

LE STORIE DEGLI ALTRI (OTHER PEOPLE’S STORIES): AN “EXTRA MOENIA” THEATRE PROJECT

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Abstract: This article examines *Le storie degli altri* (Other People’s Stories), a theatre project conceived within the partnership between the University for Foreigners of Siena, the Siena University Hospital “Le Scotte” (Azienda Ospedaliero-Universitaria Senese) and Doctors Without Borders-Italy. As part of project THE, Unistrasi, Spoke 3/3-4, and Spoke 10/5, it draws on long-standing experiences in community-based theatre. Grounded on the notion of *extra moenia* performance, the project explores how narrative and performance can function as tools for reflection, ethical engagement, and the construction of intersubjective spaces beyond traditional theatrical boundaries. The study situates the project within a genealogy of Western theatre, from ritual forms to contemporary performance theory, emphasizing the shift from character-centred representation to collective performativity. Central to the analysis is Arthur Frank’s concept of narrative ethics and the transformative potential of storytelling, particularly in relation to testimonies of suffering collected by humanitarian workers. Through a process of narrative “retelling”, participants – students, healthcare professionals, and community members – become performers who enact empathy and shared responsibility. The project thus reconfigures the actor–audience relationship, fostering a horizontal communicative space where witnessing becomes a collective practice. Ultimately, the article argues that *extra moenia* theatre can cultivate a participatory ethics capable of strengthening community bonds and expanding the social function of performance.

Keywords: social theatre; communicative bodies; theatre performance; empathy; connections.

1. Foreword

Drawing also from our previous Egumteatro experience, our premise was that Script and Theatre, Narrative and Performance could be considered a form and a tool for reflection and communication even outside their designated areas. We therefore translated this statement into a project that would draw on the rich, stimulating, and challenging environment that is the university. Rich because it is a place for reflection and education – and rich also because it is inhabited by young people who, while maturing their skills, develop critical thinking, independent thought and planning, and a sense of responsibility. Specifically, we implemented it within the University for Foreigners of Siena (Unistrasi), an ideal place due to its unique characteristics: the presence of foreigners, the study of languages and cultures, and the cultivation of a culture of dialogue and exchange stemming from mutual understanding.

As a starting point, we chose the social and medical sector, because we felt that this was exactly where the need for a new communicative approach was most evident. Accordingly, we identified another two key partners: the Siena University Hospital (AOUS) “Le Scotte”, and Medici Senza Frontiere-Italia (MSF), the Italian branch of Doctors Without Borders. We began with reflections on Narrative Medicine, Transcultural Medicine, and Cross-cultural Mediation in healthcare and social services. In today’s multicultural and open society, with its inescapable connections, a change in communication between caregiver and patient is a necessity that concerns us all, as has been explored for decades.

And that was our beginning: precisely, on February 21st, 2024.

1.1 The project

A project like this is not a civil engineering project. It can afford to have its own sort of ambition, a sense of confidence, of hope that what it proposes will arouse the interests of many. A project like this does not know everything about itself right from the onset; it is a proposal that cannot yet fully know what needs it will meet and will be able to fulfil. A project like this is no bridge over a strait, or fifty-story skyscraper – it is a door to possible implementations that needs to remain open as much and as long as possible, so those who approach it can decide when to come in, and also, if need be, to leave. This project is a welcoming space where those who decide to stay know that the individual drive that first brought them here will evolve into practical training in discussion, sharing, collective work, and concrete acceptance of others. Thus, our project appealed to those we expected would be interested, but also to those we were not sure of, and perhaps even to those we did not expect to involve at all. This is how our diverse and wonderful working group was formed.

Personally, I had worked for seven years on a similar university theatre project. It was very well received and satisfying, but there the diversity stemmed from the individual departments that the many participating students came from. There were students of classical and modern literature, law, biotechnology, engineering, mathematics, philosophy, political science, and many, many

medical students – all of them however were university students between the ages of nineteen and twenty-five.

Here it was different. For sure, there were students, especially those from Unistrasi's Cultural Mediation degree course, but also doctors, nurses, and administrative employees from the University Hospital, and ... everybody else: educators from reception centres, pharmacists, high school students, teachers, with an age group spanning from 15 to 60. Thus, diversity immediately became our main resource.

