella tempesta (2013)

By Enrico Casagrande and Daniela Nicolò

With Silvia Calderoni, Glen Çaçi, Ilenia Caleo, Fortunato Leccese, Paola Stella Minni

Dramaturgy by Daniela Nicolò

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Moving-head design Alessio Spiri

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Drawing "Moltitudini" by Marzia Dalfini

First performance 24-27 may 2013, Montréal (Canada), Place des Arts-Cinquième Salle, Festival TransAmériques,

Nella tempesta, Motus 2013. Presentation

by Renata Savo

The main theme of the play is undoubtedly *The Tempest* in its literary interpretations from William Shakespeare to Aimé Césaire. The latter gives Shakespeare's work a post-colonial slant. But the tempest also takes on another meaning, one exhorted and shouted at the top of their lungs by the Living Theater and its soul Judith Malina: the tempest as "revolution." "This blanket," says Silvia Calderoni on stage, "comes from the house of Judith Malina, in NY, we were with her when Hurricane Sandy came ... She told us we shouldn't protect ourselves from storms, but unleash them"¹

Another main theme, the theater, intended as a place of possibility where one is allowed to imagine and build new relationships; first of all, the relationship between Prospero and Ariel, or that between director and actor. But the theme of the theater overlaps interestingly in this play with the theme of power, already present in Shakespeare. Above all, in Aime Césaire's modern version it becomes a pretext to talk about issues such as xenophobia and immigration. The play was modified in keeping with the socio-cultural milieu in which it was staged: in New York, Motus "did a version more linked to the historical reality that was sweeping across America's cities, with protests over the deaths of young African Americans murdered by the police ..."²

The situation is that of five actors grappling with Shakespeare's and Césaire's *Tempest* by analyzing its characters and in certain points interpreting their roles, like actors "trying" to translate them on stage using available means. In this sense only some of the aspects related to the aforementioned topics are developed. Time, therefore, is crystallized into a "here and now," unfolding through a set of actions that create a new outlook on the work, one related to the contemporary world. For this reason, the performance text also gives voice to what is off-stage, projected onto a PVC tarp in the background. Here we see Silvia Calderoni walking the streets of Lampedusa, querying immigrants, asking who, for them, is the boss that governs them, and reiterating the question to theater spectators: a question that creates a potential for reflecting on the conventional power relationship that reigns over the stage, among which the actors who may ask spectators to perform certain actions. To give cohesion to the show, it is not the text but the actors who claim its imaginative creative power, as does Ariel, a spirit yearning to be free from his "director" Prospero.

The language adopted by the actors in the sections where they play themselves (and are referred to by their own names) reflects everyday reality, apparent in the recurrent pauses and confidential tones, and in the incompleteness of the lines shown graphically in the script through repetition, punctuation and ellipses of speech. There are very few figures of speech: we can cite an anaphora in Silvia's description of a hypothetical contemporary desert island reached by an everyman "Prospero."

The text contains few captions. However, when the opening tempest scene of Shakespeare's work is acted, Silvia even includes the heading: "Act I, Scene One. A ship at sea, stormy noise of thunder and lightning. Enter a Captain and his First-

¹ D. Nicolò, *Nella tempesta*, unpublished.

² S. Angelini, R. Savo, *Motus 008-013: la storia di una svolta, ancora da scrivere* Eemail correspondence with Sandra Angelini, in R. Savo, *Teatri del reale nella realtà del teatro: il reality trend in Italia*, M.A. dissertation, Sapienza, Università di Roma, cit.

Mate.³ Paradoxically, more text captions are stated than functional, prescriptive ones.

As for the relationship between the characters and the actors, there are many instances of dramatic identification thanks to the meta-theatrical form, where the actors play the role of the captain and the first-mate in the aforementioned scene of ACT I, Scene 1 of *The Tempest*, or they play at imagining Ariel, Miranda and Caliban according to an unequal parsing of the roles among the five actors.

Within the play's text there are numerous sonic effects, as in the first scene, where Silvia is alone in the company of her shadow, while playing an Ariel-actor at the service of her master-director. In exposing its possibilities of action in empty space like a blank page on which all drawings are possible, Silvia performs actions, both those cited by the verbs in the text and hand slaps on the floor. There are several offstage voices: the voice of Enrico Casagrande explaining the irreversibly subordinate position of the characters of Ariel and Caliban toward Prospero, the voice of Judith Malina urging the onset of revolutions; another acousmatic voice is the audio recording of one of the many sightings reported to the Harbor Master of boats off the coast of Lampedusa.

Character-actor-performer

At the beginning of the play it is Silvia Calderoni who sets the scene. The first line she says is a statement of her process of dramatic identification, of putting herself in another's shoes: "Pretend I'm invisible." An invitation, therefore, addressed to the spectators, to believe in the power of theater and to look beyond appearances, though it is Silvia herself who becomes Character-Persona: presenting Glen ("He's Glen.").

In a certain sense, Silvia is the one who in the absence of Prospero takes responsibility for what happens on stage. After introducing the spectators to the words of Judith Malina, then heard in audio playback, she carries the show forward by asking Glen, who is Albanian, what he "sees" when he thinks of "his" tempest. The actors alternate interpretations of themselves with dramatic representations of some parts of Shakespeare's plot, but not entirely defined. For example, Silvia is assigned the role of Ariel, as well, at a certain point, as that of Ferdinand; Glen that of Prospero, also assigned to Ilenia, who immediately veers toward the character of Miranda. Fortunato, however, winds up interpreting Caliban, who takes the role of an immigrant "X" who has landed in Lampedusa, an "unclean," socially inferior being, a "foreigner" who must adopt our ways in the name of an ersatz Civilization.

The play opts not only for a topical interpretation of the characters (interesting in this regard is a dialogue between Ariel and Caliban in which Prospero's two servants compare their respective ideas about freedom), but this becomes a tool for giving the play a political slant that is even more pronounced than in Shakespeare's text,

Even the absence of special effects, such as the use of blankets for constructing space and character profiles, reveals the same intention of unveiling the artificiality of the play.

Space is conceived as a kind of blank page on which to draw the scene: the "pencils", as in a Beckettian device, are the white light beams casting background shadows and multiplying figures (as if asserting that "unity is strength"), or quickening the pace of the staging of the tempest, also evoked by the roar of thunder. The visual environment is completed by blankets donated by the spectators on entering the theater; blankets that were then donated to an association involved in promoting the rights of the Roma community in Italy. The actors use the blankets to build skyscrapers, basements, and create physical mass: as in the case of the character of Caliban, "half man, half fish" buried under layers of blankets, lying on the ground in the guise of a homely beached whale. The tempest is also evoked in the music of Beethoven (his Piano Sonata no. 17 in D minor, *The Tempest*), which recurs throughout the play in both the background and the forefront with respect to all the other scenic elements, sometimes overlapping with sounds of gunfire, recalling once again the association "tempest = revolution". On the ground, on that white page which is the stage, the folded and rolled up blankets draw the colored letters of a question. It resonates powerfully, projected vertically onto the backdrop: "*And us?*".

³ *Ibidem*.