

# Altering *A(lter)A(ction)*? Egisto Macchi Then and Now<sup>1</sup>

**Marco Cosci**

*Università di Pavia*

## 1. BEYOND OPERA

*A(lter)A(ction)* is a music theatre work composed by Egisto Macchi and dedicated to the figure of Antonin Artaud. It debuted at the Teatro Olimpico (Rome), on 15 June 1966, as a product of the newly founded Compagnia del Teatro Musicale di Roma (Music Theatre Company of Rome). The reference to Artaud, alluded to by the four protagonists – Aa, soprano; aA, tenor; aa, mime; AA, reciting voice – has no biographical or representative intent.<sup>2</sup> It exemplifies a creative way of reasoning on the linguistic possibilities of the new theatre, and the desecrating and liberating force of the artist, hindered by the constituted power. The work had a good circulation in the months following premiere, thanks to a revival at the Olimpico in Rome in November of the same year, followed by other performances at the Teatro Moderno in Grosseto, in 1967, and a further revival in German language at the Haus der Kunst in Munich, on 15 and 23 April 1968. Four productions within the space of a couple of years, one of which was international, was undoubtedly an excellent result, and perhaps it had raised hopes for a more favourable reception in the years to follow. Instead, *A(lter)A(ction)* has never since returned to the theatre stage. Even a television version of it, curated by one of the leading directors of experimental cinema, Gregory Markopoulos, which was produced in 1968 as a

parallel project to the German performances, did not generate a media circulation. The video was broadcasted on German television, but its actual incidence cannot be reconstructed in the television schedules of the following years. What is certain is that until a few years ago, it seemed lost in the archives of Bavarian television.<sup>3</sup> In essence, despite being a relatively recent piece, *A(lter)A(ction)* ends up posing performance problems similar to less experimental works from the nineteenth century operatic repertoire, which have long gone into oblivion, interrupted thanks to musicological editorial ventures.

I am aware that juxtaposing a music theatre work with an opera is a risky operation. It is risky because of the aesthetic and organisational assumptions underlying Compagnia del Teatro Musicale di Roma, under whose aegis *A(lter)A(ction)* was conceived.<sup>4</sup> During the Roman performances on 15 and 16 June 1966, an articulate document was published in the programme notes – unsigned, but undoubtedly attributable to the group’s creators and promoters: Sylvano Bussotti, Domenico Guaccero and Macchi. The choice of the company name on

‘Music theatre’, and not ‘opera’ [served] to emphasise the broad polyvalence of the elements that make up the theatrical event: not pre-eminence of sound over speech or of speech over speech, or of the visual element over the aural one, but, case by case, pre-eminence and non-preeminence of one dimension over the other.<sup>5</sup>

That music theatre functions as a form of reaction to the operatic genre, and its artistic and cultural sedimentations is a recurring theme in both the composers’ explicit poetic statements and in the critical musicological reception.<sup>6</sup> Macchi came to music theatre after having focused on a series of problems related to the outdated nature of the operatic performance as it was configured during the 19th century. In a typewritten text drafted for the presentation of a concert show at the Teatro Ateneo (Rome), on 19 April 1964,<sup>7</sup> before briefly discussing the pieces that were the subject of the scheduled concert, Macchi identifies several critical issues related to an opera performance:

1. prevalence of the musical element over the other elements necessary to make theatre, and within that:
2. overwhelming predominance of singing over all other elements necessary to make music and still within that:
3. The predominance of a particular type of singing (the “bel canto”) alien to all stylisation, only aimed at immediate communication, expansion, and often rhetorical forms of expression, giving rise to a type of vocality specific to the genre, which almost cancels out the characters themselves in order to transform the voices into characters.<sup>8</sup>

From this predominance of the musical element, it follows on the one hand that ‘the visual element (scene, lights, characters) does not generally achieve an autonomous dynamism of its own, remaining on the whole [...] rather static in relation to the text-sung-music element’, on the other hand, ‘both the visual and the sound element present themselves with characteristics of unidirectionality. Action and sound proceed from a single centre located in front of the viewing and listening place’.<sup>9</sup> Even more interesting is a second text, written in a more fragmented and largely handwritten form. In this text too, which begins under the title ‘OPERA’, Macchi starts with some historically oriented considerations aimed at considering the process of renewal that, starting with Richard Wagner, invests music theatre. These considerations stimulate a new horizon of observation: is it possible to renew opera performance beyond the medial horizon of the theatrical stage? In the contemporary mediascape, Macchi identifies television as the true medium capable of surpassing theatre itself. This medium offers numerous advantages:

1. possibility of rapid scene changes: a need increasingly felt by the theatre even if never resolved [...]
2. possibility of psychological investigation through close-ups: this point is completely excluded in theatre
3. the possibility of using real actors on stage and partly etching the work with the method of film dubbing (I am not sure)<sup>10</sup>

Macchi continues his discourse by elaborating some guidelines regarding the verbal text used in a work, in which he considers that a ‘linear, rapid, precise action’ should be privileged, whose duration should be between 15 and 30 minutes and, above all, ‘making the most of TV’s psychological analysis potential, it will be necessary to limit the number of lines of the individual characters and the overall number of lines of the work, making use of the “silences” whose emotional charge will be dissolved by the music and the TV shot’.<sup>11</sup> In addition to this, there is the importance of exploiting the full potential of the human voice beyond the operatic standard, thereby also rehabilitating speech.

