

Gian Carlo Riccardi's Theatre: Some Psychological Considerations

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to analyse the avant-garde theatre and performances of the multimedia Italian artist Gian Carlo Riccardi (1933-2015). Our psychological analysis examines the Teatro Laboratorio Arti Visive, born in the 1960s, which stands as privileged space for experimentation and the contamination of different and often constructively contradictory languages thanks to the renunciation of words in favour of an activity essentialised in slow and rhythmic gestures. It is an extremely poor theatre, deliberately “crude”, where the *pièces* become cultural provocations based essentially on the anti-spectacle and the simple gestuality of manual work. This study intends to show the chronological and thematic evolution of Gian Carlo Riccardi's avant-garde theatre, from the birth of the “Gruppo Teatro Laboratorio Arti Visive” to the “Teatro dell'Immagine”, as well as his plays and performances, emphasising their connection to a current and international debate related to public art. His works, in fact, build an open and participatory dialogue with the place and the audience that enjoys the work. Riccardi carries out his research in the field of theatrical communication, but the prevailing characteristic of his performances lies in the pictorial assumptions from which they start, because his is a kind of painting theatre, a “theatre of images”.

Keywords

Gian Carlo Riccardi, Psychology, Theatre, Image, Public Art

1. Introduction

This work aims to offer the reader an analysis of the avant-garde theatre of the Italian multimedia artist Gian Carlo Riccardi. The study also contains some psychological considerations on the author regarding the theatrical events put on stage as products of his creativity.

This research will stress the evolution that Riccardi's theatre underwent over time and to the topics. The most significant stages will be analysed, first of all his cooperation with the Roman avant-garde theatre, which deeply influenced and marked his way of doing theatre: the birth of the "Teatro Laboratorio Arti Visive group", the opening of the "Teatro Club", and the birth of the "Teatro dell'Immagine" (Image Theatre). Within this analysis, which covers and includes different fields such as theatre, painting and psychology, it will be emphasised how Riccardi's plays and performances mark their connection with a current and international debate connected to public art. In fact, his creations generate an open and participatory dialogue with the place and the audience that enjoys the work. We therefore believe that he has succeeded, thanks to his theatrical experiments, in renewing the theatrical language by connecting to contemporary and international debates (Riccardi, 2013).

On the whole, this research aims to explain the major aspects and topics of his avant-garde theatre based substantially on unspectacularity and simple gesture, breaking the canons with the traditional theatre. The study perspective we have considered, underlines the fact that only by carefully analysing the entire production of an author like Gian Carlo Riccardi's artistic and theatrical production, and by knowing his biography and the determinants of his creative behaviour, considering the historical period in which he lived, we can fully understand the psychological and cultural meaning of his work (Tomassoni, 2020).

2. Objectives

This work aims to examine the avant-garde theatre of the multimedia artist Gian Carlo Riccardi, the plays and performances offered to the audience that have undergone various changes over the years. His events manage to enclose some of the most significant and recurring themes of his thought manifested in the most several forms, such as sculpture, painting and especially theatre. We then come to an accurate and careful description of the relevant elements and aspects of Gian Carlo Riccardi's theatre-making, bringing out some of the artist's most incisive and important plays.

The particular goals of the research are:

- 1) To identify and analyse the creative aspect in the staging of Gian Carlo Riccardi's plays.
- 2) To know and examine some of the artist's most significant plays.
- 3) To recognise and examine the most relevant and recurring themes and elements in the author's events and performances.
- 4) To study and analyse the psychological aspects of Riccardi's plays and performances presented by him as a break with traditional theatre.
- 5) To find out the relational and communicative aspect in Riccardi's works, outstanding examples of public art.

3. Methods

We conducted our survey through the analysis of contemporary art history texts,

the study of books and encyclopaedias containing the life and work of the avant-garde artist Gian Carlo Riccardi. He can be defined a “tout court” artist. He doesn’t belong to any artistic movement, because he worked in the most different and various artistic fields, not generating a split between them, but often creating a strong union. This is why he has been defined, by the art critic Enrico Crispolti, as a Multimedia Artist. Riccardi has in fact been a set designer, art director, actor, painter, sculptor, and writer.

