

Tiziana Barbiero

One White Rose

Renzo¹ always asked a lot of us as actors. He wanted us to master several techniques: the use of the body, acrobatics, vocal skills, singing, stunts, musical instruments, and Asian dances. In each of these techniques we were supposed to reach the highest standard, never giving up, always continuing to practise. In the early years I wasn't very satisfied. I thought I was incapable of doing anything, since I always had too many things to learn. Renzo was never concerned about time. Thirty years later, I think I can affirm that he was right. It was necessary to be determined and patient - as he was.

As a result, the actors of Teatro tascabile di Bergamo (TTB) have spent their whole life training, neglecting, some more and some less, the conceptual and theoretical dimension. In my case, this was delegated, serenely and completely, to Renzo. Since his sudden death, to look back upon even just a few steps of our path - the work on voice, and more specifically on text - without him, as I am going to do in the following pages, has been painful and hard.

1. PRONUNCIATION

When I started working at Teatro tascabile, in 1978, the actors' training was mainly centred on the body. We were totally focused on physical training and scores, acrobatics and Asian classical dances - TTB's special feature. The primary need was to develop a "new" actor, who could move skilfully on stage, unlike the loudspeaker-actor of the traditional classical theatre, who, as Grotowski said ironically, was apparently only able to stand up, sit down and smoke a cigarette.

Even though voice was included in our training (resonators, colours and different techniques we had learnt from our teachers at Teatr Laboratorium and Odin Teatret),

*Through the years,
we have proved that
these overlapping
tasks don't exclude
each other, but, if I
let them settle one by
one for a while, they
stratify, like the
Chinese lacquers, like
the colours of
painters, making the
rendition "dense", or,
to call it by a word
that Renzo loved very
much, "ritorta"
(twisted).*

1. Renzo Vescovi, founder and director of Teatro tascabile di Bergamo (15th August 1941 - 3rd April 2005)

we were still far from exploring the voice in relation to theatre text and the creation of vocal scores. It was only while working on *Esperimenti con la verità* (Experiments with Truth), a performance in memory of Mahatma Ghandi, that we started to confront the question of text seriously.

It was immediately clear to us that, if we wanted to speak on stage, we had to have at least the same technical proficiency as 'real' actors and that we couldn't excuse ourselves as their 'younger' brothers and sisters. Apart from this, it was a universe entirely to be discovered. I quote Renzo's words from my notes at that time: "Our problem is that we are in a white sea with no references (in the field of language). The autonomy of the signifier and the awareness that traditional theatre's stereotypes must be eliminated are the only references we have." (15/2/90). Our endless research - the rehearsals of *Esperimenti con la verità* lasted ten years! - began precisely with the autonomy of the signifier.

We developed our work on several levels. The first that I would like to describe, because it's still so important to me, is the work on diction and orthoepy, the correct pronunciation of the phonemes of the Italian language. At TTB, we spent many hours training the correct pronunciation of sounds. To do this, we borrowed a series of exercises from classical theatre, transforming them so that they were less sterile, adding small tasks and physical actions to avoid the risk of becoming bored and mechanical.

I remember long sessions together where we used to train in the proper articulation of consonants and groups of consonants, tongue-twisters, the endings of words, the particular Italian problem of the correct

pronunciation of the open or closed "e" and "o", and every morning spent yelling and blowing the "brrrrrrr" and "prrrrrrr" and "trrrrrrr", and also the "pappa-pioppo-pippo-peppe-pialla", and the "pappap-oppop-ippop-epppe-ialla", as if we were playing ping-pong or skipping with vowels and consonants.

Renzo, who had a degree in Italian literature, gave us fascinating history lessons on the language's origin and evolution through time, on its fathers. We learnt by heart the dictionary of diction, which was compulsory for classical theatre actors, and carefully studied the position of sounds in the mouth: oral and nasal vowels, palatal or velar ones, explosive or durative consonants. No different from knowing precisely how to turn a somersault: where to place your head, at what distance to put your arms, when and at what point to bend your legs. I emphasise this because at that time 'new theatre' and 'new actors' had a tendency to refuse all this, somehow believing that, to be authentic in theatre, you should talk as you did as a child, with all the residual defects and dialect inflections of childhood.