Therefore, in Macchi’s perspective, the recognition of the obsolescence of the operatic genre sets in motion structural changes that aim to reorganise the entire communicative machine and the processes of negotiation with the spectator. Abandoning the 19th-century tradition means establishing new ways of using materials and production, but also different rules of fruition. Macchi’s ambition is clear: it is not just a matter of imagining new compositional paths but of placing the institution ‘music theatre’ on a new platform that draws its strength from the hybridisation of media. Nevertheless, beyond the undoubted elements

of discontinuity, there remain some possible common traces between opera and music theatre, starting, often, from the same venues. For instance, Robert Adlington recently highlighted the need ‘to be alert to the ambiguities in existing terminology, and the lively debates that have existed for over sixty years about the boundaries between instrumental music, opera, and music theatre – and, one might add, dance, mime, spoken theatre, the popular musical, performance art, happenings, and installations as well’.<sup>12</sup>

## 2. BACK TO OPERA

For the perspective that I intend to propose in this article, the reference to opera is a critical step to address some common questions of a philological and performative nature, which I believe can help to enucleate problems and possible solutions around the specific case of *A(lter)A(ction)*, not only to possibly inform future revivals in modern times but also to initiate a helpful reflection for other works of those years. In fact, compared to experimental theatre opera can count on decades of publishing initiatives involving all the prominent 19th century composers of Italian opera; think of the *opera omnia* of Gioachino Rossini, Gaetano Donizetti, Vincenzo Bellini or Giuseppe Verdi. Initially, critical editions of the most essential and popular operas were published, but over time publishing plans also involved works that are unknown today, making it possible for operas that were never performed in modern times to return to the repertoire.<sup>13</sup> The philological investigation on Italian opera has not only made scores, which were otherwise not readily accessible,<sup>14</sup> available except through the transcription of recovered autograph materials, but even before that, it has developed certain specificities not common to other forms of musical production. Moreover, despite the inevitable differences in the formulation of the respective editorial criteria, modulated on the composer’s typical uses and graphic habits, philological reflection on Italian opera has fine-tuned certain basic theoretical assumptions related to the particular textual status of opera. Against the backdrop of *A(lter)A(ction)* issues, the next section is devoted to these principles.

Compared to the critical editing of instrumental music, the critical editing of opera entails several problems that can be traced back to two specific aspects inherent to the genre. The first deals with its multiple character: the text of an opera combines at least one verbal level – the libretto, made up of words to be performed and captions relating to the actions – and one musical level – made up of notes, but also consisting of the exact verbal text variously manipulated by the composer according to his own needs.<sup>15</sup> The second aspect concerns the functions of these

multiple textualities, i.e. a specific staging realised mainly by singers. As Fabrizio Della Seta has pointed out, a principle dear to seventeenth-century Shakespearean theatre applies to Italian opera, and especially to nineteenth-century opera:

Opera scholars have by now learnt the principle that, since the 1930s, has revolutionised our way of approaching Shakespeare's texts and, consequently, any theatrical text: the latter does not coincide with a concluded and definitive *opus*, but should be considered as the recording or preparation of an event that is constantly renewed over time and that is, more than any other form of artistic expression, bound by precise social and economic conditions.<sup>16</sup>

The close dynamic between text and event at the heart of Italian opera influences editorial choices on the one hand, and has performance repercussions on the other. In addition to providing performers and scholars with a critically ascertained text, which almost always corresponds to the first performance, the most recent editions include appendices that bear witness to the performance life of a given opera and its textual transformations in line with 19th century performance customs.<sup>17</sup> Critical editions of a work can thus include variants of the author's readings that occurred in subsequent revisions of the work for different performance contexts, and the vocal variations prepared by the composer for a particular performer. The latter can thus become the basis for new performances in modern times, or at least an authoritative historically informed model for the formulation of new variations according to the style of the time. Given these considerations, it has become quite clear how much the search for a performative authenticity fixed in a definitive and stable text, a principle already problematic in the vast field of the performing arts, is even more misleading when applied to the realisation on stage of a given work. In this regard, Della Seta again recalls the need to keep the dimension of the musico-dramatic text – offered by the score – quite distinct from the performance text [*testo spettacolare*], which corresponds to the work that goes on stage, i.e. the unrepeatable but documentable event resulting from the combination of acting, movement, image and sound.<sup>18</sup> The notion of the performance text, borrowed from the theatrological studies with a strong semiotic approach of the 1970s-1980s, on the one hand helps to clarify the respective fields of pertinence of the investigation, which to date has been confined to the musico-dramatic text. On the other it extends, in an ideal way, the possibilities of philologically analysing every aspect of the performance. In this direction, Lorenzo Mattei hypothesizes that one of the most complex challenges of the future will be to extend the principles informing a critical edition to everything that concerns the praxis of a specific staging, from set design to choreography, from costume design to lighting technology.<sup>19</sup>