The psychological analysis follows the lines indicated by the Psychology of Art and Literature, a discipline founded by Professor Antonio Fusco here in Italy. It studies the psychological reasons that led the artist to the creation and realisation of a work and the environmental situations that determine it, as well as the symbolic elements contained in a verbal or in this case, non-verbal text, where precisely, there is the total absence of words. The theatrical work can be considered as the expression of the overall contents of the psyche for which the conscious Ego is not the main character in every moment of artistic creation, but lots of times, is only the translator of emotional and unconscious reasons of which the Ego itself is not aware (Tomassoni, 2020).

The basic requirement is the consideration of artistic language as the heterogeneous set of expressive resources, deriving from the heritage of culturally established knowledge, on which the author can rely in order to provide and guide the understanding of his work, so the critic can also refer to decode the polysemy of the messages in it. The resulting interpretative proposal excludes any form of dogmatism and, while drawing extensively from the pool of knowledge about psychology, is in continuity with artistic, philosophical and literal criticism (Tomassoni, 2018). Moreover, critical-interpretive considerations have been put forward concerning Gian Carlo Riccardi’s plays and performances.

4. Analysis of Gian Carlo Riccardi’s Theatre

The Freudian theory of art does not show a specific interest in the work of art as an autonomous object as a formal structure, but deals with the deep conflicts, neuroses, unconscious motivations, and libidinal impulses within the artist’s personality, intended as forces and drives that characterise the content of the work (Mastrandrea, 2021). We presume, therefore, that all this puts us in a position to see the author’s work as a reflection, as a mirror of his experience, of his innermost desires and anxieties, expressed and materialised in works of art.

The aesthetic experience involves many brain areas that are certainly not easy to identify. This is true for the artist’s creative moment and for the emotion experienced by the person who enjoys any work of art, such as in this case a play (Maffei & Fiorentini, 1995).

In fact, the emotions we experience in our daily lives are called utilitarian because their main function is to improve the organism’s adaptation to the environment. They emerge in response to the evaluation of external or internal events of relevant meaning for personal needs and purposes (Scherer, 2004).

So, the approach of Riccardi's theatre on the audience is interesting and fundamental. According to cognitive psychology, the act of seeing is not only a passive recording of the external physical environment, but also involves active processing. Sensory input coming from the external environment, undergoes a series of changes before a theatrical event can be perceived. The input is transformed, reduced, processed, stored, regained, and finally used (Neisser, 1967).

In our opinion, Gian Carlo Riccardi's avant-garde theatre is located within a purely visual and perceptive sphere, in which observation and attention to certain details become fundamental attempting to find an explanation, to give an interpretation and thus a hermeneutic reading of the sometimes subjective theatrical work.

During his artistic career, Gian Carlo Riccardi has worked in the field of painting, producing caricature drawings, abstract and figurative paintings in which themes such as the surreal, the grotesque, childhood, dreams, and sexuality emerge. In addition, he has created several sculptures called "rooms", which evoke something familiar to the artist from the past. The artist has also written poetry and prose.

The experience within the Roman avant-garde theatre formed the basis of Riccardi's artistic research. He cooperated with personalities and authors such as Carmelo Bene, Mario Ricci, Memè Perlini, Pino Pascali, Pippo di Marca, Nino de Tollis and Filippo Torriero. Together with Giancarlo Nanni, Manuela Kustermann, Valentino Orfeo, Giuliano Vasilicò and Pippo Di Marca he created the avant-garde theatre "La Fede". After experiencing with this new type of theatre, Riccardi returned to Frosinone and founded the "Gruppo Teatro Laboratorio Arti Visive" in 1961 and the "Teatro Club" in 1962. For him, theatre became a privileged place for experimentation and the contamination of different and often constructively contradictory languages.

The gradual renunciation of the word in favour of a measured and even intense, but always meaningful gesture pushes Riccardi towards the research of a "Theatre of images", which originate from sculpture and especially painting. For this reason, Riccardi's theatre is a visual theatre, in which the word gradually disappears, giving way to silence (Pieyre, 1984). As the art critic Enrico Crispolti states:

It was mainly, it seems to me, about painting in action, a kind of theater-painting, theatricality expressed by means of painting, and at any rate by plastic means. Not the assumption of painting itself in the theater (in the sense of a tradition of theatrical expansion of the pictorial avant-garde, as Prampolini or Balla, for example, imagined), but in a certain way of the theater in painting, that is, a making of the performance of painting itself, precisely of the pictorial and at any rate plastic instrumentation in itself (Crispolti, 1978).