I find it hard to take a definitive attitude, but this study on diction, after a long period of research, has led me to conceive of and discover the work on text as a sheer dance of sound. This happens in particular cases and especially with poetry, so the interest is not so much in the meaning of what I am saying, but in the effective orchestration of rhythmical sound impulses, in the perfect pronunciation of a consonant or in the vibration of a skilfully executed "r".²

2.THE DRONE

For us, the problem of language and its use

2. The distinction between meaning and pure sound brings me back to Indian classical dance-theatre, which is divided into two main categories: interpretative dance, where the actor-dancer performs a poetic text, which is sung and played by an orchestra, with *hastas* (hand gestures); and pure dance, a composition of steps and movements with no meaning, for which, to use Renzo's words, "eyes to see and ears to hear are enough".

on stage has been just as demanding as the work on physical actions. Going back to the research done for *Esperimenti con la verità* and to the autonomy of the signifier, the only thing that was clear to us was that we couldn't start from the meaning of the text or from the work on character, because this probably would have led us to a traditional rendition, something we definitely wanted to avoid.

I quote Renzo's words from my notes again: "Likely method: musical procedure; organisation of sounds. Music is used for provoking, laughing, crying, etc.; a psycho-nervous use. The power of organising space, time and sounds that move the human soul: we have to use text and voice in the same way as music. The meaning of a word is just *one* of the ingredients, but not the only one. There are the forte, the pianissimo and pauses. We have to use an odd mixture, a cocktail, a fusion of musical elements and of the meaning of what is said. We have to manage to mix intonations, rhythms, and gradations of colour and chiaroscuros, to render the meaning of the text musically. It is as if a poem in an unknown language were sung in such a way that, even without understanding the meaning of the words, its sense could be grasped." (17/2/90).

After some time we actually thought we had found an effective way of working on text. The approach (I prefer not to use the terms "method" or "system", since I have always felt they set a limit to the work) was divided into two phases, which Renzo later called "the work on the drone" and "the thirty-two layers of lacquer". For us the drone is a formalised melody, learnt perfectly by heart like a song, that the actor experiments with in different ways and with

different techniques and that later would be used to fertilise another text, coming from a totally heterogeneous origin in relation to the melody itself. Once the fertilisation happened, exactly as in nature, the drone, or formalised model melody, was fated to die under "the thirty-two layers of lacquer".³

The first problem was how to create these model melodies. We tried to translate the gestures of a physical score into a vocal action or to put a spoken text on a song, then slowly to absorb the music until it disappeared. We did this as scientifically as possible: carefully studying the dynamics and logic of our movements, trying to reproduce the sounds as accurately as possible, or, when using songs, trying to maintain the same syllabic division as in the original song lyrics, avoiding squeezing in ten words where only nine could fit, never changing the accent of the word and, after absorbing the song, maintaining the different tonalities of the original and the different colours of the singer's voice.

I should point out that in our research, over the first four or five years of work, we never used texts that would be included in the performance. Our efforts were made using separate material that we never availed ourselves of again.

Then, one day, Renzo brought us the recording of some great actors (Carmelo Bene, Toni Comello, Laurence Olivier) and of some Italian poets reading their own poems (Giuseppe Ungaretti, Andrea Zanzotto), and he asked us to study and perfectly copy those renditions. That wasn't a scandal at all - if I remember correctly. For a long time we had been used to reproducing exactly the facial expressions and dances of our Indian masters, and our practice of

3. The metaphor refers to the Chinese ceramic painting technique. Actually, I don't remember if there are really thirty-two layers or whether this is a random number to give an idea of the complexity of the work, but anyway Chinese ceramics are painted with special lacquers many, many times, and each layer takes a long time to dry.

substituting for actors in performances, which required us to learn another actor's part strictly reproducing it as if we had created it ourselves, was also well established. What better way to understand how great actors worked than by trying to imitate them? I threw myself into this head first, because, in addition to the fun of being able to become Carmelo Bene or Eduardo de Filippo, I had noticed that trying to absorb the singing into a spoken text nearly always led to the same melody and that the work of translating the physical scores was very complicated and, above all, extremely lengthy. In saying this, I don't mean at all to deny the possibility of a deeper and more positive development of these two ways of creating vocal scores, but we probably felt that through imitation we would reach more effective results.

