

An Attempt at Creating Total Theatre: *Scene del potere* by Domenico Guaccero

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When approaching *Scene del potere* – ‘azione scenica’ conceived and developed by Domenico Guaccero over the span of nearly a decade (1961–1968) and staged for the first and only time on 30 December 1968 at Palermo’s Teatro Biondo – there is a high risk of being overwhelmed by the preparatory materials alone.¹ The bulk of the textual and scenic-dramaturgical preliminary materials that leads from the first draft, tentatively titled *Il potere*, to the 1965 *Scene del potere*² and its Palermo debut, is of a multifold entity. Its amount of sources, formative elements and programmatic intent is both fascinating and confusing in its labyrinthine combinations. Let it suffice to point out that the textual and scenic-dramaturgical preparatory materials consist of more than one hundred pages of handwritten and typed notes, summaries, sketches, drawings, newspaper and magazine clippings. The Fondo Domenico Guaccero also preserves letters regarding the inception and outcomes of the project,³ a ‘skeleton’ score of the preliminary draft *Il potere* and a handwritten copy of 1968’s final score of *Scene del potere*. Among these sources we can also find a photocopy of the score with side-notes by Egisto Macchi.⁴ It is therefore no wonder that the essays written on *Scene del potere* have mainly focused on the groundwork and on the composer’s programmatic intent.⁵

Given such considerations, the present article aims at offering an in-depth examination of *Scene del potere*, seen not as its initiatory process but observed in its completion: the final version of 1968. Through a detailed study of the score,⁶ it is possible to determine whether and how the composer's programmatic intent found its fulfilment in the ultimate outcome of his work.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF *SCENE DEL POTERE*

Before proceeding with the examination of the score, it is necessary to unveil the theme that lies at the very core of *Scene del potere* and of Guaccero's programmatic intent.⁷

The theme: power, its dynamics, the ways it is maintained, what legitimises it and, to a certain extent, deems it necessary. In Guaccero's work, power is carefully dissected from the inside.

The founding characteristics of the stage action: Guaccero divides his material into three parts. In the first, power is collective – the result of political, economic and social actions. In the second, these issues are joined by an insinuating presence of a more individualistic nature, while in the third part power is represented only by the body and the mind. This structure determines the 'spazializzazione [spatialization]' of the action,⁸ which in the first part takes place completely on stage, in the second also seeps into the hall and foyer, whereas in the third, we witness a complete abolition of the stage as it opens up to the 'outside' world.

The programmatic intents: Guaccero envisions a partitionable musical theatre devoid of precise narrative directions, which relies on the audience's potential for improvisation and intervention. The absence of a scenic-spatial focus is paralleled with the absence of a narrative focus: the places where the action takes place are diversified (the stage, the stalls, the foyer) in order to better engage the spectator.

Music, dialogue, action, scene and images also contribute in the making of the action by means of implementing subsequent or simultaneous 'contrappunto [counterpoint]' of elements.⁹ This happens because Guaccero believed that when art is embodied by its correspondent physical medium, it becomes art only by historical convention, thereby limiting its potential and depriving it of its essentiality.

None of the featured characters, not even the historical ones (De Gaulle, Hitler, Fischer, Rajk, Oppenheimer), is ever placed at the centre of the plot. Performers and characters do not coincide: the performers (actors, singers,

musicians, dancers) are asked to play more than one role. Guaccero pursues a very precise concept of de-specialisation that aims at broadening the spectrum of technical solutions available to the performer.¹⁰

In the score, the actors' gestures and declamations are enhanced by a music also made of actions and words. This dramatic twist in the musical plot assures vocal effectiveness: the composer experiments with the numerous methods of voice emission in relation with words. Guaccero downgrades other sound elements (magnetic tape, instruments, prepared piano, noises, etc.) to the same level of the vocal score: they are meant to either support or create an opposition.

Guaccero sees the performance as a chance to do things ('fare dramma [...] vivere dentro un'azione') as opposed to seeing things.¹¹ He envisions a theatre founded on performance work, a catalyst for a community able to actively involve and absorb the audience.

THE COLLECTIVE POWER

The score for *Scene del potere* was jotted down on 45 sheets of tracing paper: 28 for the first part, 14 for the second, 3 for the third.¹² The three parts show graphic discrepancies, which indicate that the work was completed in different moments and situations over a long period of time. The second part – subsequently merged with the revised and corrected 1965 version of *Scene del potere* – was composed using a lettering guide and is therefore very clear and well-organised, while the first and third were handwritten, indicating that they were added later as the Palermo premier approached. Guaccero introduces the score as follows:

FIGURE 1. Partial transcription of Guaccerò's introduction to the score (translation from Italian is mine). Fondazione Giorgio Cini (Venezia), Fondo Egisto Macchi

Introduction: Audiovisual actions give life to an ever-open opera: the opera of POWER. The subject can be developed ad infinitum in the framework of numerous other performances, as a series of documentaries focused on the same theme. To unveil its internal workings, it is observed from the standpoint of those (men, groups) who somehow bear this power: those who own it, those who achieve it and those who lose it; the mythization of idols (ideal tool for domination); extreme bestiality; the uncontrollable rampage of the occult, the black sorcerer; historical figures similar to ancient heroes whose stories are known and retold by all, both history and fantasy; transiting from "heavy" matter (physical science, economic and political laws) to "subtle" matter (the individual and the power of the mind).

Theatre = élite (performers) and mass (audience) actions (drama), sometimes opposed, sometimes entwined. All elements of theatre are involved: logic/sound element (words), visual element (set, lights, projections), kinetic element (gesturality);

Music = everything that goes from noises (voices and instruments) to tuned sounds. The word "music" cannot be univocal, for our concept is different from that of Aristosseno or Mozart. We're in need of a more adequate terminology.

Initial directions

SCENA 1 On the left side of the stage: harpsichord, a small table, a flowering plant, a birdcage on a perch (all characteristic elements of a bourgeois interior). At the centre of the stage, a transparent plastic panel secured to a rotatable central axis. On the top left of the panel, the word "ABFÄLLE" is accompanied by a quantitative index (= 10.000), while the rest of the surface is covered in similar smaller numbers. In one of the panel's top corners there is a printing calculator, whose numbers are visible even at a distance while it keeps progressively spouting paper. On the right side of the stage: a desk and a chair. **Complete duration approx. 45'**

SCENA 2 There are 5 scenes: 3 take place inside the theatre room (A, B and C) while 2 exit the scene (foyer or other locations: α and β). Each group of scenes can take place in whatever order is preferred (ABC, BCA, CAB and $\alpha\beta$, $\beta\alpha$ etc.). If necessary, scenes A, B and C can also be read backwards (ex. C₂₁ instead of C123). Nevertheless, the following rules are to be observed:

1. fixed montage:	external scenes	First scene	Second scene
	in-house scenes	First scene	Second scene
		Third scene	

- in-house scenes start: 2'30''/5' after external scenes
- first external scene: 2'/3' before the end of the first in-house scene.
- second external scene: 2'/3' before the end of the second in-house scene.
- third external scene: 2'/3' before the end of the third in-house scene.

