

Romeo Castellucci's hypnotic atmosphere

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This paper aims to clarify the contrasted public response to Romeo Castellucci's works, analysing particularly his work the *Oresteia* (2015) in the light of actual philosophic and scientific researches about hypnosis. Hypnosis, in fact, may provides us with the tools to understand the scenic processes which may induce a state of trance-like in the spectator and more generally the emotional path, between shock, hypnosis and distance, proposed by the images on stage.

Journalists often refer to hypnosis to describe the effect of Romeo Castellucci's images on the spectator. Fabienne Pascaud, journalist at *Télérama*, wrote an article about *Paradiso* entitled «The hypnotic but forbidden paradise of Romeo Castellucci»¹. In 2015, about Hölderlin's *Oedipus* rerun, the journalist mentions an «hypnotic and staggering state»². The same year, Jean-Pierre Thibaudat, writes on the website *Mediapart* about the *Oresteia*'s rerun and describes the Italian stage director in these words: «his visions open prospects to explore, an enigmatic abyss where the spectator can sink into, following the play's hypnotic rhythm»³. This hypnotic dimension is linked here to the enigmatic quality of the images and to the rhythm of the play. These two aspects are reminiscent of the inductive processes used during therapeutic hypnosis, and they both induce a temporal distortion and a confusional state in the patient.

¹ F. Pascaud, "Le Paradis hypnotique mais interdit de Romeo Castellucci" [online], in *Télérama*, published on July 14th 2008. Visited on April 19th 2018. Available at the following address: <http://www.telerama.fr/scenes/le-paradis-hypnotique-mais-interdit-de-romeo-castellucci,31441.php>.

² Id., "Les trois spectacles sidérants du plus grand voyant de la scène" [online], in *Télérama*, published on November 22th 2015. Visited on April 19th 2018. Available at the following address: <http://www.telerama.fr/scenes/romeo-castellucci,134242.php>. Quotes from texts which are not translated in English are translated by the author of this paper.

³ J.-P. Thibaudat, "Romeo Castellucci (3): vingt ans après, il trouve par terre et ramasse son 'Orestie'" [online], in *Mediapart*, published on Decembre 2015. Visited on April 19th 2018. Available at the following address: <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/jean-pierre-thibaudat/blog/041215/romeo-castellucci-3-vingt-ans-apres-il-trouve-par-terre-et-ramasse-son-orestie>.

In this paper I will explore the hypnotic dimension of Romeo Castellucci's plays, by comparing the way scenic elements work with the hypnotic induction process. It aims to enlighten the aesthetic effects of images on the audience. These preliminary claims are the result of my collaboration with an actual research program lead by Mireille Losco-Lena at the ENSATT (École nationale des arts et techniques du théâtre of Lyon) about the hypnotic paradigm in theatre, and of a research period in Milan for a project focusing on emotions: *Aesthetics of Emotions: Arts and cognitive science*⁴.

Questioning the relationship between theatre and hypnosis forces us to think about the picture of a sleeping audience, because the word *hypnos* means sleep. This picture is recurring in the history of theatre, to criticize, as Brecht did, spectator passivity, as well as to underline, on the contrary, the spectator's ability to create his own imaginary world, from the images on the stage. As a matter of fact, this opposition is intrinsically connected with the history of hypnosis, first marked the image of the domineering hypnotist, such as J.-M. Charcot and his hysteric patients in the *Salpêtrière* hospital, and then at the end of the nineteenth century, by the figure of the hypnotist a "guru of the masses", such as depicted by several stage hypnotists of the time⁵. However, in contemporary hypnosis, changed by Milton Erickson's practice (1901-1980), the relationship between the patient and the therapist shifts completely and hypnosis, today, is seen as a process capable to penetrate and explore the subconscious and the imaginary, as a way to reacquire one's self.

In theatre, hypnosis oscillates between two poles and R. Castellucci's work is no exception. In fact, it provokes conflicting reactions. On one hand we can read in Bruno Tackels' introduction of his book *Les Castellucci* that «the forces involved exceed simple meaningful signals, they open an infinitely larger level, a free and polyphonic field»⁶; on the other hand, Olivier Neveux, in a paper, describes a scene of Castellucci's *Purgatorio* in these words: «the rape

⁴ Project funded by the program ACRI "YOUNG INVESTIGATOR TRAINING PROGRAM".