The next step was to overlap the texts we used for research with the recordings we had learnt by heart, then to place the accidental intonations of the drone-model onto the text to be prepared. In addition, we did everything as precisely as possible, scientifically, that is, trying to respect not only the intonations but also the syllabic division of the words. We allowed ourselves only a few concessions, after months of repetition, so as not to chop up words excessively and avoid freak sounds.

I will take as an example the first of my texts for the performance on Ghandi. The model was in English and it said: "That Herr Hitler / has a plan for invading the British Isles /". Using this model to 'fertilise' it, my text in the performance became: "*Sostengono / che queste due civiltà non possono stare /*" (They maintain/ that these two civilizations cannot remain/).

The first positive characteristic of

this process is that it results in totally accidental pauses in the text⁴. Renzo had already warned us that, as a general rule, we should not respect the written punctuation, because human language doesn't strictly follow the punctuation marked on paper, and above all to avoid the full stop. Consequently, it was necessary to find a way - the first layer of lacquer - to fix and formalise the pauses.

To simplify, I will divide them into two kinds: the breathing pauses, when you breathe before continuing the text, and the non-breathing pauses.

If the text says: "England is a typical example of Western civilisation while India is the core of Asian culture", the sentence is too long and I must insert pauses. I could say, "England is a typical example of Western civilisation while // India is the core of Asian culture", placing a breathing pause after the word "while". In this way I would not follow the written punctuation that would make me breathe as follows: "England is a typical example of Western civilisation // while India is the core of Asian culture". I can later subdivide these two segments further and insert non-breathing pauses: "England / is a typical example of / Western civilisation / while // India is the core of Asian culture".

Also in choosing where to place the pauses, we didn't succumb to the temptation to let the meaning of the text dictate, instead marking on paper the breathing pauses only when the actor, reading continuously without punctuation marks, had no more breath to continue. For non-breathing pauses, we followed the accidental pauses provided by our drone.

3. THE RELEVANCE

Besides the work on voice, text, physical improvisations, and the endless discussions

4. The *pause* problem is extremely complex, and would need a separate chapter. It's maybe worth quoting only a guideline, from a session of ISTA (International School of Theatre Anthropology), that Renzo often used. It refers to physical work, but can be applied also to the voice: "outside stop - inside no stop".

on 'Ghandian' subjects, we devoted ourselves to a great deal of reading, including a biography of Winston Churchill. Apart from being a great politician and aristocrat, Churchill was one of the most relentless enemies of India's freedom. He defined Ghandi as "a half naked fakir who dares climb the stairs of His Majesty's palace", and defended England's semi-divine right to dominate and rule inferior populations in their own interest. Nevertheless, reading his biography I discovered some features that made him interesting to me from a theatrical point of view.

Churchill carefully prepared his speeches, which were almost always inflammatory and full of brilliant metaphors, by endless repetitions in front of the mirror. He is described as being keen on self-publicity, impulsive, impatient, ambitious, a war buff, and also a heavy eater, drinker, and cigar smoker. Some details of his public appearances are reported, like the V sign made with his fingers, his huge ties and the bowler hat that was too small and was placed on top of his walking stick to be waved in the air to greet or provoke the crowds.

In theatre, things often happen by chance, and even more frequently by luck. At the time Renzo asked me to prepare a monologue for a scene which compared Western and Asian civilisations. The main characters were Ghandi, on the one hand, and General Smuts, representative of the British government in South Africa when Ghandi worked there, on the other. I was given the role of General Smuts, so I looked for some recordings of Churchill's speeches. The mechanic who was fixing my car - here's my luck - supplied me with a series of recordings from the Second World War of speeches made by politicians, kings and queens, dictators, and generals. Churchill 'sang' his

speeches, and the melodies he used were really fascinating even for those who, like me, didn't understand much English. So I learnt the speeches by heart, imitating Churchill. They were so interesting that, in some rehearsals, Renzo asked me to say them instead of Smuts' monologue, although they had nothing to do with our performance. Only later did I start working on the transposition of my text using the drone technique.

Why this long digression on Churchill? Because one of the first problems we had to face when we 'invented' the work with the drone was how to select it: should it be in some way consistent and related to its final outcome or could it be chosen completely by chance? The crucial question of relevance was raised.