Gian Carlo Riccardi's theatre is influenced by the theatrical innovations of the early 20th century and the avant-garde theatre of the 1960s of which he was an active participant. Based on the thoughts of the greatest masters of the 20th century, his research theatre offers an anthropological vision of artistic practice (Willett & Brecht, 1994). His kind of theatre is extremely poor, deliberately

“crude”, where plays become cultural provocations based on gesture. A slow and repetitive gesture almost redundant that, precisely because of its slowness, underlines the speed and monotony of everyday life, claiming a utopian world, made up of dreams and suggestions, a world that Riccardi himself has caressed. The mimic-gestural sequences are “frozen” and rigidly fixed and the impact with the scene is in the name of “play”, of spontaneous and liberating playful activity. The violent and improvised gesture operates a dissociation between reality and the work, a fracture that manifests itself in the abolition of speech, the use of poor materials and a violent critique of contemporary society (Facci, 1993). In contrast to the traditional theatre of words, Riccardi sometimes uses a language of images that may be difficult for the audience to understand because it is linked to their personal memories. We are inclined to believe that this is partly recovered in later plays, where the play’s plot and meanings are manipulated in favour of a surreal and dreamlike representation as a refuge from everyday society (Moravia, 1988).

The play becomes a ritual that wants to purge humanity of its inhumanity, finds nothing but loneliness and misery while waiting for a rebirth. It’s a ritual in which the spectator is called to take part of the performance together with the actors, becoming a protagonist himself. Within this “workshop”, actors and director work together on the training and preparation of the performance, which aims to be a setting for research and experimentation.

On the basis of the studies conducted, we reckon we can make an analogical reference to the “Club-theatre” experience and to Remondi and Caporossi’s “scenic actions” (Caretta, 1965). The theatrical experiments of the latter, which required a reduction of the word and gesture, privileging the non-speech and silence, in order to leave considerable space for the work of the body, profoundly influenced Riccardi’s theatre (Galasso, 1998). The silence and slowness of movement in the Riccardi’s theatre become a refusal of speech and speed, emphasising the alienation of contemporary man in a frenetic social context.

Throughout the perfect use of gesture, the synchronisation of the overall movements, the lighting and the music, the director wants to convey a “new” message through a very personal theatrical language (Caretta, 1965).

Fundamental, in our view, is the influence of Mario Ricci’s “Teatro Immagine”, which “builds” images with bodies that deal with issues such as family, happiness, love, fear, discomfort or conflict. Riccardi recovers the kinetic and gestural potential of images that become an essential element of action, irony, fantasy, play and imagination (Franco & Zaccagnini, 2010).

In our view that Samuel Beckett’s theatre of the absurd is recovered by Riccardi in the presence of repetitive actions, in the alogical succession of events, apparently without any meaning, in the staging of the alienation of contemporary man and his crisis, anguish, loneliness and the impossibility of any communication (Beckett, 2002).

The artist, in opposition to dehumanising and banal modernity, cultivates his own liberating and anti-repressive ethics. The criticism of reality is turned against

the official theatre, in which the experimentalism of an avant-garde theatre is claimed. By dint of his works, Riccardi stages classical plays or plays taken from the world of fairy tales, overturning their meaning for a critical representation of a society incapable of communication, but within which he sees a glimmer of hope. The theme of the “double” in Riccardi’s works, is very strong (paintings, sculptures, or theatre). In fact, in our opinion, a hopeful look towards the future and at the same time a deep disappointment with man and the contemporary world can be discerned.

Sexuality, childhood memories, social homologation, illusion, hope and the rejection of the masses constitute the concepts, impressions, and sensations that Riccardi translates into his plays with a new language. These themes are figuratively counteracted through the recovery of elements that recall the world of fairy tales and poetry, together with junk and serial products and coloured lights, emblems of good and evil.

The author has made memory and introspection the nodal centre of his research, undertaking a radical and unprejudiced exploration into the territories of the unconscious, figuring fears, desires, transgressions, dreams, and visions. On the basis of the studies conducted, we have observed how similarly to Ingmar Bergman, Riccardi wonders about the universal themes of human existence, such as the incommunicability between people, the perception of death and illness, loneliness and the crisis of man within a society full of contradictions in which he lives (Grossi, 1999).