⁵ The collective hypnosis was studied by Gustave Le Bon in *La Psychologie delle folle* (1895) and also theorized by Sigmund Freud in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), just before the twentieth century totalitarianism period.

⁶ B. Tackels, *Les Castellucci. Écrivains de plateau I*, Les Solitaires intempestifs, Besançon 2005, p. 19.

of the child possesses an obvious power to astonish. Mediated only by the sound, in front of a stage which all bodies deserted, the audience can just waver between disgust, a sense of helplessness, tetany»⁷. In his analysis of Castellucci's work, the terms "astonishment" and "tetany" show a blockage for the spectator, unable to elaborate what he sees: this theatre «is marked with the absence of any emancipatory tension»⁸. These plays, therefore, block the critical thinking or do they open a «polyphonic field» which exceeds meaning? I don't aim to give an answer to that question in this paper, but I will seek to understand what stance Romeo Castellucci's work offers to the spectator. In this prospect, we can enlighten the analysis of scenic processes with some hypnotic induction processes. However, this transposition of concepts from a field to another requires some preliminary explanations, most of all about the transition from the patient-therapist scheme to the theatrical mechanism.

From the hypnotic to the theatrical system

Ericksonian hypnosis relies on a special relationship between the hypnotherapist and the patient, characterised by equality. Empathy is essential for the therapist who must respect and understand the subject, to induce the hypnotic state and support him in a process that will help to reconfigure his emotional and cognitive link with reality. This shift in the therapist-patient relationship, compared to previous models, is summed up by Isabelle Stengers in *L'Hypnose entre magie et sciences*: «it is known now that hypnosis is first of all an autohypnosis: the hypnotized subject gives a pseudo-power to the therapist, the subject has the key to understand what happens»⁹.

In therapeutic hypnosis, the therapist guides the subject, he describes an inside world where the subject can slide little by little. Thierry Melchior, in *Créer le réel*, describes this experience in these words: «while outside reality

⁷ O. Neveux, "Un matérialisme démocratique: le théâtre de Romeo Castellucci", in *Théâtre/Public*, 194, Éditions théâtrales 2009, p. 70.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ I. Stengers, *L'Hypnose entre magie et sciences*, Les Empêcheurs de tourner en rond, Paris 2002, p. 34.

gradually loses its substance, the reality inside the subject gains the same density as the first one, until it is perceived subjectively as “the” reality, like it happens in dreams»¹⁰. During the induction, the therapist may describe the external or internal behaviour of the patient, guiding him towards his own feelings: “and now you are very comfortable, your eyes are closed, you feel more and more relaxed and you see...”. The therapist’s words create inner pictures and the subject takes «the position of a spectator [...] of himself»¹¹. A kind of dissociation from himself occurs, and also an uncontrolled and unwanted empathy because «when someone else speaks about my internal state as if he knew as well as me what happens inside me, the limit between “me” and “you” tends to become thinner»¹².

The similarities between hypnosis and theatre are, at first sight, quite obvious: the ability to create another world where reality seems suspended for a while, combined with a state of self-abandonment and rest. In fact, Thierry Melchior compares dream or hypnotic state with theatre and cinema:

Everything happens as if, more generally, we tended to stop paying attention to the environment that “surrounds” a reality and confers its status. This environment can be “past”, “future”, “unreal”, “fake” or “fictional”, “imaginative”. In any case it can help reassure us.

In particular, this explains why the scene we are watching at the theatre or cinema is able to touch us so vividly even if it is, usually, just fiction. This also explains why we can live our night dreams with a considerable intensity, as if they were “real”.¹³

Moreover, the role played by empathy in the relationship between the patient and the therapist obviously echoes the role it has in the relationship between the actor and the audience at the theatre. The spectator can feel what the actor plays and becomes a spectator of the pictures on the stage as well as of his own inner state. However, a problem arises regarding the therapist-patient relationship when we try to transfer this model from hypnosis to theatre. In Romeo Castellucci’s works, for example, the figures presented on the stage are extremely enigmatic: they do not always send legible signs of their inner state. The empathic projection is often limited to a kinaesthetic

¹⁰ T. Melchior, *Créer le réel. Hypnose et thérapie*, Seuil, Paris 1998, p. 53.

¹¹ Ivi, p. 104.

¹² Ivi, p. 105.