I quote from my work diary: "It's getting clearer to me that the choice of the drone must be conditioned by the meaning of the text and by who will say it. This doesn't mean that surprising possibilities are excluded: the choice can be crazy, but it must be coherent." (21/3/91) This point of view has guided me throughout the years. If, for example, I had chosen for Smuts a Donald Duck recording - something I have in fact used in another situation - it's likely that I would not have succeeded. Churchill could be used as a model because he was one of the most important representatives of the Western culture that Smuts was defending in his speech. In the two *themes*⁵ there was a similarity that made the intonation-overlapping operation acceptable. Even though I don't exclude other possibilities, I almost never choose models that do not have some kind of link to the text I am preparing, even if this is only in an affinity of feeling (joy, melancholy, anger), rhythm (a slow or fast

5. At TTB we have replaced the word "character" with the word "theme", which seems to have less psychological connotations.

way of speaking), or colour.

Once I asked my classical Hindustan singing teacher, Pandit Amarnath, how far improvisation with a word could be taken (it is a specific technique of Hindustan singing); up to what point can one edge into strangeness. As usual, he gave me an extraordinary answer: "Well, if you want to have some adventures, you can, but the adventure mustn't be different from normality."

4. TASKS

After the drone model-melody has been identified and learned, and applied to the text, it has to be elaborated further. One way to carry this out is to add some tasks or images that lead the voice as you work.

Taking Smuts' monologue again as an example, the text says: "They have shed rivers of blood for the country's salvation". Renzo asked me to say the word "rivers" as if my voice was the spray rising from the water at the base of a large waterfall; and to say "that these two civilisations can not be united" as if I were a priest speaking slowly while stroking his hands. Then we classified different kinds of tasks: "If / the nations that represent these rival cultures meet / even in small groups the outcome / will only be / an explosion". In this case the sentence already contains its task: the final explosion. The image Renzo asked me to follow was that, whilst speaking the first part slowly, I was a terrorist unravelling a fuse on the ground in between the feet of the spectators (spatial task), then lighting it to blow up a bomb (visual task). We did this, but we moved the explosion to the words "will only be" to avoid a slavish illustration of the text, a process that we called later "onomatopoeic task" the vocal amplification of the word's meaning. (There are situations where this can be used, but generally the trick is to move the illustration to the preceding or following word.)

Another kind of task that we classi-

fied was the "subtext", also used in classical theatre. I said: "Western civilisation can be considered good or bad, but Westerners want to adhere to it nonetheless". The subtext was: "And so what? Is anything wrong with that? That's the way I am, my dear, whether you like it or not", maybe adding to myself, "fucking native", to fill the pause with meaning. Such tasks are useful to keep the actor away from psychological interpretations, and also from being vague and empty.

A further possibility is the conscious underlining of specific words. Taking the sentence quoted before, "that these two civilisations can not be united", I can, for example, underline the word "not" by making a micro-pause before and after the word. The text starts achieving a meaning that the drone alone has not been able to suggest. I could also underline the words that I consider to be the most significant in the text, augmenting or diminishing their volume, slowing down the rhythm of speaking, or changing the colour of the voice.

Obviously, in addition the physical score can become an essential element of the elaboration of the drone model-melody, giving a different level of understanding to the text which is being prepared, but this is an extremely complex subject that I will not deal with here.

The work on poetic texts is more complex, because the meaning of each word is denser and demands more profound commitment. After I have learnt the drone, I can start from the meaning of a word, seeking its sense, history, Latin origin, its synonyms and antonyms, possible adjectives, somehow disconnecting it from its context.

In *My Boyhood Days*, *Visva Bharati*, Ramindranath Tagore writes: "... yet they had brought with them an odd and delightful melody from their arcane forests". I take the word "brought", *recato* in Italian. Among

many definitions, the dictionary gives me this: to bring something near, in proximity; used specifically for light things. So I can "bring a light present": carry a little bird in my hands and put it on the ground with a smile. For some days I try out the word with this task. Then I add one more: what happens if the "r" (in *recato*) invites the final "t" to dance? Or if the "c" smiles at the "a"? Or if I improvise a dance of only consonants? And if, some days later, I also colour the word yellow? How does the word change if I paint it yellow instead of black? Then I take the word "arcane", *arcane* in Italian. It means mysterious, it comes from "ark" in the sense of a container, but also a coffer, a small box containing precious belongings: I can find so many images and change them if I feel them disappearing. "Departing, it leaves on the pale weft of life a hem of embroidered flowers, and the nights and days are preciously embellished for evermore". Is it possible, from "arcane", to build a bridge of images over to the concluding precious nights of the text?