I will begin with a personal note. For someone like me, who has been involved in theatre for more than thirty years, in different places, gradually moving further and further away from the confines of theatrical institutions while constantly searching for appropriate methodologies, a project like this raises questions that need to be adequately answered. It is so because every aspect of it has been and continues to be a stimulus for reflection that is as unprecedented as much as it is necessary.

2. From theatre direction to extra moenia “outside the city walls” theatre: where no traveller is a stranger

Oliver Sacks, quoting Lurija and Vigotskij, notes how the paradox of disease is its creative potential: there is a uniqueness that transforms the minus of handicap into a plus of compensation, and this demands casting a new look upon the brain, to be seen not as something programmed and static, but as an adaptive system, an extremely efficient one, geared for evolution and change, and constantly adapting to the needs of the organism (Sacks 1995: xvii).

Among my main experiences of theatre “*extra moenia*”, there is certainly the workshop for the users of “Il Poderuccio” in Buonconvento, in the province of Siena – and it is also the longest-running one. It is a music and theatre activity offered to the severely disabled people who attend the Center, between ten and twelve in number, and currently aged between eighteen and fifty-five. Their age on paper, however, is not particularly indicative – it only expresses how long they had been associated with the Centre and, unfortunately, the deterioration of their specific conditions as well.

In describing my work at Il Poderuccio, I will avoid using the term *therapy*, since I believe it could lead to risky misunderstandings.

I have an M.A. in Modern Literature and a diploma in directing from the Academy of Dramatic Arts. My professional life has been spent in the theatre, mostly *intra moenia*, within the walls of the theatre, as a director, playwright, and trainer. I am therefore rather embarrassed when, working *extra moenia*, outside the theatre, in a context such as that of a day centre for people with disabilities, my presence is sometimes justified as that of a specialist in some form of therapy. In cases like this, the etymological or semantic issue has never seemed to me a priority; nevertheless, throughout these nine years of activity, I have always felt compelled to make it clear from the outset that I am not a music therapist or an art therapist. Actually, the problem of defining my role has become for me a problem of defining my skills, of answering the question “what

am I doing here?”, which I deemed essential to clarify. At first, it meant taking time to look and to listen, not to be frightened by so much (apparent) difference. And indeed, the well-being produced by artistic activity reveals how much conscious will for creativity there was in those participants, as in all of us. Theatre and music offer an opportunity for the expression of one’s intellectual and emotional energy; they meet a need for individual expression and provide both the means to communicate these expressions and the tools for a possible reclaiming of one’s own existence – with all its value – by individuals often forced into marginality and exclusion.

Between 2017 and 2024, I worked with reception centres for migrants, specifically those for unaccompanied minors. It all began in the form of a theatre workshop, at the invitation of the Cooperativa Migranti San Francesco in Monteriggioni, to which was added, over time, a collaboration with the Cooperativa Pangea in Siena.

The onset in 2017 was rather discouraging: about fifteen young people between the ages of sixteen and nineteen, almost all from sub-Saharan Africa, who had no idea whatsoever of what theatre was, had never even heard the word translated into the two or three colonial languages more or less at my disposal, or in any case were not interested in learning about it, and generally wanted to go and play football (later, cricket too, when youngsters from the Indian subcontinent and Afghanistan arrived). But I was helped by the context. The caretaking provided at the time also included schooling, recreation, sports, psychological assistance (everything that in current migrant reception policy is now being denied, to minors as well as to female victims of trafficking), though with a ban on employment for minors. And everything that the children initially perceived as an instrument of harassment was eventually recognized by them, if not quite as one of their rights, at least as something reassuring, almost pleasant – in fact, welcoming. They let their defenses down, and that’s when I would come up with my strange proposal of a game. I also devised a stratagem that worked very well right from the start, and continued to function in the years to come. I convinced three or four students from my university workshop to come with me, and devised for them the role of “generational mediators”, to everyone’s great satisfaction.

The greatest satisfaction was obviously the performance, or rather, the performances we designed and staged between 2018 and 2024. The greatest satisfaction was seeing the kids so enthusiastic and proud to appear on stage in front of an audience of their peers from the city schools, in theatres both in Siena and in Rome.