At the end of the third in-house scene, insert an interval: immediate and sudden DARKNESS (duration 1'/2'). Guitarist. FULLY LIT stage: 15"/30" break. Then the conductor walks in.

Scenic elements: (a) in-house scenes (with traditional stage or platform): above the proscenium, a large congress-like banner bears the phrase "THE MANAGER MUST STAY SANE"; on stage, at the centre there is a conference table with a cloth, a chair, a glass, and just to the right the tape recorder is propped on top of a stool. To the left of the stage, the harpsichord (or harp) is positioned under a noosed rope dangling overhead, while on the right side of the proscenium there is a 1934-style clothes hanger next to a folding ladder; at both sides of the stage, two small staircases lead to the audience's seats.

(b) external scenes: a grand piano waiting to be prepared; on a table lie the necessary props for the ceremony: cross, rhombus, black mask with red lips, paintbrush with cup, object (blood-stained rag with little radio): object and cups are to be covered with nylon.

SCENA 3 The stage is completely covered with chairs arranged in a precise planimetry of asymmetric groups spaced out by passageways. Hanging from the chairs, simple musical instruments (woodwinds, strings, percussions). Walkways can be found among the audience, on the rows of seats. From the ceiling, a rope ladder can be lowered in order to make sure that the performer is visible to all. An instrumentalist armed with keyboard or percussions is on stage or in the stalls. Bright light everywhere, in the room and on the stage. **Duration: 23'**

Scena 1 presents a series of audiovisual sequences meant to guide the audience through the actions and unveil the mechanisms of power by describing the undying allure of myths that are able to subjugate individuals through domination.¹³ Hitler, Marx, Rajk are evoked in the first film segment to support Guaccero's claim.

The first scene commences in pitch darkness, the room echoing with gusts of wild wind and the sound of heavy panting. In the background runs a mute sequence of images:¹⁴ middle-class Germans carry slaughtered bodies to their burial. This is a clear reference to the physical violence entailed in the practice of power, which here finds its historical counterpart in the horrors perpetrated by the Nazis.

Section A of the first part is characterised by the presence of voices (initially off-stage), both amplified and not, which exhale sound in light descendant *glissandi*. The initial fragment puts us in front of a trenchant timbric dimension (EXAMPLE 1): the vocal intensity is otherworldly, seedy, even metallic in its vigorous *crescendo* (of microphoned voices). Almost all of the numerous possible tonal variations conceived by Guaccero, indicated at the beginning of the score,¹⁵ are present in the opening section. The expansion then culminates in highly evocative phonetic improvisations.

EXAMPLE 1. *Scena del potere, Scena 1, first part, A, 1'15"–2'30"*. Fondazione Giorgio Cini (Venezia), Fondo Domenico Guaccero

The image shows a handwritten musical score for a scene. It is organized into several horizontal sections:

- VID:** Visual instructions at the top, including "Luci da [] a" and "Escono sf. Luci da [] a".
- AUD:** Audio instructions, including "Luci [] bianca argentea sulla sinistra. Soprano 1, Soprano 2 e Tenore, vestiti da borghese '34-5', senza soprabito; azioni da fermo, restano, parlano: approssimano per la colazione, due da mangiare all'asciutto, inaffrati - fuori."
- SCENA:** The main musical score, divided into vocal and instrumental parts.
 - VOCI:** Vocal parts for Soprano 1, Soprano 2, Tenore, and Bass. Includes lyrics like "Luce da [] a" and "Escono sf. Luci da [] a".
 - STRUMENTI:** Instrumental parts for Clarinet and Saxophone.
 - VOLUMI DI AMPLIFICAZIONE:** A section with a blacked-out area, likely indicating volume levels for amplification.

The score is heavily annotated with musical notation, including notes, rests, and dynamic markings. There are also some handwritten notes and corrections throughout the score.

Section B of the first part opens with the singers (two sopranos and one tenor) carrying out a melody – one of the few present in the performance – with lyrics inspired by Novalis’s *Sehnsucht nach dem Tode*. The singers are wearing middle-class clothes; they repeatedly perform the typical gestures of daily life.

The previous chaotic texture is opposed by the vibrant lyricism of this fragment. The singing, reveals the words in minute detail, while the melody flows calmly and gives rise, at 3’30”, to a linear rhythmic chorale: the syntactic structure of the parts somehow requires the performers to proceed with solemn rigour. At 4’38” the powerful choral climax clashes with the entrance of a new melody played to the words: ‘es rauschten leis’ die Wälder, so sternklar war die Nacht [the forest softly rustled, how starry was the night]’.

This fragment sees the first soprano and the piano taking up bars 36–44 of Robert Schumann’s *Lied Mondnacht* (text by Joseph Freiherr von Eichendorff), while at the same time the second soprano recites verses from Giovanni Pascoli’s poem *La mia sera* and the tenor tackles Virgil’s first eclogue. The nocturnal atmospheres evoked by the voices inject a dramatic sense of irony into the death imbued sequences previously seen on stage (a corpse left in the middle of the scene, the showgirl alternately busy flaying the dead body and parodying Hitler). This contrast prepares the stage for the entrance of the baritone’s voice – recorded on magnetic tape and accompanied by brief billowing instrumental waves and bursts of flash photography lights – which recites chosen passages from the dictator’s speeches.¹⁶

In section A of the second part, political power leaves the spotlight to economic power, embodied in this case by the bleakness of stock market gamblers. A chaotic moving mass of amplified voices and overlapping words, where meaning cannot immediately be perceived,¹⁷ generates a sort of sound nebula, which functions as a comment to a quote from Marx’s *Capital*, a message carried on by unamplified voices:¹⁸ ‘La teoria diventa forza materiale non appena conquista le masse [Theory becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses]’. The action takes place in near darkness; light beams rapidly cutting through the shadows.

Section B of the second part describes the stock market crash: this refers to the Black Tuesday of 1929 that witnessed the downfall of Wall Street. The crash slowly takes form through the boisterous stage entrance of the businessmen’s wives, the noisy presence of the percussionists as they arrange their instruments, a recorded voice that proclaims: ‘Suona la campana a morto per la proprietà privata [Sound the death knell for private property]’.

Section C, which seals the second part, shows the effects caused by the stock market crash through the interaction of three businessmen, a scene which

culminates with one of them committing suicide. The scenic spaces are of a composite nature: the action takes place contemporaneously in different areas of the stage and the stalls area, sometimes directly addressing the audience.