Through the years, we have proved that these overlapping tasks don't exclude each other, but, if I let them settle one by one for a while, they stratify, like the Chinese lacquers, like the colours of painters, making the rendition "dense", or, to call it by a word that Renzo loved very much, "*ritorta*" (twisted).⁶

5. FATE AND CHANGES

Some of TTB's performances were conceived as a montage of attractions, and the work on text had the same characteristics.

Over the years, the actors have formalised sequences of ways of laughing, crying, coughing, mumbling, gargling, stammering that can be used when a text is being arranged. The introduction of the drone into these 'embellishments' can be decided by the actor or happen accidentally. It may come from a stumble, an omission or, for example, when working with a tape-recorder, from chance recordings of other voices (a colleague entering the rehearsal room by mistake or someone shouting in the street). I have often erroneously pressed the wrong switch on the tape-recorder while preparing a drone, so that a word was cut or doubled in the reproduction, later realising that this technical error was very fortunate.

A strict rule we have always maintained is that a drone must never change, that the actor's duty is to stick to it always, without any alteration. The possible changes must occur naturally, organically, as a consequence of a particular task or of the director's direct intervention. But despite this, the drone does change.

I use the example of the word "rivers" from Smuts' monologue again: "They have shed rivers of blood for the country's salvation". Carrying out the task of the spray lifting beneath the waterfall, it is likely that the preceding and following words are drawn in, that the general rhythm and speed slows down, that the colour of the voice darkens, and so on. It is this kind of change that gradually modifies the drone, in the slow process of the lacquers' drying, until at times, where necessary, it disappears completely.

6. Classical Hindustan singing has been a major experience for me. During the presentation and elaboration of a raga (a raga is a musical scheme of five, six or seven notes composed logically; the layout of the notes evolves into a significant form), at a certain point the singer dwells on some words in the text, those more charged with meaning. The texts are always poems in Urdu or Sanskrit. The singer meets, for example, the word "heart", and for many minutes he remains on that word filling his singing with variations, notes, beats, colours, intensities that depend on his knowledge, intuition or imagination. A singer is esteemed for his competence with language and his ability to improvise with words.

6. MEANING

After working for many months with Renzo on Smuts, we had created a whole net of links that allowed me, on the one hand, to speak the text in an identical way each time, like a written musical score, and, on the other, prevented me from falling into psychological interpretations. But we had a problem. It was a long text, of considerable intellectual insight, and, while I performed it, I understood nothing of what I was saying, because I was so busy keeping up with all my tasks and the formalised physical score. Similarly, those listening didn't understand anything either.

From the question of relevance and work with the drone, we had reached the problem of *meaning*; the meaning of what an actor is saying on stage. Of course, we were aware of this basic question from the very beginning of our research, but we had simply decided not to deal with it, in order to follow paths traditionally less beaten.

In this phase, Renzo often interrupted me and got me to articulate the concept I had just expressed in my own words, even developing it further. I still have a notebook where, in the evening, I would rewrite Smuts' words in my own way, sometimes starting from the end, sometimes from the middle, sometimes taking just one sentence and elaborating the issue with other arguments. I did so, always defending the text's *theme* (see footnote 5, page 65) as much as possible, even when I totally disagreed with him.

In this way I slowly began to forget the drone and the layers of lacquer. In the absolute strictness of the form, I was able to think about what I was saying, and could go back to the drone whenever I needed it.

To clarify, I consider this work on meaning as another layer of lacquer. Working on form rather than content, what I do on stage simply is to perform my score paying

attention to the correct pitch of the notes. Everything else relates to impulses from deep down that I find difficult to define. In my opinion, it is the spectator who gives the text meaning; somehow, this is the spectator's job. Similarly in India, the final goal of "interpretative dance" is to become "pure dance".

7. THEFT

When you set out on a path without knowing where it will take you, you take wrong turnings and you spend a lot of time going round in circles. But after ten or twelve years of work, the apparently long and difficult process, the steps of which I am retracing in these pages, actually happens quite fast. Many of the lacquer layers are no longer necessary. Only the drone, diction, pauses, 'embellishments' and experience remain.