The first show, at the Teatro dei Rozzi in Siena, May 2018, was presented as follows:

The performance stems from a theatre workshop project for unaccompanied minors at the San Francesco migrant reception centre (Monteriggioni). Young people take to the stage in an entertaining and energetic show. Beautiful, witty, intelligent young people. Young people who are not a social and geopolitical problem: they are our young people, our children’s friends, their schoolmates. Young people who are also our own sons and daughters. With their difficulties, their mood swings, their uncontrollable vitality, their

faith in the future, the same intelligence and beauty, the same rights. A performance that means to put the human question right back at the core and remind us that being human is not just the experience of “fear” but also that of “love” and “care.” And to remind us that the other people’s stories are also our stories. To remind us that “the others” are inevitably “us” (from the *Programme* of the performance).

Between 2015 and 2022, six editions of the annual theatre workshop for students at the Siena University were held, culminating in a performance. The theatre workshops were named *Prometheus Unleashed*, after Hans Jonas’ definition, an:

irresistibly unleashed Prometheus, to whom science gives unprecedented power and the economy gives relentless momentum, demands an ethic that, through self-restraint, prevents his power from becoming a disaster for mankind (Jonas 1979: 15; my translation from the Italian edition).

The project, conceived in 2015 by Francesco Frati, Chancellor of the University of Siena, was divided into two basic stages: a theatre workshop and a final performance.

The latter was conceived as the culmination of a process of study, documentation, in-depth analysis, and debate on the general theme of ethics and sustainability in the application of knowledge, a topic of fundamental importance for an institution dedicated to scientific research such as the University. The approach was based on the concept of responsibility, following Jonas’s reflection, which focuses on the crisis in the relationship between man and nature, and is aimed at finding an ethic and a policy appropriate to technological civilization:

The real issue is the emergence of this new obligation, summarized in the concept of responsibility. [... Until now] both knowledge and power were too limited to include the distant future in predictions and even our terrestrial globe in the consciousness of its own causality. Instead of idly wondering about the remote consequences of an unknown destiny, ethics has focused on the moral quality of the momentary act itself, in which the rights of our neighbours who share our fate must be respected. In the age of technology, however, ethics has to do with actions [...] that have an unparalleled causal horizon, accompanied by a knowledge of the future that, however incomplete, goes beyond all previous knowledge. Added to this is the scale of long-term consequences and often their irreversibility. All this places responsibility at the centre of ethics, with spatial and temporal horizons corresponding precisely to those of actions. For this reason, the theory of responsibility, which is still lacking today, is at the heart of the work (Jonas 1979: 16; my translation from the Italian edition)

This was our starting point and, as we have seen, the title of our workshop, open to students from every department of the University of Siena.

Based on this experience, I believe that theatre in a university, even before being an opportunity to develop those skills, aseptically designated as soft skills, may be seen as a place of “creative chaos” that naturally promotes the melding of knowledge and the acquisition of transversal skills, first and foremost creativity. Creativity is seen as a professional resource and a stimulus for the

evolution of knowledge and the development of interpersonal and communication skills.

In those years, not even Covid could stop us, and we tackled different issues every time. These were our performances, all guided by Jonas' concept of responsibility:

2015/16: *Welcome to Los Alamos!*

The story of the construction of the atomic bomb from the point of view of the physicists who worked on it.

2017/18: *(As of Today) We Are Closed.*

The story of the economic and financial crisis that began in 2009.

2018/2019: *It all revolves around...*

Galileo Galilei in Siena after his recantation.

2019/2020: *Pierre & Marie* (podcast for Unisi InstagramTV).

Atoms of Radium in 16 (unmissable) episodes. The story of Pierre and Marie Curie, the scientist couple.

2020/21: *Darwin on the Beach* (feature film).

Darwin, human evolution, and the impact on the environment.

2021/22: *I'll tell you everything.*

Or: journey into infospace, between pandemics and wars.

3. The actor and the narrative: a journey towards the construction of Other People's Stories

“Could the meaning of being born human be to become Human?”

(Franck 2004: 7)

Reflecting on *Prometheus Unleashed* leads us to the experience that began in 2024 and is now in its second edition: *Le storie degli altri*, (*Other People's Stories*).