The interval between the second and third parts of *Scena 1* is significant: the body of the suicide businessman is carried away from the scene; the score leaves room to possibly fit a 2/3-minute solo performance by the dancer. This choice is motivated by the fact that there is a clear switch from an action which takes place in the past to one which belongs to a possible future, thus discussing the elusive dynamics through which the power of the collective influences the individual.

Guaccero decides therefore to entrust this shift in perspective to an almost entirely theatrical action completely based on the performer's acting skills. The moment is also characterised by the constant presence of a film that acts as counterpoint to the theatrical action, enveloping both stage and projection with intense atmospheric continuity.

To better dominate this mechanism, in the score Guaccero accurately indicates the counterpoint among the elements involved in the action. The score is more similar to the storyboard of a movie than a music score (EXAMPLE 2).¹⁹ Two narrative units, marked with precise chronometrical recommendations, all run across the same strip: the predetermined one (overlapping slides, recorded sounds on tape and phrases written on signs) and one that takes place at the moment of the performance (action, sound, words).

EXAMPLE 2. *Scene del potere, Scena 1*, third part, 0 – approx. 1’26”. Fondazione Giorgio Cini (Venezia), Fondo Domenico Guaccero

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C. (Cina Brand) Situazione sonora: lo schermo è ripartito parallelamente alla scena come in A. Le SSP (= Serie dei Segni di Paolo → altre o lettere) è al centro in piedi - sullo schermo (o all'aria) sono proiettate immagini di varie nature: qualità, il suono registrato su nastri. Situazione globale. Il D.C.M. (Discondizionato non condizionato, lo "scatto", l'effettiva) è il lettore o l'attore - lo Superpartito è la figura (de Kleen, acciabbato, il capo, etc.)

Handwritten musical score for 'Scene del potere, Scena 1' by Simone Caputo. The score is divided into two sections. The top section covers time 0' to 58' and includes characters like 'IO, SERVITUTI', 'BARBARA ISTERICI', and 'IDENTITÀ STABILITÀ'. The bottom section covers time 58' to 59' and includes characters like 'PACIFICI', 'SQUADRE', and 'SQUADRE'. The score includes various musical notations, time signatures, and descriptive text in Italian. A handwritten note at the bottom right reads '(1) lo schermo viene proiettato solo dalla dispendiosa.'

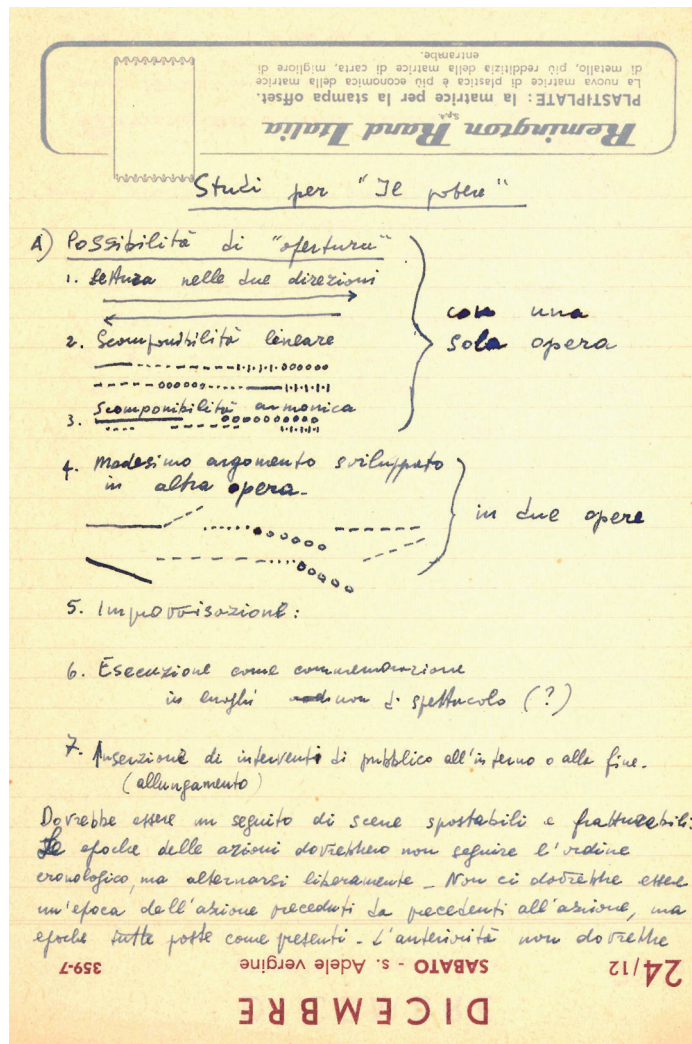
Here the music consists of an accompaniment of pre-recorded sounds: the rest of the scene is built on gestures that correspond to sounds (loud laughter, gargling, exclamations – elements that Guaccero himself describes in the score as noise made up of collective sounds).

This theatrical dimension is meant to focus on reality, delving deep into the individual stripped of all pretensions and presumptions, shown as a slave of the consumerist values that society provides, which commodify well-being to the detriment of mankind’s very *humanitas*. Man is easily seduced by false virtue: the myth of race, the worship of money, blind faith in science (all clearly represented in the slides that compose the video). At the end of the first part’s third section, the narrator affirms that ‘Dio è incompatibile con le macchine e la felicità universale [God is incompatible with machines and universal happiness]’, words that sound rather like a prelude to the condemnation of all the negative effects brought on by science, the central theme in the following section, which thus concludes the first part of *Scene del potere*.

THE INDEPENDENT AND PERMUTABLE NATURE OF THE PARTS

Scena 2, which is also divided into 5 scenes, is built according to a precise pattern meant to enhance the ‘open’ nature of Guaccero’s project. It should however be noted that from the very first outline of the work (first titled *Il potere*), it was clear that the idea of a non-directional theatrical narrative was pivotal for its development – as proven by some of the preparatory notes (FIGURE 2), and especially by the first framework conceived for *Il potere*.

FIGURE 2. *Scene del potere*: preparatory materials. Hand-written notes entitled *Studi per “Il potere”*. Fondazione Giorgio Cini (Venezia), Fondo Domenico Guaccero



Getting back to *Scena 2*, while scenes A, B and C take place in the theatre hall, scenes α and β are simultaneously staged in the foyer. Since there are no precise narrative criteria to dictate a consequential order, the performers can alternate each scene in accordance with their own will. Even the segments constituting each scene can be put together in a variety of combinations. The score, on the other hand, is well-defined when it comes to indicating intervals between the conclusion and beginning of the scenes. Another important element is the expanding concept of Guaccero's performing space: stage, foyer and stalls all become part of a whole. In conclusion, the audience's participation is not exclusively emotional, for *Scene del potere* adds a physical component: from *Scena 2* onwards, the actions take place amongst or near the audience, directly engaging with it in an attempt to transform the viewers into actual active participants.²⁰

Scena 2's fragmented nature is made clear from the beginning of Scene A: the curtains opened wide to reveal the entire set, while the speaker sits on stage (A1) advocating ideologies which speak 'nel nome dell'umanità, del popolo, della razza, di Dio [in the name of mankind, population, race, and God]' and presenting the audience, who have yet to settle into the theatre, with a few tracks by Mozart played with the aid of a tape recorder.²¹ Suddenly (A2) the tenor, rising from the stalls as if he were part of the audience, sings a tune that Guaccero calls *Il canto dei poeti dell'età presente*. This flowing lyrical melody is opposed shortly after by the rough harsh voice of the first soprano who – tightly engaging with guitar, clarinet, saxophone and percussions – directs accusations towards Rajk: 'Egli è passato nel campo del capitale straniero e della reazione [He now stands in the land of foreign capital and reaction]'.