By now the TTB actors have built up a huge archive of potential drones: great classical actors, politicians, opera recitatives, Italian melologues, German *sprech-gesang*, voices from films, etc. When I have to prepare a text, I immediately go through my archive in my mind: what kind of voice, melody, style of singing do I want to use; I almost always start my work in this way. I say almost, because nowadays, after so many years, I can also do without a model, although I have no doubt that, if I always worked without a recent or old drone - the same drone can be employed for different situations and by different actors achieving totally heterogeneous results - I would lose an extraordinary range of new melodies, colours and intonations. Thanks to my archive, I can be certain that Ophelia will not speak as Juliet did in the previous play.

If I 'steal' a drone from other actors, the question is *how* to steal, and from *whom*. How to avoid the theft being recognised? First of all I need to identify the specific

features of the performer, for example Carmelo Bene's nasality. I try to remove these and eliminate eventual flaws as well, like exaggeratedly affected diction or slight hamming. Then I try to amplify what I recognise as qualities.

For *Valse*, an outdoor TTB performance, I prepared a short text from the fourth canto of the *Aeneid*, using as the model a fragment of one of Carmelo Bene's performances. In his interpretation, Bene used extraordinary vibratos. Renzo and I decided to develop the vibrato technique as far as possible. In *Valse* I am on stilts, in the open air, and I need to speak very loudly to be heard. Having removed the performer's specific features, placed the text in a completely different context and used completely different words, the original melodies eventually hide their source.

Some years ago, four days before the premiere of *E d'ammuri t'arricuordi* (a TTB performance on popular traditional Italian songs), Renzo asked me to prepare a fragment from Ermengarda's delirium from Alessandro Manzoni's *Adelchi*. Four days! I ran to my archive and chose a recording of a young Italian classical actress, who was a friend of Beppe Chierichetti, one of my colleagues. I worked for two days by myself, and then Renzo came. The drone model-melody was working well. Because we were so short of time, Renzo intervened much more harshly in the text than he did normally with his actors, fixing the least prepared parts himself (Renzo was a very skilled actor). We had the premiere and all went well. Then rehearsals started again. The Ermengarda work, although it had been successful, was still too raw, so once, in rehearsal, I returned for a few seconds to the melody of the drone. Then Beppe, running up to me pointing his finger said: "I've got you!" We laughed. We both knew that, after a few days, nobody would ever recognise his

actress friend's beautiful work.

The second problem is by *whom* to be inspired? When we were younger, Renzo strongly forbade us to see traditional theatre performances or to listen to them on the radio.

Not long ago, I told him I had heard a programme on an Italian actor, and that he did not seem too bad to me. I remember how, without even properly hearing what I had to say, Renzo replied: "You must not listen to such things". I answered laughing: "Renzo, thirty years have gone by!" This demonstrates how violently opposed he was to the traditional style of acting and how much he feared that those intonations, affected diction, stereotypes and clichés would cast even small, faint shadows on our way of speaking.

Instead, in the early years, he asked us to go to the markets and record people's conversations, to understand how people really talked and sharpen our hearing to the utmost. No young actor from traditional theatre schools has ever joined TTB, partly because it is extremely hard, if not almost impossible, to eliminate the defects rapidly and definitively acquired in such schools. However there are some exceptions in classical theatre and these are the ones we take as models: Carmelo Bene, Memo Benassi, Eduardo de Filippo, Toni Comello, Pupella Maggio, for instance.

8. RELIVING ONE FINAL MEMORY

In 2004 the Municipality of Lecco commissioned us to direct the *Corteo Manzoniano*, a traditional, historical pageant that hadn't been produced since 1965, which evokes Alessandro Manzoni's most famous novel, *I promessi sposi*, set in Lecco. Based on the story of Renzo and Lucia, a young seventeenth-century couple, this text is considered to be one of the most important in Italian literature, and is studied in every

Italian school.

I was born in Lecco, where the first thing children get to know about when they come into the world is Renzo and Lucia's story. Some passages of the novel are read as early as in primary school, and all school trips, to the pupils' great disappointment, visit "Manzonian" places, that is, places where the story is thought to have happened. I have known the most famous parts of the novel by heart since I was a child.