As mentioned above, in a project such as this, questions arise that stimulate new, albeit necessary considerations, linked to fundamental issues in the field of theatre history and practice.

In presenting those facts of Western theatre history that I consider generative, I will make some “leaps”, driven by the need to arrive at a synthesis that expounds and supports the experimental nature of *Le storie degli altri*.

With regard to the figure of the actor, the one who acts on stage, Benvenuto Cuminetti (1982: 138) identifies two poles of reference: the “festive pole”, where the theatrical event is based on different experiences that refer to ritual processes, and the “theatrical pole”, where the actor “is called upon to embody an aesthetic dimension within the horizon of fiction”. From this polarization, Jean Duvignaud derives a second polarization: “the festive actor in the ritual

process legitimized by myth”, and “the *comédien* actor born with the enforcement of writing” (cit. in Cuminetti 1982: 138). The *comédien* breaks free from the festive actor through fifth century Attic tragedy, which establishes Western theatre and gives rise to the world of fiction. Unlike the epic, it requires “staging” – and that in turn requires writing. Antonio Attisani shows how rituals are transformed into aesthetic events, how writing moves from the orality of myth to “authorial creation,” and how the actor is transformed from being possessed to being the possessor. Staging, Attisani argues, contrasts with ritual, even despite the very intentions of the Athenian tragedians themselves:

Classical Greek theatre emerged right alongside secularization, that is, with the replacement and transformation of mythical–religious content into worldly values, but not as an articulation of secularization. [...] The Athenian tragedians do not clearly express themselves either for or against secularization. They question, they play on contrasts, they are aware of the unstoppable nature of the process, they understand its solid motivations and negative effects; but all this is experienced, even in subjective terms, as a loss of knowledge (Attisani 1995: 39).

In classical civilization, theatrical scripts are among the first non-administrative written texts, yet they do not present debates between ideas, or conversations between different personalities, but rather contrast different ideas of justice, opposing logics, all endowed with equal authority. In breaking away from the previous world that claimed to possess knowledge, learning becomes a quest, and an attempt is made to share this condition of uncertainty and instability with the audience through the human beings/characters who embody this fragility.

The author, like the viewer, does not know the answer, or rather, must recognize the validity of Antigone’s motivation as well as Creon’s, the paradoxical rationality of both in the secularized world (Attisani 1995: 40).

At the same time, however, it is precisely writing that, by secularizing theatre, makes it open to censure and therefore also elusive. From now on, the artist is no longer a shaman, an interpreter of knowledge; his statements are relative, and he can therefore become a critic (or a lackey). The language of Western theatre is now confirmed as being marked by the dialectic of the double, “where the past of tradition becomes secret or clandestine” (*ibid.*).

In Western theatre, from then on, the materials will consist of the text (and of texts, including ideological and unconscious ones), while the wellspring of meaning that artists draw from contains the world-story (voice, song, body); on the institutional side, techniques will concern the exposition of ideas (logic), whereas stage artistry is the domain of a poetic process that is, if anything, analogical: it evokes the invisible and the unheard, naturally metaphysical. Within the institution, the function of judgment (and of opinion, of criticism) dominates, but the stage embodies the question, the perennial appeal posed by the confrontation with the unresolved and the difference (Attisani 1995: 42).

With the actor in Greek tragedy, the *character* is born, that thing for which a man

leaves his identity behind in favour of another's, and yet, even so, no true identity is created, since the character is in contrast with the chorus, and the chorus prevents him from achieving that state of "fulfilment" and completeness to which he aspires by asserting his own motivation: the chorus opposes the character's yearning for identity and fragments it. The point is that one must understand what will replace this function in the centuries to come, since it seems clear that this trait of *plurality* will never disappear from theatrical art.

Aristotle tells us about the transition from the poet himself as interpreter to the "professional" actor who imposes his skills and prepares to consolidate his autonomy: this is fully established in the Baroque era, when the players of the *Commedia dell'Arte* break away from the medieval jester and become artists in the modern sense of the term. This autonomy is identified with the practice of improvisation, which places the actor at the centre of theatrical art and marginalizes the dramaturgical/literary text, turning it into a "canvas." This establishes the extra-linguistic component of the "performed" text, recognized not as a literary work but as an "event" that refers to an actual audience, to an act of "seeing: and "hearing" that takes place here and now and cannot be deferred or fragmented like a reading.