Starting from these theoretical-philological coordinates, we can return to the music theatre experience of the 1960s, in particular to *A(lter)A(ction)*, to focus on

old and new problems. The joint note issued the day before the debut of *A(lter)A(ction)* demonstrates that, at least theoretically, the performance dimension constituted a founding part of the creative project, which sought to escape any of the operatic-derived pre-eminences. On 14 June 1966, Egisto Macchi, Mario Diacono, Daniele Paris, Sergio Tau and Franco Valobra signed a joint declaration in which they stated themselves to be effective ‘co-authors’.<sup>20</sup> Each artist recognised the essential contribution made by the others, with their work, discussion, advice and opinions on the staging of the music theatre piece freely but faithfully inspired by the life and writings of Artaud, and based on a montage of his texts derived mainly, but not only, from the *Lettres de Rodez*.<sup>21</sup> Composer, verbal text supervisor, conductor, director and scriptwriter felt the need to make the authorship of a result, a meeting point and synthesis of different artistic fields, explicit. Behind such a declaration, we can discern not only a claim to multi-authorship in reference to the performance, but a questioning of the distinction between dramatic text and performance text, mentioned above. *A(lter)A(ction)* falls squarely upon that horizon of experimentation born within the theatrical workshops of the Roman scene, but in any case assimilable to transversal tendencies relating to the ‘postdramatic’ sphere theorised by Hans-Thies Lehmann at the end of the 1990s.<sup>22</sup> The investigation into theatre after Brecht revealed new hierarchies between the visual and the acoustic, alternative relationships between the materials of different artistic forms (images, words, sounds, movements), and an increasingly central role reserved for new technologies. The dividing line between literary text and performance text becomes increasingly marked.

Postdramatic theatre it holds true that the written and/or verbal text transferred onto theatre, as well as the ‘text’ of the staging understood in the widest sense (including the performers, their ‘paralinguistic’ additions, reductions or deformations of the linguistic material; costumes, lighting, space, peculiar temporality, etc.) are all cast into a new light through a *changed conception of the performance text*. [...] it becomes more presence than representation, more shared than communicated experience, more process than product, more manifestation than signification, more energetic impulse than information.<sup>23</sup>

Within this framework, the text changes structure and functions in the living space of performance. When contemplating a revival of *A(lter)A(ction)* in modern times, it is more complex to define the boundaries of application on a practical level, faced with this change of where it is situated on the theoretical horizon. If *A(lter)A(ction)*, according to the declarations of 14 June 1966, is the fruit of an authorial effort that is substantiated in the tangency of all the artistic components, there could be a temptation to attempt its revival through a philological analysis of the spectacle itself, from a more or less normative (and conservative) point of

view. The paradoxes of such an operation are obvious at the theoretical level. The reduction of *A(lter)A(ction)* to the ‘reproduction’ of an event, however chimerical, would contradict the very performative potential underlying the conception and articulation of the work. But, even admitting that perspective, the insurmountable obstacles that the scholar or performer encounters on the road at a practical level are equally problematic. It is, therefore, necessary to better clarify the contours of this work’s very brief history on stage and to understand what the surviving sources say and, above all, do not say.

### 3. PERFORMANCE TEXTS

Given the importance attributed to the performance component in the music theatre revolution of the 1960s, an ideal starting point for a critical analysis of the work could be the audio-visual recording of one of the four stagings of *A(lter)A(ction)*. However, only a film version of *A(lter)A(ction)*, which dates back to the German performances has survived. At the end of 1967, under the impetus of conductor Eberhard Schoener, the Bayerischer Rundfunk, together with the Haus der Kunst in Munich initiated a joint project. The two institutions staged a series of performances, with the slightly different title *(A)lter(A)ction*,<sup>24</sup> as a music theatre work at the Haus der Kunst, and as an experimental film for the Bayerischer Rundfunk third program, directed by Markopoulos. The latter was an autonomous project conceived for the new medium. Indeed, there no stage anymore, the audience disappears, but, above all, Markopoulos modified the perception of space through tight montage: ‘a new narrative form through the fusion of the classic montage technique with a more abstract system. This system involves the use of short film phrases which evoke thought-images’.<sup>25</sup>

Despite the absence of audio-visual sources for the theatrical versions, it is nevertheless possible to reconstruct some critical elements of the stagings, so as to highlight the transformations that *A(lter)A(ction)* underwent during its brief life on stage, rather than to subject the performance to a philological study. The analysis of the opera’s brief performance history also relieves us of the temptation to pursue such a path, which would entail quite a few epistemological problems based on the post-dramatic horizon discussed in the previous section. By comparing the remaining sources, it is possible to have a clear idea of specific textual mutations, and, thus, of the consequent performative repercussions, with each revival. In the next paragraph, I would like to show how completely misleading it is to understand the above-mentioned authors’ statement from June 1966 in a normative sense.

### 3.1 Variable texts

The sources available are mainly held in the FEM of the Cini Foundation, where the following are preserved: Macchi's autograph score, prepared for the 1966 premiere, under the title *Studio per A(lter)A(ction)*; the subsequent printed version published by Bruzzichelli, used for the Italian and German reprises; a selection of instrumental parts; programme notes by Domenico Guaccero and Roman Vlad; the audio recording of the performance at the Haus der Kunst on 15 April 1968;<sup>26</sup> some notes which, beyond providing perspective on the genesis of the work, help us to define the management of the stage space. Besides the materials held in Venice, other useful sources include the verbal text published in the journal *Marcatrè*;<sup>27</sup> four published stage photos from the June 1966 performances;<sup>28</sup> unpublished stage photos from November 1966 performances preserved at the Accademia Filarmonica Romana; the German version of the verbal text, some production notes and the German press reviews dossier held at the Historical Archive of Bayerischer Rundfunk in Munich.<sup>29</sup>