¹³ Ivi, p. 110.

empathy, like when we fear the performer's pain at the beginning of *Inferno*, in front of Romeo Castellucci attacked by dogs.

In fact, the therapist-patient relation defining the hypnotic relationship cannot be transferred to theatre, as we could expect in the first place, to understand the relationship between the actor and the spectator. Ruggero Eugeni, researcher at the Università Cattolica of Milan, who wrote *La relazione d'incanto. Studi su cinema e ipnosi*¹⁴, provides a solution to this problem when he suggests substituting the hypnotist with the cinematographic device. If we want to do the same with theatre we have to consider the way scenic processes can be compared with induction techniques. Mireille Losco-Lena claims that these techniques combine several effects on the patient's eye and ear. In this prospective, I think that the theatrical device is completely able to act on the spectators' senses and to create a hypnotic *atmosphere*, where the scenic world becomes the only reality. Of course we can question this statement, because the spectator at the theatre is always completely aware of the illusion, but the same thing happens in hypnosis. We said earlier that Isabelle Stengers reminds us hypnosis is always an auto-hypnosis, the result of the subject will, a "conviction" for some. Thierry Melchior evokes an interesting inductive method, which aims to hypnotise the most reluctant subjects: if they act "as if" they were hypnotised, it is highly possible that the induction happens. Doesn't the spectator, upon entering the theatre, come to immerse himself in the world before him? Does he not want to pretend, during the play, that nothing else exists?

Furthermore, the concept of atmosphere seems able to account for the hypnotic experience proposed on the stage: an experience of immersion in a reality that erases our relationship with reality. Enrico Pitozzi uses it to describe Castellucci's plays and their intricate visual and auditory environment: «this is about the composition of an *atmosphere* that can be seen as a feeling to inhabit. We can detect it, even name it, but it is impossible to define exactly»¹⁵. The mystery of this feeling is probably linked to what E.

¹⁴ R. Eugeni, *La relazione d'incanto. Studi su cinema e ipnosi*, Vita e pensiero, Milano 2002, p. 35.

¹⁵ E. Pitozzi, "Estendere il visibile. La logica del suono e del colore", in Piersandra di Matteo (ed. by), *Toccare il reale. L'arte di Romeo Castellucci*, Cronopio, Napoli 2015, p. 116.

Pitozzi calls «cracks», something that vibrates in the pictures and «pushes on the limit of the representation». A «suspension acting in the picture [and] saying that we must see beyond what seems to be here, in front of our eyes»¹⁶. The «suspension» prepares the spectator to look at the picture in another way, to seize it through sensations, without considering the representation. The art of the spectator becomes the art of “intuition”, beyond the threshold of perception. This position in front of the picture requires a state of sensorial opening and an inner receptiveness that reminds one of the hypnotised subject.

During hypnosis, the body is stimulated in the first place through induction methods so that the patient can open up to his inner world. Erika Fischer-Lichte, in *Estetica del performativo*, explores the relationship between the atmosphere and the body. According to the German author, we can say that the atmosphere penetrates the spectator because the sounds really go through his ear and vibrates in his ribcage; in the same way the light, as we well know, penetrates the subject through his skin; the retina, it catches the picture. Therefore, the spectator is truly immersed in an atmosphere that literally invades his body, that inhabits him as much as he inhabits it, like Enrico Pitozzi says. This pun reveals the duplicity of the atmosphere and confirms that a parallelism with hypnosis is possible: the subject inhabits the picture he produces even if he is inhabited by the pictures the therapist suggested. Actually, according to Erika Fischer-Lichte, the atmosphere of the play that the spectator perceives and lives is emanated by the objects composing the theatrical device (including sounds). In this light, the atmosphere is neither an objective quality of the pictures, nor a subjective quality of the spectator but what happens “between” the object and the subject.

We have already mentioned the hypnotic rhythm of the *Oresteia* (*an organic comedy?*), and this play seems to be an emblematic example of Castellucci’s aesthetic since we can find in it the main patterns of his work: atypical bodies, white stage designs or on the contrary dark and devastated spaces, animals, a fascination for tragedy, auditive saturation, the tulle on

¹⁶ Ivi, p. 117.

the proscenium... Moreover, in this play, there are numerous contradictory images and atmospheres. Some of them allow us to analyse what can produce a hypnotic atmosphere for the spectator and others reveal its limits. In the end, the analysis of these moments will let us go back over the ambivalent reception of Romeo Castellucci's works.