The process that led from the *comédien* actor (who still exists today) to the avant-garde performer of the 20th century was long and tortuous (or incredibly linear), involving the theorization and practices of exceptional figures and the evolution of these figures and their roles, with the progressive implementation of complex aesthetic reflections, the arrival of new technologies, relationships with other artistic disciplines, historical events, and social transformations.

We could then turn to what does not happen, in the sense that it does not change, thus leading to a definition of Theatre that may be useful to our reflection, one among the myriad of possibilities, trying to say something in order to do something, escaping what Attisani defines as the "braking paradox" of the absence of a language of theatre, "both when it resolves in favour of an unspeakability and when it seeks total semiotisation" (Attisani 1995: 18).

One of the aspects that becomes increasingly apparent as complexity increases and persists is undoubtedly the plurality of skills required to create the theatrical "object" (the performance), but also to produce theatre in all its necessarily slow unfolding. Even the ups and downs that have characterized the status of the figure of director have never determined its exclusivity: and how could they? Even "staging", understood as theatre in which a demiurge director interprets texts and imposes his personal vision, cannot do without professionals who possess other skills, and this is even apparent with the advent of modern technologies. Even in theatre directed by a director, the actor can never be considered a mere executor of the director's intentions, not only because he possesses technical skills that the director can manipulate but not "possess", but because he is another human being, endowed with his own intellectual and moral worldview, which the director and author must deal with.

The other professionals involved, set designers, costume designers, lighting designers, sound designers, and musicians, are also evermore increasing in artistic recognition; they are becoming more and more specialized, not mere executors of someone else's will. It is therefore appropriate to think of theatre

work as “common artistic work”, as a “community of creators”, and this, while always having been in the nature of theatre, has being affirmed programmatically from the historical avant-gardes of the first decades of the 20th century onwards, with their eagerness to explore and expand the field and the limits imposed by the historical form of Western drama. In particular, we are indebted to the reflections and practices of director and theorist Richard Schechner, founder of a “science of performance” in which everything is expanded – through the contamination of cultural models, the multiplication of stage space, and the involvement of the audience. By repossessing Western and non-Western models of ritual theatre, Schechner explores his own cultural context to discover within it theatrical forms that perform functions that correspond to those of primitive ceremonies while affirming the necessity of theatre and its social function, its connection to a community. The idea of community is twofold: on the one hand, it binds together the artists who participate in the work of a collective aimed at implementing a performance; on the other, it includes the spectator as a cooperating gaze, not merely bound to a passive enjoyment in a dedicated space. That plurality, which the process of secularization of Attic tragedy does not invalidate, that tension towards the openness and inclusiveness of ritual, seems to be reconfirmed in the modern era thanks to the neo-avant-garde and, above all, to the theory and practice of performance art. In her introduction to Richard Schechner’s *Performance Theory 1970–1983*, Valentina Valentini explains this second aspect very clearly:

With the concept of *restoration*, Schechner discovers a new dimension of the spectator: it is no longer a matter of posing, of a role fixed by a “closed” text that blocks the free play of knowing and recognizing oneself along predictable paths and trajectories, nor of witnessing, as a presence at an event from which one is excluded, as in a profane glimpse. The concept of *restoration* brings to light an image of the spectator as someone who reconstructs an object, revives it, and renews it, an image that converges in a common liminal space with that of the operator, in a third place, the one of the *performer* (Valentini 1984: 36).

Performance occupies such a broad territory that it can include both those who traditionally act and those who traditionally watch, transforming them into a single entity so dense that it excludes any elsewhere. Performative action no longer focuses so much on products, artistic creation, aesthetic ambition, and exhibition, but rather on work processes, practical training in discussion, in sharing, in collective work, and in the concrete and daily acceptance of others. Theatre as performance therefore represents training in empathy, a sense of community, and being human beings worthy of the name.