Riccardi’s works always show an ending that is open to the spectator’s personal interpretation. Everyone, therefore, can follow the discourse of this “Image Theatre”, which, in strong contrast to the “Word Theatre”, is based on the figure, on the gestural expression of the whole being of the performers with a rhythm of pressing dynamics (Prinzi, 1972).

An essential artistic component is present in his performances: the “Image Poetry”. It indicates the individual and overall expression of the actors, an expression not limited to the attitude of the face, but concerning the exasperating slowness of the movements or the suddenness of them, which, in the very instant in which they occur, reveal all their poetry (Rodi, 1964). It is in this ‘dream theatre’ that the artist stages his fantastic representation and can rework and reinvent it without suffering the harsh limits imposed by external reality, thus finding himself in the ideal conditions to make the most of his freedom of invention (Treglia & Tomassoni, 2020). We presume that this is one of the noblest and most sublime moments of the artist, in which he is immersed in a cathartic dimension, in a dream world unknown and incomprehensible to others. The artist, by means of his plays, thus has the opportunity to fantasise and imagine with his mind, to make journeys to unreachable and remote destinations (Tomassoni & Spilabotte, 2022).

A poetic attitude underlies Riccardi’s vision, which identifies the transformations of society and the distortions of mankind by representing the world of

childhood, with its puppets and puppet characters, and the topicality of a world made up of masks and craving for objects that he takes away from the imagination, but which, at the same time, the artist gives to the public in expectation of redemption.

We believe that Riccardi's plays demand a not detached audience, unsophisticated and with spontaneous and immediate reactions. An audience whose intellectual freedom is not repressed by conventions and habits but which, with an intimate and deep vision, is able to approach certain aspects of real contemporary life with sincerity (Sergio, 1972).

Actors and spectators are called upon by the author to participate all together in the realisation of the theatrical sequence. Riccardi's theatre is therefore a break with tradition and in this sense can be defined an avant-garde theatre (Vita, 1972).

Riccardi, looks back to Artaud's "Theatre of Cruelty", which proposed performances designed to provoke the unconditional participation of the spectator (Artaud, 2019).

Riccardi's performances are not only staged in closed places such as theatre halls, churches, gyms, schools and municipal halls, but also in open public places such as squares, which become collective places for socialising and getting together, streets, city centres, car parks and the countryside. These are happenings and performances in the squares that recover, in our view, the experiments of "Living Theatre", in favour of a gestural ritualism and an increasingly extended dialogue with the spectators (Valenti, 2018). They are spontaneous theatrical actions that involve, bother and provoke spectators by establishing an active dialogue with bystanders.

The spectator involved in the action participates in it according to his or her psychological and cultural openness, entering into the ritual in action, which replaces the word with gesture (Prinzi, 1972).

Riccardi's performances merge different artistic codes, retrieving, in our opinion, the experiments of the "Fluxus group" (D'Avossa & Ossanna Cavadini, 2012), of Bread and Puppet theatre, which, using masks, puppets and papier-mâché puppets of colossal dimensions, combines music, dance, happenings and sculpture, and of Body Art, which investigates the impulses of the unconscious, to free all the flows of desire, repressed by a society locked in atavistic taboos (Secchi, 2010).

The artist's performances become the territory of the manifestation and expression of the ego, capturing social and cultural contradictions through body language made of gestures and images. Throughout his ephemeral events, the artist brings everyday objects into urban space, an everyday life that is subject to compromises to which the artist rebels by bringing new meaning and a new message on account of gesture. The objects are delivered as simulacra of a lost memory that must be recovered. It's an invitation to the spectator to participate in the event.

Both for the plays and the performances in the square, Riccardi is actor, painter, sculptor of a landscape that he brings to life and reshapes under his hands, like a stage set, with the help of the audience. Audience and actors thus become the protagonists of a spontaneous game that recalls the speed of life and the slowness of death, in an event leading to collective transformation.