Scene B sees the two singer-actors (the tenor plays Rajk, the soprano plays the prosecution) engage in a *concertante* exchange based on the different timbres, tone and nuances of the two voices: urged by the prosecution (B1), Rajk addresses the audience by singing his confession. Once Rajk is deceased, Oppenheimer bursts onto the scene (B2), using onomatopoeic sounds to express Einstein's equation, 'E=mc²'.

The scene ends with section B3; the sound score is completely recorded and is based on the interaction between three elements: Hitler's voice (ranging from acute to medium and low registers), sounds of various types,²² and a male choir comprising of 6 voices. The lyrics are drawn from *Ein deutsches Requiem* (by Jorge Louis Borges) and *Hitler speaks* (by Hermann Rauschnig).

With a 2'45"-long sequence, Guaccero forces the audience to experience what can be described as the vision of a horror movie without the sense of protection one can usually enjoy and rely on when inside the theatre space.

Scene C appears more like a sort of ritual than a theatre performance and is characterised by an increasing use of improvisation. Alogical elements are organised within a compartmentalised structure. In C1, the stage is fully lit: the harpsichordist enters the scene and begins to play, imperturbably, almost as if he were performing a recital – thus enters the actress donning a black mask and furiously screaming ‘L’oggetto! [The object!.]’ showing a radio to the audience.

Section C2, which is about 4 minutes long, does not have a score and is built on stage directions alone (EXAMPLE 3). This is the part that better exemplifies Guaccero’s conception of music as an element that, although formative, does not have a dominant role in his work: music must abandon its leadership and admit its own insufficiency. Being part of a dialectic process, music must make space for what he sees as theatre’s original unifying tradition which considers sound-word-action-vision as a whole.²³ It is therefore no coincidence that before the action begins, all those participating affirm with determination ‘cold happening’.

EXAMPLE 3. *Scene del potere, Scena 2, C2, approx. 4’*. Fondazione Giorgio Cini (Venezia), Fondo Domenico Guaccero

(SCENA C₁) *L'attore s'impadronisce. Distingue verso l'oggetto. L'attrice ha la maschera sul volto e porge l'oggetto all'attore. La radio emette il suo messaggio. L'attore immagina il viso nell'oggetto. Inizia. Il flautista comincia a dar segni d'impazienza. Batta il pugno sulla mano. Il flautista dice a voce bassa: "Oppressi, oppressi" e ripete, girando in tondo e battendo il pugno. Tutti mirano verso lo scrittore. "Oppressi, oppressi."* 220'ca. (40'ca.)



(SCENA C₂) (4'ca.) Tutti dicono con decisione e serietà: "cold happening," poi:

AZIONE Agiscono: soprano, tenore, attrice, attore, flautista, pianista, clarinetista e sassofonista. La clarinetista (la pianista), il percussionista e il clarinetista fanno azioni esclusivamente "sonore". Il contrabbasso e il direttore sono attenti all'azione. E' dato, per ogni attore, un campo di tre azioni fra le quali ciascuno sceglie al momento la propria azione. Vi aggiungerò un'azione inventata al momento. Quando qualche non fosse possibile seguire dai azioni del proprio campo. In genere i movimenti saranno frenetici, ma senza veloci spuntamenti (velocità data). Per tutto il brano le luci (effluvi, colori) si muoveranno ad intervallo e velocemente in sala e sulla scena.

SOPRANO: 1. Sbatte un uovo nel piatto
2. cavala l'attesa frustandola,
3. ride soffocata e fotografata dal pubblico, con flaghes.

TENORE: 1. Pista del vetro in un piatto;
2. punga altri con uno spillare;
3. lo schiuma con detergente.

ATTORICE: 1. Sventola un stacco, con una ventagliata sugli altri;
2. sospira un fegno con carta vetrata.

ATTORE: 1. Tira il macchinetta in grandi fagioli di carta;
2. fa un omaggio, si cala i pantaloni e dice: "mammi pipi";
3. fa commuovere le dita sul proprio corpo e si soffoca.

FLAUTISTA: 1. Dice "Oppressi"
2. cerca di respirare un fegno morto, poi lo lancia via;
3. crolla un palloncino gonfio.

PIANISTA: 1. Lancia qualche coltello e lo manda in platea;
2. si cala le scarpe e opera piedi e calzini;
3. fugga e si scioglie i capelli con phon.

CLARINETTISTA: 1. smonta lo strumento e suona in parti di esso;
2. si siede sulle ginocchia di qualcuno (anche in platea o forse dal relatore) e lo bacia;

SASSOFONISTA: 1. Lancia dalla chitarra lentamente;
2. cerca di vomitare;
3. si strappa i peli.

SUONI I suoni derivanti dalle azioni indicate raggiungono al massimo l'intensità media e devono essere in generale nel campo del piano. Gli altri suoneranno anche spuntati, graditi, con almeno una azione sonora ciascuno.
- La clarinetista (o organista) suonerà con preparazioni e sulla cordata;
- Il clarinetista accorderà lo strumento;
- Il percussionista farà cadere per terra, con fracasso, gli strumenti di metallo.
Ai O' qualcuno dirà: "Covè il Taa?.. E un altro risponderà: "La vita quotidiana è il vero Taa."
Verso la fine (a 30' ca.) clarinetto, sax, chitarra, o percussione improvvisano un basidi di reduce. l'attrice si lancia nelle danze, mentre gli altri terminano la loro azione. Il gridi acquiescono un loro disimpegno sessuale. Tutti acquiesceranno immediatamente il proprio aplomb, non appena si sarà alzato il relatore (4,5,6,7).

(SCENA C₂) Il relatore si alza, mette in moto la registrazione e contemporaneamente legge la relazione. Gli "attori", attraverso la chivvombilità, se non repressibili, almeno per esigenze di azione, sono attenti al relatore, non sempre della registrazione, di quanto ascoltano. Essi sono e relatori, fanno capo di almeno durante la lettura. Qualche profumo, almeno, sempre fermo sino alla fine. Le entrate di attori e di attori C₂ sono indicate nel frammento. L'attrice, dalla voce registrata, è sempre uguale. Nella lettura della registrazione.