In his *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*, (*Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen*, 1795), Schiller says that man only plays when he is a human being in the full sense of the word, and he is only fully human when he plays, meaning by “play” that which mediates between instinct and intellect, and fulfils the aspiration to beauty. On this subject, Schechner writes:

I am asking “you” – whoever is reading this – to consider the almost unimaginable because it is so hard for people to take seriously those who are not doing business, making war, or enforcing the will of God. To take seriously those who play; those who create playgrounds and art spaces. To take seriously the personal, social, and world-making force of performance. We must reject ideological, economic, and religious rigidity in favor of flexibility and fluidity (Schechner 1984: 221 in the Italian version).

Here, the category of “acting” helps us identify the origin of some key concepts of our project and of what has informed our work, both in its theatrical and writing components.

The workshop stems, first and foremost, from the desire to stimulate the playful–creative abilities of all participants, to “turn people into artists” (Schechner 1988: 39), and this is achieved precisely by using the tool of play, understood in its meaning of “child’s play”, where there is no external gaze and therefore no judgment. The concept of free play, above all free from judgment, from judging oneself, from judging others, and from the fear of being judged, is linked to that of empathy training and of the resulting practice of building a working group or, even better, a community.

Let us now examine the other category: that of storytelling. If the basis of the performance – that which inspires us – lies the idea of empathy training, a sense of community, and therefore the re-appropriation of one’s humanity, then in our approach to storytelling we are also looking for an ethic, so that stories may become a place for encounters, exchanges, mutual influences and compensations, and transformations.

It is precisely the transformative power of stories that Arthur Frank talks about, as well as about narrative ethics:

Narrative ethics takes place in telling and listening. There is no such thing as a self-story if that term is taken literally; only self-other-stories. The stories we call “ours” are already bits and pieces we have gathered from others’ stories, and we exist no less in their “self”-stories. Ultimately narrative ethics is about recognizing how much we as fellow-humans have to do with each other. As we grope toward some unknowable vision of the good and virtuous, cutting and pasting stories, borrowing and lending along the way, we become communicative bodies (Frank 1995, p. 163).

Arthur Frank is not a theatre person, but rather an emeritus professor of Sociology at the University of Calgary specializing in illness and healthcare ethics. Yet his work is fundamental to the search for a method on which to base our theatrical experience and reflection. As Frank deals with stories of illness, the role of concepts such as listening, relationship, and empathy – understood as resonance between communicative bodies – becomes even more evident. These concepts must become practices. According to him, in order to acknowledge the transformative power of stories, we must ask ourselves: what kind of person do you become by listening to a story? And not: what have you learned from this story?

In the first year of our project, we tried to answer these questions and give substance to these ideas, working on the first-hand accounts of Doctors Without

Borders personnel, extreme stories of suffering and injustice. Frank defines the narrative of suffering as a *broken narrative*. We can say that, in the case of MSF testimonies, we are faced with a double “brokenness”: that of those being narrated, human beings who are victims of war, violence, hunger, and other abuses, and that of the narrators of all this: humanitarian workers who, in the act of collecting these stories, become, by condition and resonance, broken narrators themselves. Thus, in this effort to get closer, we had the opportunity to become the third term in a relationship: a moral relationship where, as Lévinas says, a deep sense of responsibility is expected. *One is for the Other*, and where:

this attention to the Other [...] can be affirmed as the very bond of human subjectivity, even to the point of being raised to a supreme ethical principle (Lévinas 1988, p. 159).

The theme here becomes that of openness to the interhuman, understood as an intersubjective space in which encounters take place and loneliness no longer exists. Not an empty interstitial space, but a place of what Frank calls narrative co-construction, which he defines as even more important than content since, in an extreme situation such as that of disabling illness, the story is the one that is told by others.

This was the case for us when, in the 2024 performance, we took on the task of bearing witness and telling other people’s stories. It should not be forgotten that many of the participants in the project are healthcare professionals, while others are young people who are training to become healthcare professionals or mediators.

This was the first phase of what I consider to be an experiment in *peer empathy*, as individual narratives found other bodies and resonated with them, creating a balance:

If people could believe that each of us lacks something that only an other can fill – if we could be communicative bodies – then empathy would no longer be spoken of as something one person “has for” another. Instead, empathy is what a person “is with” another: a relationship in which each understands herself as requiring completion by the other. [...] The sufferer is made whole in hearing the other’s story that is also hers, and in having her own story not just be listened to but heard as if it were the listener’s own, which it is. The illusion of being lost is overcome (Frank 1995: 150; 183).