Sensorial and semiotic *deprivation*

The induction phase aims to keep a distance with the reality surrounding us and with the rational relationship we have with it in order to enter into ourselves, in our own psychic reality. Some atmospheres in the *Oresteia* are built on a sensorial and semiotic deprivation process, disturbing our relationship with the images through a process similar to hypnotic induction methods. The repetition phenomena, for example, seek to provoke a temporal distortion for the spectator. The most striking auditory repetition comes from the skinned goat, hanging in the middle of the stage and wheezing in the *Choephoroi*. The rib cage is opened, and a tube absorbs and expels the air from it, reproducing the breathing movement. Here the repetition of a visual element is combined with the auditory repetition. The image may obviously provoke a reaction of disgust in the spectator, but he oddly forgets it in the end and let himself sway to the rhythm of the breathing that can even be associated with a reassuring imagination.

Moreover, the movements of the figures manage to also alter temporality. All characters move in the same way, as R. Castellucci himself underlines in a text describing his work: «All characters who will act on the stage always keep, unless a different indication is given, the same type of gait: slow, regular and oscillating»¹⁷. The slowness and the repetition of the same movements by all actors drag the spectator in a constant and at the same time fleeting rhythm, because time seems to have stopped.

This feeling is strengthened by the stage design, which works on the absence of stimuli. In the *Choephoroi*, the presence of a tulle veil isolating the stage from the audience and acting as a screen, forbids the spectator to have

¹⁷ R. Castellucci, C. Guidi, C. Castellucci, *Epoepa della polvere. Il teatro della Societas Raffaello Sanzio (1992-1999)*, Ubulibri, Milano 2001, p. 120.

a complete view of the stage. The transparent and lightly white veil hides the white walls of the stage from us, the floor covered with a powdery substance, and some figures, also completely covered in white. It is as if the spectator saw through a veil of snow some slow movements executed by figures who merge with the scenery and could not hear anything because of the powder which suffocates the noise of the movements. The atmosphere the artist created is clearly intentional: «The two veils overlap and expose themselves or hide from the beams of light, they create an aerial and dusty perspective, or impenetrable screens that increase the sensation of a soft and at the same time compressed silence, which has a strong absorbing power»¹⁸. The spectator is in fact absorbed, immersed in this atmosphere which invades him: he is impregnated by the rhythm of bodies and sounds, the white light and the veils keep his gaze fixed on the stage, and the silence invades his mental space.

The visual and auditory repetitions contribute to change temporality but can also bring the spectator to be upset or confused, because they unsemiotise the scenic components. The repetitions-variations of sentences are ubiquitous in the *Oresteia*: in the *Agamemnon*, the Rabbit-Coryphaeus is always repeating the same identical words to his chorus: «Silence, be careful!» or «Be careful, silence!»¹⁹ Such interventions addressed to his fellow rabbits who assume the role of students, dilute the Aeschylean text which loses its semiotic consistency little by little, until it seems to be composed of a flow of words without any logical links. Besides, Aeschylus text²⁰ is built on an old syntax and grammatical structure which sounds inaccurate or incomplete: «Blades of fire give news from Troy and rings of conquests. / It is ordered by a woman's heart who like a man decides»²¹.

¹⁸ R. Castellucci, C. Guidi, C. Castellucci, *Epoepa della polvere. Il teatro della Societas Raffaello Sanzio (1992-1999)*, cit., p. 120.

¹⁹ Ivi, p. 98.

²⁰ In their paper "L'Oresteia mutilata di Romeo Castellucci: 2006-1995", Roberta Ferraresi and Massimo Marino underline the fact that R. Castellucci chose an outdated translation of the text to enhance its "dead" aspect (in *Doppiozero* [online], published on October 13th 2013. Visited on September 29th 2017. Available at the following address: <http://www.doppiozero.com/materiali/lorestea-mutila-di-romeo-castellucci-2016-1995>).

²¹ R. Castellucci, C. Guidi, C. Castellucci, *Epoepa della polvere. Il teatro della Societas Raffaello Sanzio (1992-1999)*, cit., p. 96.