REL. (col. teatro) 12 20 28 36 44 52 60 68 76 84 92 100 108 116 124 132 140 148 156 164 172 180 188 196 204 212 220

REL. (col. teatro) 12 20 28 36 44 52 60 68 76 84 92 100 108 116 124 132 140 148 156 164 172 180 188 196 204 212 220

N. pubblica Si è aperto per l'attori per and... / l'area di probabilità ma il rischio (col. teatro) / solo aumenta e gli "scari", fra precisione ed efficienza tendono a essere più sensibili

STR. 1.5 (col. teatro) FRAMMENTO I (col. teatro) FRAMMENTO II (col. teatro)

Guaccero assigns three actions to each participant, giving them the power to choose both the action and the moment to carry it out on stage – while a fourth action is meant to be ad-libbed. Even the lights move according to improvised dynamics.²⁴ From a musical standpoint, the section is based exclusively on the sounds produced by the specified actions, all except for one instance fixed by Guaccero at approx. 3'20": 'clarinetto, sax, chitarra e percussione improvviseranno un twist veloce. L'attrice si lancia nella danza, mentre gli altri terminano la loro azione. I gesti acquisteranno un tono chiaramente sensuale [clarinet, sax, guitar and percussions will improvise a quick twist. The actress will leap into a dancing frenzy while the others are busy bringing their actions to a close. The gestures will take on an explicitly sensual tension]’.

The non-focused narrative style that characterises scenes A, B and C of *Scena 2* is paralleled by an undetermined use of space and scene, which finds its highest expression in scenes α and β : if in A, B and C the locations are different (the stage, the last rows of the stalls area, the corridors) – so as to engage the audience with the actions taking place in their vicinity – the choreographies conceived for scenes α and β take place in the foyer and adjacent areas.²⁵ The composer's intent is to break through the 'fourth wall', progressively reducing the degrees of separation between performer and spectator. It is not the performance in itself, but the audience's own actions that drive the audience towards a more critical and conscious approach to the work.

Scene α 's choreography sees a big open piano placed at the very centre of the foyer, which the pianist is called upon to prepare. This is how Guaccero desemanticises the classical instrument and opens up new worlds of unprecedented and alienating sonorous possibilities to the viewer, who therefore becomes acquainted with a ritual that has little to do with a 'classical' concert. It is a passageway to another dimension. The actor is the first to enter the room (after being 'dressed', as required by any formal rite of passage), followed by the flutist and the audience, who are now able to move freely. At this point, Guaccero indicates that pianist and ballerina should perform an interlude in the foyer; if the room is empty, the interlude should be performed for the bar staff or theatre staff: the traditional conception of scenic spaces is thus completely wiped out.

In scene β ,²⁶ one can clearly sense the underlying idea of theatre conceived as a process in which the audience is no longer confined to merely listening and watching but also become an active part of the ritual – as Guaccero had hoped for in his preparatory materials. The ritual begins before the action: the pianist and dancer prepare the 'arredi sacri [sacred vestments]'. They lay a cloth on the ground, at the end of the piano, and place a cross, a percussion

mallet, a rhombus and a cup filled with red liquid all around the music stand, on which a black mask is placed inside the grand piano, towards its tail, they position the 'object' (a small radio wrapped in a blood-stained rag).

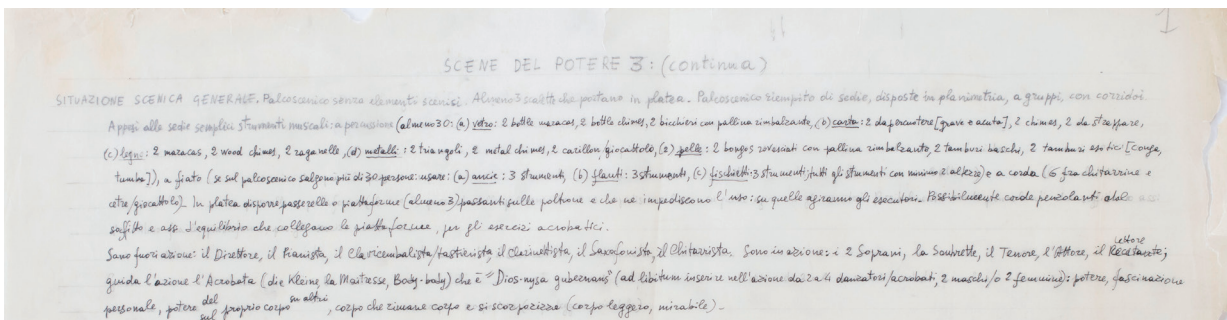
The action opens with the orderly entrance of the hooded figures (singers, musicians and actor). As if in a state of trance, the hooded flock is ordered to throw itself towards the audience, uttering piercing shrieks in an attempt to wrap the hoods around some of the spectators' heads. While the whole action is out of control, the dancer grabs the 'object' from the actor's hands. The latter lets out a cry and desperately heads towards the audience, closely followed by the singers and musicians who in the meantime have interrupted their deranged dancing.

Although this specific moment of Guaccero's work might appear to have drawn inspiration from the contemporary happenings of the 1960s, scene β cannot be fully associated with this type of performative situation, for the composer never loses sight of his rigorous parameters when it comes to regulating the action's duration and coherence. It is as if he were some kind of God able to shape matter from chaos.

FROM 'INSIDE' TO 'OUTSIDE', FROM THEATRE TO REAL LIFE

The course undertaken by Scenes 1 and 2 comes to an end in *Scena 3*, the third and final part of *Scene del potere*. This action features an utterly obsolete set design: the stage is cluttered with randomly gathered chairs where instruments are propped ('Palcoscenico riempito di sedie. [...] Appesi alle sedie semplici strumenti musicali [...]'). FIGURE 3). The intentionally random disposition is designed to give greater emphasis to the lighting and movements of the performers, in order to achieve a complete unity among elements.

FIGURE 3. *Scene del potere, Scena 3, initial caption: general scenic situation. Fondazione Giorgio Cini (Venezia), Fondo Domenico Guaccero*



Light is to the scene what music is to the score: an expressive element beyond the symbol. Brightly effulgent and shining everywhere, the light becomes gradually feebler as the action continues, only to intensify once more towards the end, interrupted by rapid and unexpected spurts of darkness. In short, light significantly contributes in animating the performer and functions as a unifying element with the scenic space. Here, the performer can contemporaneously explore him/herself and his/her surroundings. In the score for this last part of the scenic action, words and movements are more central than sounds (the notes written on the sheet are but a few and at undetermined pitches).