For the 2004 pageant, the TTB senior actors dealt mainly with technical questions, (I was in charge of costumes), but reserved for themselves the reading of the recorded texts broadcast during the performance that was presented by about two-hundred actors.

During the first meetings, while assigning tasks and roles, I jokingly said to Renzo: "That's fine, I will find and prepare the costumes, but please let me do *Addio monti* (Farewell to the mountains)." *Addio monti* is one of the most beautiful passages; a monologue by the weeping Lucia, forced to leave her home and village and to seek refuge in a convent near Milan, because of the attentions of an arrogant local lord.

I started working at TTB at seventeen, and to do so I moved from Lecco to Bergamo, abandoning school and family. My father had died fifteen days earlier. The memory of those first years of work always brings to my mind loneliness, separation and sorrow: the partly desired and partly imposed end of my adolescence. Whenever I could, on free days I would go back to Lecco, to my father's house. The following morning I would catch the train, always with the lines of *Addio monti* on my lips.

In short, I felt that that text belonged to me, now that I was an adult actress. Renzo didn't seem to share my point of view. He had graduated from university with a thesis on *I promessi sposi* and this

novel had a fundamental role in his entire artistic life. I think he believed that it was very hard or even impossible, for an actor, to perform *Addio monti* without spoiling it, and he had decided to give it to one or more little girls, who hadn't yet learnt to respect punctuation when reading, or to read it himself, having recited it dozens of times before in his life (as I had, but Renzo didn't know that). We were at odds: I continued to insist, and he continued to deny me kindly. Meanwhile, I worked on the text. I had fixed the pauses very precisely, but I hadn't used any model for the drone. Simply by repetition and repetition, the intonation had taken shape by itself.

The days for recording came. Renzo still didn't want to hear me. After some skirmishes, somehow I forced him at least to listen to what I had prepared. We went to the rehearsal room where the technical equipment was set up, and, given the situation, I said the text with huge difficulties. After my presentation Renzo commented: "The work is good" - he almost always started like that, even when it wasn't true - "but your Lucia is still a bit too vigorous. Read again here, what comes before the beginning of *Addio monti*". And he read it himself: "E, *seduta come era, nel fondo della barca, posò il braccio sulla sponda, posò sul braccio la fronte, come per dormire, e pianse segretamente.*" (And sitting, as she was, in the bottom of the boat, she laid her arm on the ledge, her forehead on her arm, as if to sleep, and cried secretly.) "Yes, this is how it should be", and he leant back on the chair he was sitting on. Of course, it was clear: that's how it should be.

I was running out of time: in a few minutes the young girls would arrive for the rehearsal; I had only one chance left. I sat on a stool in front of the microphones; I laid my hand on my cheek, bent my head and started. A few words were enough for a

huge, ancient, never forgotten sorrow to fill me. Those words, which were so familiar, so charged with meaning, so embarrassing because so close to me personally, suddenly made their way through my memories, triggering a sharp nostalgia. Tears ran down my arm to the palm of my hand. They dropped on my skirt. I was quite sure that if I weren't careful, I would end up being overwhelmed by emotion, surrendering to sobs and eventually having to stop. At the same time, just as precisely, I felt that the dominant and restraining force which gave me control and allowed me to progress, was the pure power of diction, refined through years of work.

I finished the text. Renzo was very happy with it; and I was in great turmoil. What had happened? What was all that invasion of meaning, feelings, content and psychology? How should I behave in the future? What could I learn from this?

I didn't have the chance to speak to Renzo about that experience. I certainly would have done so, if we had met in the rehearsal room again. Just once, some months ago, we mentioned *Addio monti* and I said: "Renzo, it was all Stanislavski there!" And his response was only: "Come off it!"

TTB planned to work on *Othello* in the future. Our time of preparation is always very long. In the next years we probably would have had to face the intricate and fascinating problem of the dialogue between actors. We would have started by making more experiments...

I thank Giuseppe Goisis, playwright and director of

the Compagnia Brincadera of Bergamo, for his help.

Translated from Italian by Giuseppe Goisis

TIZIANA BARBIERO (Italy) joined Teatro tascabile di Bergamo in 1978 and has worked as an actor in most of the productions since then. She has specialised in classical Indian Odissi dance, and in particular she is responsible for vocal work within the group.