The artist performs public works designed for an open dialogue with the place and the audience that surrounds and enjoys the work. The exhortation is for a theatre that does not merely mirror the society, but contributes to changing it, a theatre that transforms itself into action, working in a time and space other than the traditional theatre building. In his performances, therefore, “site-specific” strategies of connection between the place and the work emerge (Pugliese & Birrozzi, 2007). This connection, in fact, is created specifically for the qualities and characteristics of the site where it is located. Moreover, his works do not act by imposing themselves as “external objects” on the space and the public, but are born with them, becoming part of an international debate related to art in public space (Piolselli, 2015). Fundamental, therefore, is the dialogue that Riccardi’s theatre works establish not only with the surrounding environment, but also with the community. They are the result of a participatory and shared practice between the artist and the audience, which is involved through the construction of an inner and simultaneous relationship between the user and the work. The theatrical event performs a communicative function by activating the spectator’s unconscious response mechanisms, triggering his emotional reaction by means of the use of elementary gestures and figuration (Bourriaud, 2001). At the same time, we are convinced that these representations bear witness to a penetrating denunciation, encoded throughout the dramatic reversal of reality.

The innovative element introduced by Riccardi “is to shift the position of the audience to the creative centre” (Crispoliti, 1977). The artist’s goal is, therefore, to realise his works in a place of public discussion intended for dialogue and social action.

From a discrete and confined dimension of the artwork, we move to an open, interactive dimension, contingent and contextual to its physical and perceptual environment.

We reckon that Riccardi promotes the idea of a “negotiated” artistic intervention because he is not the individual creator of an individual work, but rather the work is the result of a participatory cooperation between the artist and the public for whom the work is intended.

Riccardi’s works offer themselves, therefore, as a “model of sociality that creates cohabitation” (Bourriaud, 2001), thus generating a form of work/public coexistence and fitting into the strand of so-called “relational art” and what Paul Ardenne has called “contextual art” (Ardenne, 2002).

We believe that Riccardi’s work hinges, therefore, on understanding the work’s communicative and artistic skills and its bearing of meaning. He works on the context of placement, as it is capable of bringing out the content and

meaning of the work. Riccardi executes his works in different contexts, from media, to squares to urban places (Kosuth, 2001). He studies the work in relation to the context of reception, placing it in particular in contexts where it is unexpected, where it is not recognisable a priori. The audience that receives it and notices it, therefore, is the one that actively acts as a user towards its contents (Lowell, 1998). Riccardi's works show, therefore, how there is a contextual strategy between exhibition venue, audience and work, often held together by the performative and real-time aspect of his works. The performative character is given by the very presence of the artist who constructs the work as an event, as a real time event.

The theatre workshop setting is proposed as a space-time separate from everyday life. In such a situation there is a suspension of everyday life in favour of an exploration-construction of different ways not only of thinking, perceiving, moving, but also of interacting; the normal rules that guide social and communicative interactions are questioned, or at least redefined.

As far as the chronological and thematic evolution of Gian Carlo Riccardi's theatre is concerned, it presents a remarkable transformation.

In the 1960s in particular, Riccardi was marked by an extreme renewal of artistic and theatrical language, coinciding with the reflections developed by theatre movements and collectives and the experience of the Roman theatre avant-garde (Piolselli, 2015).

In this period of experimentation, art wonders about its own role by subverting traditional languages and using new means of expression, everyday life, and dialogue with the audience. In particular, Riccardi offers, at an early stage of his work, on the one hand a reworking of works that are part of the theatrical tradition, but updated through original and avant-garde language, and on the other hand, unprecedented performances based on visual and image shock.

Characteristic of these years is the almost complete nudity of the actor. By laying himself bare, he presents himself to the audience in the face of the aberrant characteristics of everyday life, rejecting them. Instead, Riccardi seeks genuine complicity with the audience by dint of the rituality of gesture, rejecting what he considers the trappings of an outdated tradition. Riccardi's works become the construction of a negotiated and democratic political space, exemplified in the participatory construction of the work and the viewing subject. The actors come down from the stage and choose at random, from the stalls, a spectator who will become the protagonist or antagonist of the work.

One of the milestone plays of the 1960s is "Hamlet the first" (see Figure 1), staged by Riccardi in 1962 and 1967. Riccardi's Hamlet is a set of assonances and dissonances, punctuated by long silences, by the emptiness that can be observed in the blackness of the scenes, in the abrupt blocking of the action. The void is in the dialogue-monologues, in the words preserved in Shakespeare's language (Carlino, 1967). Riccardi's Hamlet is a conversation stretched to the utmost between actor and spectator.