The action begins as the audience is taking their seats – those who do not find a seat are invited to sit on the stage. The acrobat, Dios-nysa, mimics the destruction of power, which at this moment is represented by the stage in its dual role of authority and taboo. The audience is invited to play the instruments, continuously encouraged by the galvanised shouts of the sopranos and the dancer. Accompanied by *fortissimo* recorded sounds, dancers and mimes perform ‘sempre più meravigliosi [increasingly wonderful]’ exercises of acrobatic possession, trance and drug-fuelled bliss. Guaccero’s hope is that the audience will also become part of the ritual, swept into a rhythmic frenzy of both body and soul. Suddenly, the on-stage lights go out and the ‘shapies-bodies’ of the performers leave the room. The dancer invites the audience to go outside, while the flutist starts playing from the theatre’s threshold: at this point, the performance can take place elsewhere, even in the street.²⁷ For a sacred ritual to be complete, the procession (ministrants and faithful alike) must walk beyond the confined spaces of the temple. Similarly, Guaccero’s theatrical action is meant to only partially take place inside the theatre: the work’s completeness depends on its exiting the scene and breaking the divide between actors and spectators.²⁸

30 DECEMBER 1968: PALERMO’S FIASCO

The overall constitutive complexity of the scenic action, along with circumstantial causes due to the production difficulties of the set, made 30 December 1968 a failure as the date of *Scene del potere*’s official debut in Palermo.²⁹

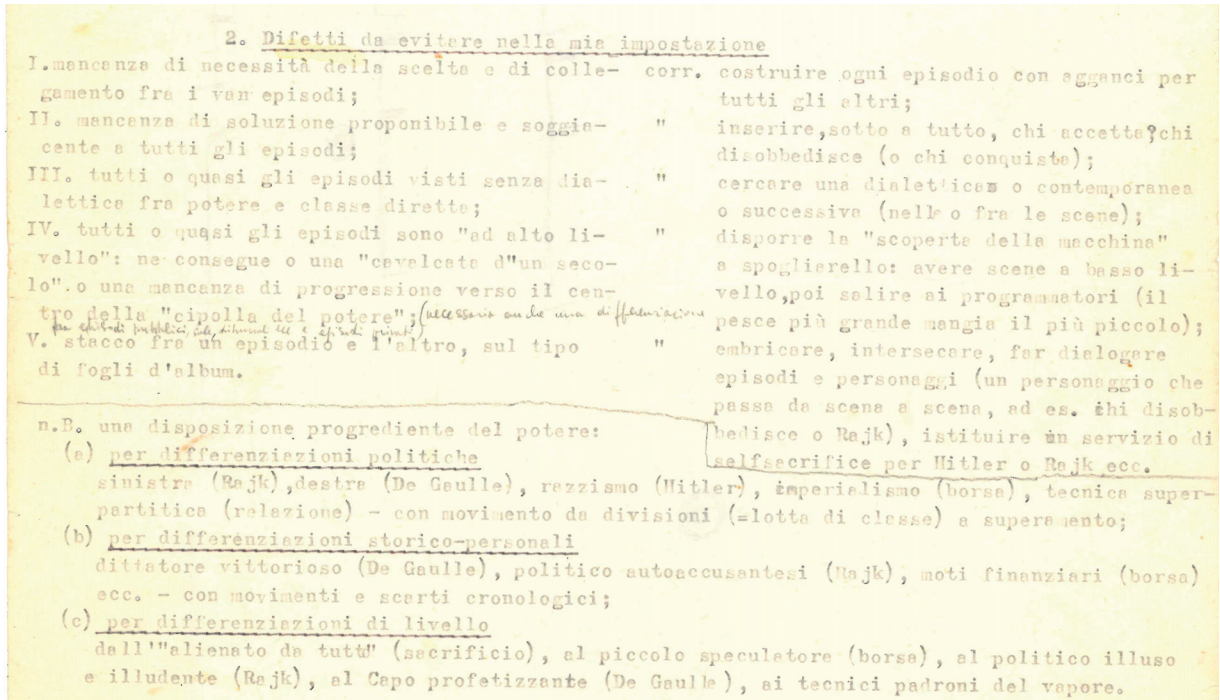
Mastropietro has extensively tracked down the tormented relationships between Guaccero, the producers (the Teatro Massimo and the 6th Settimana Internazionale di Nuova Musica) and the workers involved in the realisation of the project.³⁰ The organizational issues can be briefly summarised as follows.

Only after the summer of 1968 were they able to find the right space

to host the performance, which according to Guaccero had necessarily to be architecturally fit to allow forms of interaction between performers and spectators. The Teatro Biondo seemed suitable: despite being structured as a traditional Italian theatre, it was equipped with a large foyer, essential to Guaccero's project. By the end of November, light plots, props and tools were not ready and the score had yet to be completed. According to Guaccero, by the beginning of December the rehearsal schedule was dangerously compromised, as he writes in a letter to Francesco Agnello reporting 'situazione all'insegna [...] del dramma [a situation on the verge of tragedy]'.³¹ On 5 December the performers refused to sign the rehearsal calendar; finally, on the 30th, the date set for the debut, the designated conductor Daniele Paris sent a formal request to the superintendent (and to Guaccero and Agnello just for reference) to replace the staging of the performance with an *esecuzione all'italiana*, in order to protect the work and wellbeing of the performers.³² In the end, Guaccero chose to present the work in the form of a 'prova aperta [open rehearsal]', given that the action was still far behind on its production schedule, especially from a theatrical standpoint.

The comparison between the score and the recorded television footage confirms that during the debut many scenic actions were cut out, that the counterpoint between elements was only partially employed (to the detriment of the plot's scenic elements), that the impact of certain images and lighting choices was minimised and that *Scena 3* was transformed and deprived of its ritualistic conclusion.³³ A comparison between the preparatory materials, the score and the television footage shot at the *première* reveals that, ever since its inception, this project had been overly dominated by the scenic dimension: a stage whose only wish was to be consumed by non-theatrical events, to be reborn as a collective ritual. It is therefore no coincidence that this tension underlies most of Guaccero's preparatory materials, forcing the composer to come up with the 1968 version of *Scene del potere*, where he pays more attention to the resolution of theatrical issues than to those related to music, steering away from his initial programmatic intent. This is what he wrote, for example, about the avoidable errors encountered while re-elaborating the 1965 draft into the final version of 1968 (see FIGURE 4 and the English translation in footnote 34).³⁴

FIGURE 4. *Scene del potere*: preparatory notes. Fondazione Giorgio Cini (Venezia), Fondo Domenico Guaccero



Guaccero's intent was to use music in the framework of theatre in order to attain certain levels of psychological experimentation involving both performers and audience – jumping over the very concept and boundaries of theatre. This attempt was in part unsuccessful, as is clearly shown by the visual footage, because of its significantly amputated scenic and performative dimension.