As Alessandro Mastropietro has pointed out, the collation between the musical sources preserved in the FEM and the programme notes suggest a margin of adaptability to the different venues, offering the possibility to perform *A(lter)A(ction)* in two parts – as happened in the November 1966 revival and the following year in Grosseto – or seamlessly – as happened with the Roman premiere in June 1966 and German performances in 1968.<sup>30</sup> In the two part performances an instrumental prelude was played at the beginning of the second part. However, here too, Macchi composed two different versions: the first for five string instruments (violin, two violas, cello, and double bass) for the Rome performance, and the second for two violins, clarinet and bass clarinet, used in Grosseto. In this case, we are therefore presented with three performative options, all adopted in the 1960s, which would put today performers in front of an easily resolvable choice.

Other variable aspects deal with the text performed by the reciting voice (AA), besides the translation into German adopted for Munich and the television project. Indeed, I would like to stress that AA was interpreted in all the Italian versions by the American composer Frederic Rzewski, for whom Macchi indicated the intonation by using diagrammatic lines. Rzewski was most probably assisted by microphone amplification, though not explicitly indicated on the manuscript and published scores, this can be inferred from the *Marcatrè* stage photos. Furthermore, these photos show the variability of the transformations in the construction of the stage space. The manuscript and printed score, as well as the text published in *Marcatrè*, present a series of fundamental stage captions prescribing the movements and gestures to be followed by the performers. Nevertheless, it is impossible to



make plausible assumptions on the actual rate of prescriptiveness. Instead, we can note the different set designs used in the two Roman performances of 1966, even though the author's reference is still Kounellis. If we compare the photos published in *Marcatrè* and in the catalogue of the *Biennale de Paris*, corresponding to the performances in June, with those held in the archives of the Accademia Filarmonica Romana, we can see striking differences in the protagonists' costumes and in the set designs, which originally used a multitude of photographs, newspaper cuttings, and symbols, such as the ENI dog (FIGURE 1).

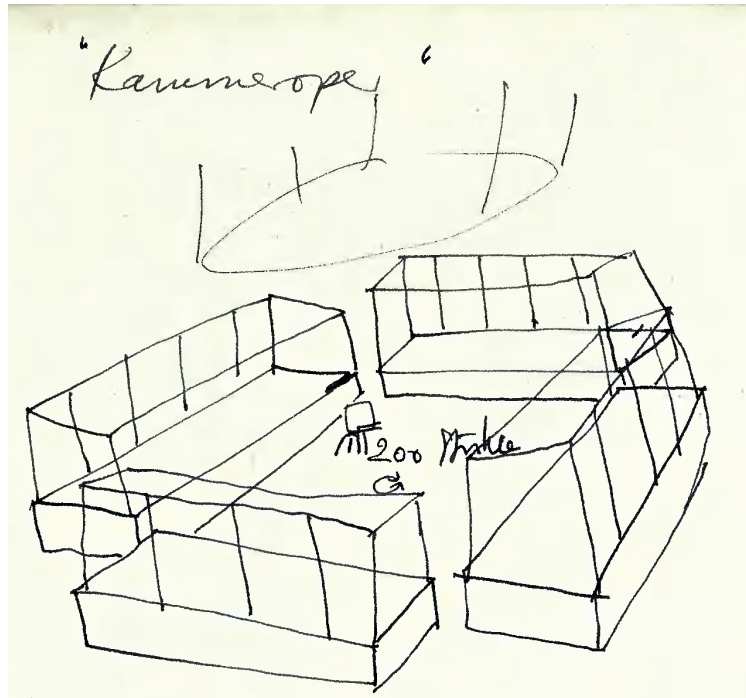
**FIGURE 1.** Stage photo from the Roman performances at the Teatro Olimpico (Rome) in June 1966; published in *Cinquième Biennale de Paris. Section Italienne, Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris 1967*, Rome: Istituto Grafico Tiberino, 1967.



The German theatrical version also shows some changes in the entire scenic layout thanks to Costa Pinheiro's costumes and sets, most likely the same ones used in Markopoulos' video, and the stage direction by Tatjana Massine – daughter of the choreographer Leonide Massine – which disrupted the traditional form of spectatorship between the hall and the stage. Some handwritten sketches and the stage photos published in the press reviews, both held in the historical archive

of the Bayerischen Rundfunk, present a completely different management of the Haus der Kunst space.<sup>31</sup>

FIGURE 2. Sketch of the set for the German performances at the Haus der Kunst in 1968. Historisches Archiv des Bayerischen Rundfunks (Munich), Nr. FS/8215.



The FIGURE 2 reproduces a sketch of the set, where the audience sat in the centre of the hall on 200 swivel chairs while the performers moved around on four platforms. *A(lter)A(ction)* – comprehensibly defined by the production staff as a *Kammeroper*<sup>32</sup> – enveloped the spectators and bombarded them like a boxer in the middle of the ring, as Mastropietro has argued through a powerful analogy.<sup>33</sup>

### 3.2. Missing texts

So far, we have examined certain performative variables indicating the possibilities for staging *A(lter)A(ction)* depending on the context. Through exegesis of the sources, possible paths have emerged: the ones evidenced by prescriptive sources – those ascribable to authorial intentionality, such as the score and production notes – and the descriptive ones – those derived from the actual performances, such as the photos and press reviews. Some more difficult questions still need to

be discussed, related to the degree of openness of the musical text envisaged by Macchi himself and the lack of particular texts, now lost.