The figures appearing on stage and particularly the Rabbit-Coryphaeus, somehow bring a form of confusion. When he enters for the first time, the Rabbit utters these words: «... It's late!... Oh... how late it is!...»²², while he is looking for an imaginary watch in an imaginary pocket. The *Agamemnon* has just begun but the spectator, in a flash, is carried away to *Alice in Wonderland*. His part as a Coryphaeus of rabbits will be revealed just a few moments later, when he points to the little group. The reference to *Alice* remains obscure, without any logical link to what happened before, and it will remain that way until the end of the first part of the trilogy²³. The collision of references, between Aeschylus and Lewis Carroll (and also Artaud, present in a great part of the play), contributes to a process of estrangement: at the end we do not recognise either of them. Enrico Pitozzi evokes the way the relationship between contradictory elements «ask the spectator to be on his guard»²⁴ inducing a *Unheimlich* effect.

This game between conflicting elements, or at least concerning different fields of reference, appears also through a process of voice “dissociation”. The term “dissociation” refers to the hypnosis field again. The induction aims to permit dissociation: between conscious and subconscious, or the dissociation of a body part, as it occurs in an analgesic or an anaesthetic phenomenon. In our case, the voices do not seem to belong to the bodies in front of us, as R. Castellucci underlines, referring to the Rabbit: «But there is something strange in his voice: it is too high-pitched. It seems to be the voice of an old castrated man, it has nothing tragic, nothing to do with tragedy»²⁵. Even Clytemnestra's voice is modified: the character is portrayed by an obese naked woman, but her voice sounds like a man, it is hoarse. The spectator sees the body and listens to the voice. The image surprises him above all because this atypical body is highly self-referential: it is quite hard to

²² Ivi, p. 97.

²³ B. Bost clarifies the references to Artaud in the following paper: “Romeo Castellucci, entre tableau et scène du corps”, in L. Boucris, M. Freydefont (ed. by), *Arts de la scène*, III, *Scène des arts. Formes hybrides: vers de nouvelles identités*, *Études théâtrales*, 30, Louvain-la-Neuve 2004, pp. 60-67.

²⁴ E. Pitozzi, “Estendere il visibile. La logica del suono e del colore”, cit., p. 117.

²⁵ R. Castellucci, C. Guidi, C. Castellucci, *Epoepa della polvere. Il teatro della Societas Raffaello Sanzio (1992-1999)*, cit., p. 98.

associate it with the queen of Mycenae and its oppressive presence cannot refer to anything else than the performer herself. According to Erika Fischer-Lichte, R. Castellucci's atypical bodies leave the spectator with a feeling of powerlessness, because in our culture of the perfect body, they remind us of death, disease and «evoke refusal, disgust, horror, fear, and also shame»²⁶. The voice which emanates from this body reinforces the sense of monstrosity: we do not know who is in front of us, strangeness invades our ears after penetrating our eyes. The spectator is at first immersed in uncertainty, voluntarily built by the director, but the vagueness around the figures and images can also be interpreted as a form of freedom.

In fact, during the process of induction in hypnosis, you can leave the patient in uncertainty to make him lose his everyday references, or to help him open up his imagination, but the therapist does not impose anything to the patient. For example, in hypnotic anaesthesia, the doctor can formulate his proposals as questions or uncertain sentences: “now *I don't know if you feel your arm, maybe you just feel a tingling, or maybe you don't feel anything*”. There are numerous possibilities and such expressions echo strangely the description of Castellucci in his *Oresteia*, descriptions opening to an infinite amount of possibilities. For example, regarding Aegisthus' movements, he writes: «He moves between soft tubes hanging from the ceiling and he surrounds her with a series of movements which do not have any purpose. They just look like the nervous flight of a drone around his queen. Or maybe he brings some of the tubes to her mouth»²⁷. It is in fact impossible to catch the meaning of his gestures: Aegisthus' movements are aimless, they can have a symbolic interpretation (his devotion to Clytemnestra) or a functional meaning (to bring her the tubes) or both of it...

The numerous and opposed references, the dissociations between voices and bodies, the illegible meaning of the movements, everything aims to confuse the spectator. He slowly loses his rational and everyday references. In hypnosis, confused suggestions have the same purpose, but Thierry

²⁶ E. Fischer-Lichte, *Estetica del performativo*, Carocci Editore, Roma 2014, p. 262.

²⁷ R. Castellucci, C. Guidi, C. Castellucci, *Epoepa della polvere. Il teatro della Societas Raffaello Sanzio (1992-1999)*, cit., p. 102.