Reviews were particularly harsh: the *Giornale di Sicilia*'s critic Renato Chiesa (31 December 1968) stigmatised the outcome of the final happening, stating that 'il "non teatro" ha mostrato tutto il suo squallore, la sua inutilità, la sua follia ["non-theatre" has here proven all its squalor, futility and madness]', while Mario Messinis of the *Gazzettino* (3 January 1969) described the performance as 'caotico, velleitario, realizzato con un infantile "bric à brac" scenico [chaotic and unrealistic, the result of a childish theatrical "bric à brac"]'. Filippo de' Rossi of the *Momento Sera* (4 January 1969) compared *Scene del potere* to 'un centone di suoni e immagini assolutamente incomprensibili [an absolutely incomprehensible jumble of sounds and images]' and Felix Aprahamian of the *Sunday Times* (5 January 1969) stated that 'a pathetic attempt at "total theatre" was incomplete and abandoned successively before the end of each part'.³⁵

These considerations draw attention to certain aspects of the score that were perhaps among its endogenous causes of failure. Although an overabundance of information and dense elemental counterpoint represent the composition's richness, they were also quite problematic. As per Guaccero's own choice, the very nature of *Scene del potere* was 'inorganic': even if the composer had managed to punctually deliver on the scheduled premiere date, the scenic action would in any case have been inextricable. The proliferation of materials was necessary to provide an objective perspective on power. Organisational issues backfired making an already unsolvable project unsolved and incomprehensible for most.

The theme of power played a central role in Sixties theatre production, characterised by its striving towards linguistic renewal and political engagement. Guaccero however decided to approach the subject from another perspective, distancing himself from contemporary works like those of Berio, Nono, Maderna and Manzoni who mainly focused on denouncing the opposition between those who have power and those who suffer its consequences. In a historical moment such as the one that Italy was experiencing in those years, when everything was charged with tension and anything could be simplified in terms of antagonism and opposition, Guaccero's choice to prefer an objective vision of power did not help him secure a future for the performance after its debut. Although the idea of observing power in its possible technocratic and financial declinations might appear to us now as quite far-sighted and necessary, it did not make an impression on the commentators of the time. Just like other composers of his era, and maybe even more so, Guaccero thought of 'theatre' as a form of rediscovering the reasons behind music's insufficiency, experimenting with 'the primordial tradition of unity between sound-word-action-vision'.³⁶ What made *Scene del potere* truly unique, however, was the fact that music was assigned a non-primary role. Guaccero went beyond theory and actually created a theatre based on the counterpoint between the various elements of a work of art – as can be observed in the score itself – thus diving headfirst into the complexity of such an experience.

Through a careful examination of the score, one can spot two other possible endogenous causes of the action's fiasco: first of all, it presents itself as a perpetually endangered mechanism, for it can turn out to be extremely complex and ineffective whenever the management of the space is not perfectly handled and calibrated by the performers and fundamental elements. Secondly, the precisely marked timings, the over-detailed directions and the taste for symmetry that dominate the entire structure of the sections profoundly clash with the idea of a theatre of 'action' that is supposed to be built as each synergy takes place

between the performers and the audience. Through the interpretation of the score, Guaccero emerges as a sort of panoptic eye, simultaneously controlling all the elements under his watch.³⁷

Then, as previously stated, the RAI television footage provides further information that must be taken into consideration: on the evening of 30 December 1968, a few fundamental elements of Guaccero's original design were discarded (some partially, others completely), thus distorting the very founding principle according to which *Scene del potere* was supposed to stand, that is on the equal coexistence of the elements and not on music's predominance. The filmed footage brings about further considerations regarding Guaccero's idea of a theatre founded on stage work: in his writings, he envisioned the spontaneous generation of a community of performers, engaged in an intense experience of interpersonal bonding and skill exchange. The relationship with the audience was to be considered an essential part of this community. In the images however most of the performers appear insecure, uncoordinated with each other and not fully familiar with the project's execution. This result was actually predictable: rehearsals had started only a few weeks before 30 December, and so the cast had not been able to establish the collaborative workshop dynamics that Guaccero had strongly hoped for – plus the performers were co-opted, so there was no true adhesion to the project and its aims. Similar theatrical experiences of the same years – such as the Living Theatre – were based on the performer's profound conscious participation in the artistic project: this approach assured real cooperation throughout the whole artistic development of the work, along with a different relationship with the audience, founded on the communication between two non-artificial communities. Last but not least, at the time, Guaccero did not fully understand that a radical project such as *Scene del potere* could not take place in a theatre or be included in a well-defined playbill such as the Settimana Internazionale Nuova Musica.³⁸ The composer did invest much time in choosing the right location, but it was not enough: the Teatro Biondo was a theatre *all'italiana* and the sharp separation between its elevated stage and the stalls below was not suitable for the scenic-spatial non-centrality required by the actions. However, it must be said in Guaccero's defence that it was only a few years later that radical works like his left the theatre spaces for other, more suitable locations. In the mid-Seventies, for example, theatrical productions were staged in the civic spaces of the Santarcangelo di Romagna Theater Festival, while from the 26th to the 28th of June 1978 trains travelling from Bologna to Porretta Terme hosted *happenings* organized by John Cage in collaboration with Walter Marchetti, Juan Hidalgo, Demetrio Stratos and Daniel Charles. Two other noteworthy

events that truly marked this important passage in time were Carmelo Bene's reading of *Lectura Dantis* from the top of Bologna's Torre degli Asinelli on July 31st 1981, and *Prometeo. Tragedia dell'ascolto* played by Luigi Nono in Venice's Chiesa di San Lorenzo during the month of September 1984.