Since *A(lter)A(ction)* is an experimental work from the 1960s produced by one of the founders of the Associazione Nuova Consonanza and a future member of the Improvisation Group Nuova Consonanza, it is not surprising to find some improvisational sections. For example, at score number 54, a generic '15" improvisation' involving two groups of percussion instruments is prescribed. Subsequently, there is also an improvisation which accompanies the work's climax: the drugs dance (score numbers 96-105), where all the dancers give a liberating performance of increasing intensity, which interrupts the continuous musico-dramatic changes seen up to this point. During this section several musical layers, based on preexisting recordings and instrumental improvisations, progressively saturate the sound scene. The improvised section relies on page 105 of the printed score. Unfortunately, this page is now lost, but it is legitimate to assume that it contained some more precise indications, suggesting a free improvisation based on a set of specific musical structures. In fact, among *A(lter)A(ction)*'s instrumental parts there are nine glossy sheets for the two piano-keyboards, the two percussion instruments and the double bass, which present a series of staves enclosed in boxes to be performed without a precise order (FIGURE 3). Today performers could develop a historically informed improvisation based on these indications and through the testimonies of some of the protagonists of the 1960s, such as Walter Branchi, John Heinemann, or Alvin Curran.<sup>34</sup>

More complex is the interpretation of a whole series of materials connected to the mass media system that occupies a vital role in the musico-dramaturgical structure of the work. The issue is multifaceted because it not only confronts us with more substantial gaps, but also activates problems of a symbolic and technological order that require radical choices to be made. Without going into a dramaturgical analysis of *A(lter)A(ction)*, I would like to emphasise how much the work intends to represent the violence and oppression exercised by different subjects to the detriment of the voiceless entity of the mime (aa) on several levels. This horizon includes the characters of the doctor-priest, and the policemen [carabinieri], but, above all, it includes two forms of mass media, such as television and popular music.

A television troupe with a stormtrooper journalist is always on the scene and somehow justifies a moment with a solid metalinguistic mark that concludes the work. After the drugs dance section, a curtain descends, and the audience in the auditorium, together with the actors/singers on stage, watches a projection which, in turn, can be interpreted as the result of the recording of the TV crew filming on stage during the performance. Unfortunately, no source of this footage seems to

remain. The testimonies of the time suggest that footage of five to six minutes of the performance, recorded during rehearsals, was projected at that point in order to reconstruct a visual synthesis of the entire performance on the screen through the filter of the troupe. This is the solution also followed by Markopoulos' television version. The 'broadcast' was then torn apart by the body of a mime that pierced the screen, bringing everything back to the initial magmatic state prescribed by the first page in the score. Making a new video does not constitute an obstacle within these coordinates.

FIGURE 3. Glossy sheet of the double bass part corresponding to page 105 of *A(lter)A(ction)* score. Fondo Egisto Macchi, Fondazione Giorgio Cini (Venice).

CONTRABASSO

The image displays a page of musical notation for a double bass (contrabasso). The score is presented in a 'glossy' style with multiple systems of staves. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns, accidentals, and dynamic markings. Key performance instructions are written above the staves, including 'legno bass.', 'arco', 'gliss.', and 'grillo sul tavolo'. Dynamic markings such as 'ff' (fortissimo) are also present. The score is divided into several systems, with some systems containing multiple staves. The notation is complex, featuring many notes, rests, and articulation marks.

Two musical elements also refer to the mediascape of the 1960s: the interventions of a beat orchestra, consisting of two electric guitars, an electric bass, a Hammond organ and drums, on stage, which improvises freely on a series of rhythmic modules characteristic of popular music of the time, such as the shake, surf or boogie; and some recordings fixed on disc and magnetic tape, played at different speeds which are used throughout the work and, in particular, during the above mentioned drug scene, unfortunately all lost. In this last respect, the Bavarian television recording is of little help in understanding the possible content of these materials. Indeed, it needs to be clarified whether they were used or whether the final mix makes them imperceptible. Thus, how can we reconstruct these missing soundtracks? I argue that there can be two ways forward, which should each follow a systemic approach to the entire work. If one chooses to retain the beat orchestra and dance forms of the 1960s, it would be preferable to select a whole series of sound materials from that period, which could also imply the use of the sound and audio-visual device technologies of that period: staging *A(lter)A(ction)* essentially as a historical object, to be performed according to a technonostalgic perspective that places the spectator in a field of symbolic forces characteristic of a particular historical season.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, in order to re-propose the critical discourse of *A(lter)A(ction)*, one could consider updating the work's media structure according to the technological devices and soundscape of the contemporary era. It is not a question of establishing hierarchies between musical genres, relegating popular music to a piece that can be modified at will, as opposed to the sacredness of art music. Instead, it is a matter of recomposing the logic of the work and trying to revive those sound elements, which are not the result of a creative output but are objects that speak of a precise historical moment.