Returning to Frank’s idea of the transformative power of stories and applying it to this triangular narrative experience, in our case all three vertices of the triangle are storytellers, while only two are also listeners. Those who originate the stories are listened to and their stories enter into the process of *retelling*, which involves listening and narration, and whose first level is that of direct witnesses and the second that of those who, in our theatre experience, have taken up the burden. Fritz Breithaupt, professor of cognitive science at Indiana University and author of *The Narrative Brain*, talks about *retelling* in the chapter entitled “The Telephone Game”, in which he describes what he calls *chains of retelling*, giving examples of scientific experiments carried out on them

(Breithaupt 2025). These chains are the passage within a chain of narrators of the same fact. Considering retelling as the ideal form for explaining our theatrical narration process, we observe how the chain did not break after only three passages but continued, expanding the space of our work to the theatre hall, where the audience is, and is considered the place of the public: those who watch and listen.

From the perspective of neuroscience, scientific research can describe how different areas of the brain perceive and respond to a work of art, develop a theory of vision, and interpret sensory experience by analysing interactions between neurons using complex instruments. From the perspective of art psychology, represented by scholars such as Ernest Kris, Alois Riegl, and Ernst Gombrich, art is incomplete without the involvement of the observer. The aesthetic experience of art would therefore be a mediation between two subjectivities: that of the creator and that of the viewer. We must now focus our attention on the condition of *Other People's Stories*, highlighting some of its "specificities".

Speaking of Attic tragedy, I recalled that one of the functions of the Chorus was to prevent the condition of "satisfaction" and completeness to which the character aspires by asserting his motivation, to oppose the character's aspiration to identity, fragmenting it and leaving open in the scenography what Attisani defines as "the unresolved" (*ibid.* 1995: 42).

But what happens if we eliminate (as we did) the character as an individual who vies with the chorus, and bring only the latter on the stage – the "community of craftspersons", that homogeneous group fully aware of its actions? These in turn become ethical choices that completely inform the performance. No self-exhibition, no flaunting of professional skills, only adherence to the witnessing. In this case, the narrative is shared and, as such, conveys a sense of belonging and cohesion to the group. Here, those whose actions play out on stage are certainly not "actors" in the sense of *comédiens* (and even Grotowski's definition of "non-actor" seems inappropriate to me), but in my opinion they have honourably earned the definition of performers and, as such, are representatives of a plurality. The audience, who know their characteristics and their origins, will then perceive them as "peers".

Thus, the distinction between this side and the other side of the stage, even if it is drawn, will have a mere spatial meaning, but in fact it will not mark a distinction in skills – perhaps, from the point of view of retelling, not even in roles. The theatre thus becomes much more than an open space: like the performance, it has no boundaries: it becomes a real centre where everyone can converge, because our chorus is a powerful device for spreading the emotions and the ethico-political awareness that give form to our witnessing. Our chorus keeps the physical and mental space of the narrative open, because the transformative power is the same for both the narrator and the listener, and because this will make it possible, even in course of this transit, to achieve co-creation. Those who listen already know what is being narrated, or rather they do not know the individual facts but they know their meaning, and have already assigned an ethical judgment to that reality. What needs to be achieved is the sharing of an emotion that, if experienced in solitude, can only be frustrating, if

not useless.

4. Other people's stories: extra moenia theatre.

At the outset, I mentioned *extra moenia* theatre, and used this definition for the title of this paper as well. *Extra moenia* does not necessarily mean leaving the theatre's physical space; it's rather a matter of breaking away from certain conventions already challenged by experimental theatre in the '60s, '70s, and '80s, with its different options for performance, enjoyment, and above all, relationship – conventions subsequently stubbornly reintroduced, swallowing up almost the entire space of theatre done “by the book”. *Extra moenia* is a proposal for a renewed overcoming of these non-physical walls, according to the practice, certainly not new but perhaps not yet fully explored, of the actor-performer as a bearer of empathy among peers, of horizontal theatrical communication, a segment of a retelling that precedes and surpasses it.

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