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Notes

- 1 The preparatory materials are kept and preserved in Venezia, Fondazione Giorgio Cini (FGC), Fondo Domenico Guaccero (FDG).
- 2 26 April 1965, Rome (Teatro delle Arti), 3rd Festival of Nuova Consonanza.
- 3 The letters are addressed to Francesco Agnello, Mario Bortolotto, Paolo Emilio Carapezza, Minsa Craig Burri, Antonino Titone, Italian newspapers and press.
- 4 The handwritten copy dates back to the 1980s, when Macchi and Titone attempted to unsuccessfully put on a performance of *Scene del potere* in Palermo. The Fondo Egisto Macchi at the FGC still preserves a newspaper clipping (*L'Ora*, 17 December 1985) which summarises the reasons behind the tentative effort.
- 5 See Alessandro Mastropietro, 'L'interno/esterno della voce: su *Scene del potere* di Domenico Guaccero', in: *Voce come soffio, voce come gesto. Omaggio a Michiko Hirayama*, a cura di Daniela Tortora, Roma: Aracne, 2013, pp. 123–172.
- 6 The study will also make reference to a number of preparatory materials. A more detailed overview is provided in Simone Caputo, '«Musica, parlato, azione, scena, film: teatro lirico con film»: *Scene del potere* di Domenico Guaccero', in: *Teatro di avanguardia e composizione sperimentale per la scena: 1950–1975*, a cura di Gianmario Borio, Giordano Ferrari and Daniela Tortora, pp. 259–301.
- 7 Guaccero's programmatic intents have been extrapolated from: *Scene del potere*'s dramaturgic-textual preparatory materials; Domenico Guaccero, *Scene del potere*, untitled introduction (3rd Festival of Nuova Consonanza Theatre Program, 22–27 April 1965); Guaccero's writings on musical theatre ('Un'esperienza di teatro musicale', *Il Verri*, 21, 1966, pp. 126–140; 'Postilla sul teatro musicale', *Duemila*, II/6, 1966, pp. 79–84). The quoted texts are part of the Domenico Guaccero collection, "*Un iter segnato*". *Scritti e interviste*, a cura di Alessandro Mastropietro, Lucca: LIM, 2005, pp. 470–471, 143–160, 161–171.
- 8 A few of the technical solutions implemented by Guaccero (spatialisation, active audience, etc.) mentioned here were not his prerogative and can even be found in works by other contemporaneous authors.
- 9 Guaccero conceived up to 29 different combinations of music, spoken parts, action, scenes and motion pictures.
- 10 The concept of 'de-specialization' was further explained by Guaccero in 'Sulla tradizione del teatro musicale', in: *di Domenico Guaccero. Prassi e teoria*, Roma: Nuova Consonanza, 1984, pp. 180–192: 187–192 (also in Guaccero, "*Un iter segnato*". *Scritti e interviste*, pp. 172–182: 178–182).
- 11 See Guaccero, 'Postilla sul teatro musicale', pp. 166–167.
- 12 A detailed synopsis of *Scene del potere* was written by Mastropietro, 'L'interno/esterno della voce: su *Scene del potere* di Domenico Guaccero', pp. 151–154.
- 13 *Scena I* is divided into four parts (some of which are further articulated into sections); each part is marked with a distinctive letter.
- 14 The images are taken from the book *Think of this, man!*, a cura di Pietro Caleffi e Albe Steiner, Milano: Feltrinelli, 1960, p. 166.

- 15 Falsettos, harmonic progressions, vibrato, blown sounds, applying glottal or tongue strokes, etc.
- 16 Guaccero drew some elements of Hitler's speech from *The morning of the magicians*, a 1960 book by Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier.
- 17 The text, extracted from Marx's *Capital*, recites: 'Il movimento contraddittorio della società capitalista si rende manifesto attraverso il suo ciclo periodico, il cui punto culminante è la crisi generale [The contradictory movement of capitalist society shows itself in the completion of its periodic cycle which culminates in general crisis]'.
- 18 Guaccero indicates the precise pitch for both the single voice and the group of voices, giving the performers the possibility to invert the syllable order.
- 19 The third part of *Scena 1* lasts approx. 8' (half the duration of the previous scenes, all approx. 15' long) and it is not divided into sections.
- 20 Guaccero explains his concept of 'teatro di partecipazione [participatory theatre]' – one of the central driving themes of 1960s avant-garde – in 'Postilla sul teatro musicale', pp. 168–170, underlining the important influence of John Cage's reflections (see his 'Experimental music' in: John Cage, *Silence*, Middleton Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1961, pp. 7–13) and the entire *oeuvre* of Living Theatre (see Julian Beck, *The Life of the Theatre. The Relation of the Artist to the Struggle of the People*, San Francisco: City Lights, 1972).
- 21 The songs are from the first *finale* of the *Zauberflöte*, while the other works mentioned by the speaker are the Fantasy in C minor K 475 for solo piano and the Quartet K 465 n. 19 in C major.
- 22 A pack of dogs; the ebb and flow of the sea; a mill; a machine gun; an organ; slow steps; a slamming door; breaking glass.
- 23 '[...] all'originaria tradizione dell'unità di suono-parola-azione-visione'. Guaccero, 'Scene del potere', p. 471.
- 24 Guaccero instructs: 'Per tutto il brano le luci (riflettori, colori) si muoveranno ad libitum e velocemente in sala e sulla scena [Throughout all the piece the lights (floodlights, colours) will move ad libitum and rapidly across the scene]'.
- 25 Guaccero's very score is made up of steps, movements and figures that only partially rely on the pre-existing musical and rhythmic structure.
- 26 The scene is divided into 7 actions and one prologue, which are seamlessly combined.
- 27 See Guaccero, "Un iter segnato". *Scritti e interviste*, pp. 470–471: 471.
- 28 See Guaccero, 'Sulla tradizione del teatro musicale', p. 176.
- 29 The staff and cast of the Palermo debut are listed in Mastropietro, 'L'interno/esterno della voce: su *Scene del potere* di Domenico Guaccero', pp. 142–143.
- 30 See Mastropietro, 'L'interno/esterno della voce: su *Scene del potere* di Domenico Guaccero', pp. 162–172.
- 31 Date-stamped 1 December 1968 (FDG, fasc. 'Corrispondenza').
- 32 Date-stamped 30 December 1968 (FDG, fasc. 'Corrispondenza').
- 33 The Roman headquarters of the RAI Archives preserve a 57'12" recording of the Palermo premiere (Display case Na 77088).

- 34 '2. Mistakes to avoid during my preparation I. lack of need for choices and connections between the various episodes; II. lack of feasible solution underlying all episodes; III. all or almost all episodes devoid of a dialectic between power and subjected class; IV. all or almost all episodes are "high level": the result is a "century-long horse-ride" or a lack of progression towards the central's layer of "power's onion" [...]; V. an interval between each episode, like the pages of a photo album.'
- 35 Most of the reviews spawned from the 1965 debut of *Scene del potere* were of a different nature: Everett Helm (*Die Weltwoche*, 15 May 1965) wrote of the performance's successful ridiculing of the audience; Alberto Pironti (*Veltro*, 3 June 1965), described it as 'un movimentato spettacolo d'avanguardia [an eventful avant-garde performance]'.³⁶
- 36 See footnote 23.
- 37 Reflecting on new theatre's attempt to foster a new dynamic where performers and audience are co-authors and co-performers, Guaccero often stressed the importance of avoiding an intrinsic risk factor: the composer's complete loss of control over his work. See Domenico Guaccero, 'Musica sperimentale', in: *La Musica. Enciclopedia Storica*, Torino: UTET, IV, 1966, pp. 459–468, now in Guaccero, *"Un iter segnato". Scritti e interviste*, pp. 210–224: 223.
- 38 And yet, Guaccero wrote in 'Un'esperienza di "teatro musicale"', p. 149: 'A quale "pubblico" mi rivolgo? Per chi scrivo? Per chi non vuole essere più soltanto "pubblico". [...] Niente routine di festivals aperti solo agli intimi o di manifestazioni del bel mondo, con belle signore compiacenti [Which audience am I referring to? Who am I writing for? I write for those who want to be more than simple "spectators". [...] No more humdrum festivals open only to few or élite events crowded with beautiful women eager to please]'.³⁷