#### 4. TOWARDS NEW TRADITIONS

Having reached the end of this itinerary, I would like to return one last time to opera. As has become clear in the preceding paragraphs, in this article I have not sought to provide precise solutions to problems that lie beyond musicological competence and responsibility. Several decades of philological studies applied to Italian opera have shown that the role of musicologists is not to provide an armored text, to always be interpreted the same way at every performance, but rather to put a performer in a position to make his or her own, more or less, legitimate choices, with full knowledge of the historical evidence.<sup>36</sup> It is no coincidence that Della Seta notes that

It is not wrong to contaminate different versions of *Don Carlos*; it is not wrong to interpolate in the aria of madness from *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835), a cadence known to have been introduced around 1860; it is not wrong to perform the infamous high C (the so-called ‘Do di petto’), not written by Verdi, at the end of ‘Di quella pira’. On the other hand, it is wrong to always and only perform that contaminated version, to always interpolate that cadence and not another, always to perform that note as well as never to perform it, basing oneself on a mythical Author’s Will or an equally hypostatic Tradition.<sup>37</sup>

There is, however, a substantial difference that makes the task easier for philologists and performers in the case of 19th-century Italian opera, and makes it more risky and slippery for those who want to try their hand at re-proposing music theatre works. Italian opera can rely on decades of studies and sources that have clarified the functions of the musico-dramatic text within a standardised production system, which allowed interpolations by the performer within fairly precise coordinates. On the contrary, for music theatre, not only do we have to face new textual and performative problems connected to the post-dramatic horizon, but we have to try to solve them without the support of a sedimented tradition that can help us understand the legitimate ways of dealing with fluid texts and the gaps in the sources.

In this regard, recent trends developed by reenactment studies could help us to look at these gaps from another perspective. Besides reconstruction practices based on textual evidence, reenactment practices could offer possible paths to re-perform and transform *A(lter)A(ction)*, freeing performers from any chimerical research of authenticity or fidelity to the work. Through the lens of reenactment, productive tension between past and present becomes the priority of a performance, finding new ways to establish a dialogue with contemporary audiences, and, therefore, creating new meanings.<sup>38</sup> Only by plunging again into materials of that creative season, performance after performance, will it be possible to contemplate the efficacy of potential paths and inaugurate new traditions for the future.

## Notes

- 1 I would like to thank Francisco Rocca, curator of the Fondo Egisto Macchi at the Institute of Music of the Fondazione Giorgio Cini in Venice; Sylvaine Couquet Macchi for her constant support in my research; Stefan Merl at the Historisches Archiv des Bayerischen Rundfunks in Munich; and the anonymous reviewers for their suggestions that helped to improve previous versions of this article.
- 2 For an introduction to this music theatre work see the seminal essay Daniela Tortora, ‘*A(lter)A(ction)*: un tentativo di teatro musicale d’avanguardia’, *Il Saggiatore musicale*, V/2, 1998, pp. 327–344.

- 3 In 2015, after several attempts, I found out that the video was catalogued under the title of Franco Evangelisti's *Die Schactel*, always directed by Markopoulos. A copy of Markopolous' *A(lter)A(ction)* is now accessible at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini in Venice. For an analysis of the media convergence in Macchi's music theatre work see Marco Cosci, 'La scena media(tizza)ta: teatro, cinema e televisione in *A(lter)A(ction)*', in: *Teatro di avanguardia e composizione sperimentale per la scena in Italia: 1950–1975*, ed. by Gianmario Borio, Daniela Tortora, Giordano Ferrari, Venezia: Fondazione Giorgio Cini, 2017, pp. 235–257.
- 4 On the Compagnia del Teatro Musicale di Roma see the precise reconstruction informed by numerous documents proposed by Alessandro Mastropietro, 'Intorno alla *Compagnia del Teatro Musicale di Roma*: un nuovo modello operativo, tra sperimentazione e utopia', in: *Teatro di avanguardia e composizione sperimentale per la scena in Italia: 1950–1975*, pp. 105–161; Alessandro Mastropietro, *Nuovo Teatro Musicale fra Roma e Palermo, 1961–1973*, Lucca: LIM, 2020, pp. 173–188. For an introduction to the Roman music scene of those years, see also Alessandro Mastropietro, 'A survey of new music theatre in Rome, 1961–1973 "Fabulous years"?', in: *New Music Theatre in Europe*, ed. by Robert Adlington, New York and London: Routledge, 2019, pp. 177–202.
- 5 "'Teatro musicale", e non "opera" per sottolineare l'ampia polivalenza degli elementi che costituiscono l'evento teatrale: non preminenza del suono sulla parola o di questa su quello, o dell'elemento visivo su quello auditivo, ma, caso per caso, preminenza e non preminenza di una dimensione sull'altra'. Fondo Egisto Macchi (henceforth, FEM), Folder *A(lter)A(ction)*, Programme notes, Fondazione Giorgio Cini (Venice).
- 6 See *Teatro di avanguardia e composizione sperimentale in Italia: 1950–1975*.
- 7 The following pieces were performed; Alban Berg, *Wozzeck*; Luigi Dallapiccola, *Il prigioniero*; Luigi Nono: *Intolleranza 1960*; Domenico Guaccero, *Nuovo incontro (a trio)*; Sylvano Bussotti, *Five piano pieces for David Tudor*; Morton Feldman, unspecified piano piece.
- 8 '1. prevalenza dell'elemento musicale sugli altri elementi necessari a fare teatro, e all'interno di ciò: 2. schiacciante predominanza del canto su tutti gli altri elementi necessari a far musica e ancora all'interno di ciò: 3. predominanza di un particolare tipo di canto (il "bel canto") alieno da ogni stilizzazione, solo proteso alla comunicazione immediata, all'espansione, a forme spesso retoriche di espressione, dando luogo a un tipo di vocalità specifica del genere, che quasi annulla i personaggi stessi per tramutare le voci in personaggi', FEM, Typescript without title and date, with handwritten notes; *incipit*: [È stato scritto da un noto musicologo italiano].
- 9 'l'elemento visivo (scena, luci, personaggi) non raggiunge generalmente un proprio autonomo dinamismo, rimanendo nel complesso [...] piuttosto statico nei riguardi dell'elemento testo cantato-musica'; 'tanto l'elemento visivo quanto quello sonoro si presentano con caratteristiche di unidirezionalità. Azione e suono procedono da un unico centro posto di fronte al luogo di visione e di ascolto'. Similar considerations underlie Luigi Nono's famous essay: *Possibilità e necessità di un nuovo teatro musicale* [*Possibility and Necessity of a New Music Theatre*], written for a Venetian conference in 1962 and later published in *Il Verri*, VIII, 9, 1963, pp. 59–70 (English translation in Luigi Nono, *Nostalgia for the Future. Luigi Nono's Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. by Angela Ida De Benedictis and Veniero Rizzardi, Oakland: University of California Press, 2018, pp. 209–223).
- 10 '1. possibilità di rapidi cambiamenti di scena: esigenza questa sempre più sentita dal teatro anche se mai risolta [...] 2. possibilità di indagini psicologica attraverso primi piani: questo punto è completamente escluso nel teatro 3. possibilità di usare veri attori sulla scena e incisione a parte del lavoro col metodo del doppiaggio cinematografico (non sono sicuro)', FEM, *Opera*,