Melchior distinguishes induction and trance: «to induce the subject in a confused state and to do nothing with it does not have any sense. It is about using this state to allow hypnotic phenomena or therapeutic strategies»²⁸. Through the analysis of atmosphere, apparently opposed to hypnotic experience, we will seek to understand what happens to the spectator beyond this confused state.

The limits of the hypnotic state

Along with the process of deprivation, the overabundance of stimuli is also a characteristic of R. Castellucci's works. They disturb the hypnotic atmosphere because the excess is associated with shock and surprise which often convoke a physiological and emotional response.

At the end of the *Agamemnon* we can see an example of the superimposition of stimuli, described in these words by the artist:

Musics are saturated and the noises, the sound and the ridicule, the smell of sulphur and the colour of blood are completely superimposed. The general effect, hallucinated and derailed in front of us is the same as in ATTIC TRAGEDY. Nothing more, nothing less. There are improvised brakings of sound, which push further the public's sensation, by the effect of inertia.²⁹

The poetic dimension in this description, where scenic elements are in a synesthetic relationship (the sound brakes), recalls of course a general atmosphere built by everything in the scenic space, but this time the space is saturated at a sensorial level. At the beginning of the play, spectators receive some earplugs they can wear to ease the sound invasion that vibrates and resonates in the bodies. The physiological shock provoked by the sound also often comes with a visual shock due to flashes of light³⁰. What happens, in consequence, to the spectator's hypnotic state with this kind of atmospheric upheaval?

These two processes (the sound saturation and the flashes of light), according to Mireille Losco-Lena, remind us of the induction processes used

²⁸ T. Melchior, *Créer le réel. Hypnose et thérapie*, cit., p. 193.

²⁹ R. Castellucci, C. Guidi, C. Castellucci, *Epopoea della polvere. Il teatro della Societas Raffaello Sanzio (1992-1999)*, cit., p. 114.

³⁰ Like the tulle veil, the use of flashes of light or saturated sounds are recurring in the artist's works. See for example *Br.#04 Bruxelles* (2003), *The Four Season Restaurant* (2012).

by Charcot on his hysterical patients. He combined a dominating speech “now you sleep” with a strong and brutal noise (hands clapping) or a blinding light. Yet the peculiarity of this kind of hypnosis consists in provoking a sort of catalepsy, recalling Romeo Castellucci’s description of this part of the play, when he evokes the “inertia” of the audience. Although this process seems problematic and is associated to a period where hypnotists did not take a lot of care of their patients (or rather, their female patients), we know the processes inducing confusion through shock are practiced even today; the substantial difference obviously concerns the subject’s consent. According to Mireille Losco-Lena, shock as an inductive process, which brings the subject to a state of astonishment and modifies the body, is not incompatible with a following state of trance or inner reverie, hypnotic and personal.

Another perspective seems equally possible. During hypnosis the subject, who is now a spectator of himself, can feel some kind of dissociation between his mind and his body. He forgets his body, which seems to match the idea of a hypnotic atmosphere created by the theatrical device, meaning that the spectator, imbued with silence and slowness, becomes one with it, his body is completely absorbed. In consequence, I think the visual and auditory shock is able to make the spectator return to himself. Suddenly the pain strikes us, we are blinded, deafened, and it makes us aware of ourselves (physically) and detached from the images. In the same way, the violent moment that implicates some kinetic empathy or physiological response would produce a similar effect. Cassandra, portrayed by an obese woman, enters the stage closed in a transparent glass cage, hardly larger than her. She seems to suffocate, her body touches the walls of her prison, she cannot move. The spectator feels in a physiological way the motor powerlessness which reminds him his own incapacity to move as a theatre spectator. This brings him to be again aware of his own body, in the reality of the theatre and in the real time.

Other elements provoke surprise and bring the spectator back to the performative reality. Children or animals on stage (monkeys in the *Eumenides*) always induce the spectator to wait for something to happen, even if it is impossible to predict. It reminds us that we are in a theatre. Everything is obviously elaborated and prepared, but the presence of children

and animals seems to go against this organisation and their appearance puts the spectator in an alert state where he retrieves his consciousness of reality while the dissociation disappears.