typescript/manuscript undated; *incipit*: [Dobbiamo risalire a Wagner]. On the other hand, it should be remembered that opera plays a fundamental role in Macchi's outputs, such as his activity as an opera director in the late 1980s and the opera reductions for the OperaNova project, developed with Ennio Morricone in the early 1990s. See in this regard Angela Carone, 'Gettare nuova luce sul passato. Le regie di Egisto Macchi per *l'Euridice* e *il Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*', *Philomusica on-line*, 16, 2017, pp. 227–247; Marta Maria Vitale, 'Egisto Macchi's "Pocket" «La bohème»: Innovation and Tradition in the Reduction of Puccini's Masterpiece', *Archival Notes*, 6, 2021, pp. 59–76.

- 11 'sfruttando al massimo la possibilità di analisi psicologica della TV, sarà necessario limitare al massimo il numero delle battute dei singoli personaggi e quelle complessive del lavoro, facendo leva sui "silenzi" la cui carica emotiva sarà sciolta dalla musica e dalla ripresa televisiva', FEM, *Opera*.
- 12 Robert Adlington, 'Introduction: why "new music theatre" now?', in: *New Music Theatre in Europe*, pp. 1–11: 2.
- 13 For an overview of the many problems related to Italian opera and the philological perspective, see Philip Gossett, *Divas and Scholars: Performing Italian Opera*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2006.
- 14 It must be remembered that the printing of Italian opera scores is a relatively recent occurrence. For a long time, operas circulated only in manuscript form, according to specific staging. See Fabrizio Della Seta, 'La filologia dell'opera italiana fra testo ed evento', *Storie e linguaggi*, V/1, 2019, pp. 111–121.
- 15 Towards the end of the 19th century, the textual level of stage arrangements recording details related to the visual component was also added to these reference textualities. See in this regard Alessandra Campana, *Opera and Modern Spectatorship in Late Nineteenth-Century Italy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- 16 'Gli studiosi dell'opera lirica hanno ormai appreso il principio che, dagli anni Trenta del Novecento, ha rivoluzionato il nostro modo di accostarci ai testi di Shakespeare e, di conseguenza, a qualsiasi testo teatrale: quest'ultimo non coincide con un *opus* concluso e definitivo, ma va considerato come la registrazione o la preparazione di un evento che si rinnova costantemente nel tempo e che è, più di qualsiasi altra forma di espressione artistica, vincolato da precisi condizionamenti di natura sociale ed economica'. Fabrizio Della Seta, 'Il testo del melodramma', *Belfagor*, LXI/6, 2006, pp. 617–631: 622.
- 17 Hilary Poriss, *Changing the Score: Arias, Prima Donnas, and the Authority of Performance*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- 18 Fabrizio Della Seta, 'Premessa', *Bollettino del Centro rossiniano di studi*, LVII, 2017, pp. 9–17: 13–15. De Marinis himself proposed the translation of 'testo spettacolare' into 'performance text'; Marco De Marinis, *Capire il teatro: lineamenti di una nuova teatrologia*, Rome: Bulzoni, 2008, p. 45. It should also be noted that teatrological studies have long since abandoned such a strongly semiotic perspective, in order to better understand theatre processes and practices, cf. Marco De Marinis, 'New Teatrology and Performance Studies: Starting Points Towards a Dialogue', *TDR: The Drama Review*, LV/4, 2011, pp. 64–74.
- 19 Lorenzo Mattei, 'L'edizione critica dei melodrammi settecenteschi: una ricognizione', *Bollettino del centro rossiniano di studi*, LVII, 2017, pp. 53–60: 59.
- 20 FEM, Folder *A(lter)A(ction)*. A transcription of the document can also be found in Tortora, '*A(lter) A(ction)*: un tentativo di teatro musicale d'avanguardia', p. 338.
- 21 Cf. Tortora, '*A(lter) A(ction)*: un tentativo di teatro musicale d'avanguardia', pp. 338–340;



- Elena Salza, 'Egisto Macchi and Antonin Artaud: from *A(lter)A(ction)* to *München-Requiem* and Beyond', *Archival Notes*, 3, 2018, pp. 97–118: 103–104; Alessandro Mastropietro, *Nuovo Teatro musicale tra Roma e Palermo*, pp. 291–293. For detailed discussion on Mario Diacono, *A(lter)A(ction)* and its complex visual aspects see Elena Salza, *Mario Diacono. Tra avanguardia e nuova iconografia Italia-Stati Uniti, 1960–1984*, PhD Dissertation, Ca' Foscari University, Venice, 2019, pp. 60–141.
- 22 Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. by Karen Jürs-Munby, New York and London: Routledge, 2006.
  - 23 Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, p. 87.
  - 24 The credits of the television version, as well as the press reviews, show the title as *(A)lter(A)ction* and not *A(lter)A(ction)*. It is unclear whether the inversion of the brackets is to be linked to a title variant witnessed by the text published in *Marcatrè* – see *(A)lter(A)ction. Composizione per teatro di Egisto Macchi. Testo di Mario Diacono. Azione scenica di Sergio Tau e Marco Valobra, Marcatrè*, 30–33, 1967, pp. 87–115 – later used as the basis for the German translation, or whether it is, on the contrary, a conscious choice to distinguish the Italian project from the German one.
  - 25 Gregory Markopoulos, 'Towards a New Narrative Film Form', in *Film as Film. The Collected Writings of Gregory J. Markopoulos*, ed. by Mark Webber, with a foreword by P. Adams Sitney, London: The Visible Press, 2017, pp. 207–208: 207.
  - 26 Egisto Macchi, *Musicisti del Novecento attivi a Roma*, CD I.R.TE.M. 994/1–2, 1996.
  - 27 See note 24. Mario Diacono's text has been recently republished in Mario Diacono, *A(lter)A(ction) 1965*, Ravenna: Danilo Montanari Editore, 2020.
  - 28 *Marcatrè*, 26–29, 1966, pp. 15–20; *Artaud in Musica, Vie Nuove*, n. 25, 23 June 1966, p. 67; *Cinquième Biennale de Paris. Section Italienne, Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris 1967*, Rome: Istituto Grafico Tiberino, 1967. See Salza, *Mario Diacono. Tra avanguardia e nuova iconografia Italia-Stati Uniti, 1960–1984*, p. 62.
  - 29 München, Historisches Archiv des Bayerischen Rundfunks, Folder nr. FS/8215.
  - 30 Mastropietro, *Nuovo Teatro Musicale fra Roma e Palermo*, pp. 300–301.
  - 31 München, Historisches Archiv des BR, Folder nr. FS/8215. Mastropietro proposed similar observations on the basis of Walter Branchi's oral memories; Mastropietro, *Nuovo Teatro Musicale fra Roma e Palermo*, p. 313.
  - 32 The use of the term *Kammeroper* could also be connected not only to the genre, but also to the opera company *Münchener Kammeroper*, which supervised the theatrical production.
  - 33 Mastropietro, *Nuovo Teatro Musicale fra Roma e Palermo*, p. 312.
  - 34 See Fondazione Giorgio Cini's Research-led Performance Workshops, in particular *Istantanee. Collective Improvisation, Techniques and Styles in Europe*, Venice, 13–15 September 2022. Partial recordings of the workshop are available at the Institute of Music at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini.
  - 35 Timothy D. Taylor, *Strange Sounds. Music, Technology & Culture*, New York and London: Routledge, 2001, pp. 96–114.
  - 36 See on the relationship between performance and the risks of supposed 'fidelity' to the text of a critical edition Marco Beghelli, 'Per fedeltà a una nota', *Il Saggiatore musicale*, VIII/2, 2001, pp. 295–316.
  - 37 'Non è sbagliato contaminare versioni diverse del *Don Carlos*; non è sbagliato interpolare nell'aria della pazzia della Lucia di Lammermoor (1835), una cadenza che si sa essere stata

introdotta verso il 1860; non è sbagliato eseguire il famigerato Do acuto (il cosiddetto “Do di petto”), non scritto da Verdi, alla fine di «Di quella pira». È invece sbagliato allestire sempre e solo quella versione contaminata, interpolare sempre quella cadenza e non un'altra, eseguire sempre e comunque quella nota come pure non eseguirla mai, fondandosi su una mitica Volontà d'autore o su un altrettanto ipostatica Tradizione'. Della Seta, 'Il testo del melodramma', p. 624.

- 38 On reenactment see *The Routledge Handbook of Reenactment Studies: Key Terms in the Field*, ed. by Vanessa Agnew, Jonathan Lamb, and Juliane Tomann, New York: Routledge, 2020; Mark Franko, 'Introduction. The Power of Recall in a Post-Ephemeral Era', in *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Reenactment*, ed. by Mark Franko, New York: Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. 1–18.