At the end of the *Agamemnon*, the Rabbit-Coryphaeus tries to end the play after he was brutally struck by Aegisthus. In the meanwhile he starts telling us the story of Alice following the rabbit (but here the girl is named Iphigenia) and we can hear music by Wagner. He seeks to close in this muffled atmosphere at whatever cost, both for his story and the play. At this point we hear the little rabbits' voices, calling him: «Sir Guidi!... Sir Guidi! You are completely wrong!...»³¹ This intervention contributes to confuse the spectator: we understood that besides Atreides' story there is a second fictional level involving the Rabbit-Master and his students, but it is always quite hard to pass from one to the other, particularly because these two levels are mixed with Carroll's fiction, which has an enigmatic status. The last intervention from the Rabbit about a swivel chair turning for some time: «... But why the fuck is this chair turning?!...»³² could immerse even more the spectator in confusion or could in fact let him get out of the confusion to take back his real position, in the theatre. The spectator, absorbed in this atmosphere, did not notice this movement that he may have integrated physically and was contributing to rhythm his perception. The Rabbit-Coryphaeus' line brings us back to the performative reality: in fact, why is this chair turning? Its movement does not have any sense regarding the dramaturgy or the story of Agamemnon's return, nor regarding the story of Alice-Iphigenia or the relationship between the Coryphaeus and his students-chorus. This chair does not tell us anything. Its presence contributes to create the atmosphere but when its unsemiotised quality is revealed, it brings the spectator brutally back in his seat, in the reality, at a proper distance from the images.

These moments of shock can both immerse the spectator intensively in a state we can define as hypnotic, capable of subsequently provoking a form of catalepsy and a reverie, but they can also bring him to suddenly leave the

³¹ R. Castellucci, C. Guidi, C. Castellucci, *Epoepa della polvere. Il teatro della Societas Raffaello Sanzio (1992-1999)*, cit., p. 117.

³² *Ibidem*.

hypnotic atmosphere so that he can find his relationship with reality once more, to be aware of his own physical responses. In both cases we are dealing with a passage, a modification of the state of consciousness and of the body, a modification of the gaze. The spectator, in front of numerous atmospheres, passes from moments of trance, more or less deep, to moments of hypnotic reverie and if there are some returns to the reality of the performance maybe it is only to guarantee an even deeper ulterior immersion. The purpose of hypnosis is to help the patient to reconfigure his relationship with reality, as a response to a change in his real environment to which he cannot adapt. In this sense hypnosis modifies the perceptions, the gaze and the emotions of the patient toward his environment. It is obvious that R. Castellucci works with and on the spectator's gaze.

The comparison between the organisation of the scenic elements in the *Oresteia* and the processes of hypnotic induction allows us to clarify the spectator's aesthetic path in this play, a path marked with contrast games and ruptures. Hypnosis also clarifies the singularity of reception. The dialogue I previously evoked with my colleague Mireille Losco-Lena, shows that each spectator reacts in his own unique way to the images, because they reach subconscious depths, rooted in everyone's body.

One question remains voluntarily open at the end of this paper: the ambivalence between images that emancipate imagination and those which alienate us, deeply linked with the story of hypnosis. Castellucci's theatrical device exerts a strong grip over the spectator, and it seems right to ask how the perspective of opening the imagination and changing the spectator's gaze authorised a form of authority that is highly reminiscent of the domination of the fathers of hypnotism and magnetism. Erika Fischer-Lichte often uses the term «power»³³ to describe the relation between spectators and actors. Theatre craftsmen foresee a performative device where the spectator has a part to play, or several parts, since his position toward the stage is constantly negotiated.

³³ Cfr. E. Fischer-Lichte, *Estetica del performativo*, cit., p. 103 (about Einar Schlee – *Mütter*, 1986).

Now we just have to understand if Romeo Castellucci invites us to participate in the construction of the signification or if he leaves us with the rabbit part: like those who were waiting for us, seated on our seats, for the play *B.#03 Berlin*. They were inert, and their eyes were wide open. But we should consider that the Rabbit-Coryphaeus from the *Oresteia* is more ambiguous than that. In fact, the White-Rabbit from *Alice* is often portrayed as a figure of resignation and passivity, and he could in some way remind us of the part of the spectator of the antic chorus, but the Rabbit, here, is a source of estrangement, he distances the text and breaks the fiction with quotes from *Alice*, and the reference to Artaud. In this way, he could be the one who helps the spectator gain some criticism, through the distance he establishes with what we see.