Figure 1. “Gruppo Teatro Laboratorio Arti Visive”, Hamlet the first, 1962, Riccardi family archive.

In the performances of the 1970s, Riccardi continued the theatrical discourse begun earlier, but the content of the theatre of this period became even more explicit, characterised by a strong moral, political and social condemnation: “Man must live and not let himself live”. The characters’ clothes, threadbare and reduced almost to rags, externalise a decomposition and inner malaise. As in contemporary paintings featuring clowns, pierrots and masks, satire, the grotesque, the surreal and fairytale worlds burst forth. Riccardi operates a violent critique of contemporary society using themes from the biblical and fantasy worlds and presenting anonymous kings and characters in misleading contexts. The criticism of mass society is always mediated by a language that is never aggressive, but always poetic.

In these years Riccardi’s research was part of an international debate concerning the destiny of historic centres, urban expansion, the need to safeguard memory and the need to understand the identity of the territory. All this takes place through the community’s appropriation of space and the valorisation of cultural heritage, as in the reflections already initiated throughout numerous events organised towards the end of the 1960s where urban space becomes the epicentre of individual and collective interventions (Ardenne, 2002).

Riccardi, by means of performances and participation in street festivals, turns towards the recovery of the historical and social memory of the territory and a revival of the traditions of the past. In our view, he, through theatre, breaks the

static nature of everyday life by means of events that take place in public space, no longer perceived as “silent space”, but as a place of active dialogue with the public and participatory dialogue with the spectator. The plays and performances, in fact, emphasise the cultural purpose and the decidedly experimental commitment of the individual performances.

Riccardi’s peculiarity, starting from the 1970s, became the habit of wearing a white suit, a red scarf, and a white glove in many plays. The actor becomes a mime able to capture the audience’s attention to himself and to his actions. An intense and collaborative dialogue with the audience is thus created within the plays and performances.

A perfect example is the play “Pinocchio” (see **Figure 2**) in which a fairy-tale and dreamlike world is represented. This event becomes a pretext for Riccardi to develop an original discourse on the effects of a certain type of children’s literature (Rondi, 1974). The play presented in 1970, 1974 and 1975 at the “Il Torchio” theatre in Rome “breathes on the spectator an oppressive “breath” to reawaken in him the consciousness and the priority of life over death” (De Libero, 1974).

Collodian characters come out with imaginative “verve”. The actors enter the audience no longer as childhood legacies, but as pressing ideologies. In a rapid alternation of characters, power, justice, as well as pity, hatred and love are highlighted on account of symbolic visions. All that remains of Collodi’s work is a fragmentary tale: “Geppetto wants a puppet who can dance and do somersaults [...] as soon as his legs are done, the puppet leaves the house and goes to the street”. Behind this character, an autobiographical tale is hidden. It hides and masks the director’s personality, his “active” thought continually striving towards a suffering participation in a world he does not accept.

Pinocchio, a fairytale character, can also be identified with today’s man, mangled, judged by the law and the church, suffocated by welfare, lured, and castrated. From this kind of co-responsibility, Riccardi seems to pull himself out by telling all that he thinks and has suffered since childhood. In his characters, in fact, there is the implication of a tragedy. It is the very idea of Pinocchio who hides and does not defend himself: despised, he is reduced to a sometimes sleazy, sometimes fantastic, sometimes cruel, perverse, and blasphemous performance (Ricci, 1975). The fable of Pinocchio is the occasion for a “return to childhood” of a forty-year-old man in search of “lost time”. Everything happens almost exclusively through the “voice” of bodies (Liberati, 1975).

His Pinocchio has finally ceased to play the role of the mentor of an educational hagiography, or the interpreter of a domestic myth, once and for all he has shaken off all those mendings of final wisdom that curled him up in the quickly read text, and this is not an easy desecration, but rather a silence finally written by the author not Collodi (De Libero, 1975).

In the 1980s and 1990s, Riccardi, even more than in the past, tried to understand the transformations taking place in the territory, in public space and in historical centres by means of performances and participation in theatre festivals. The artist, through his works, tries to reconstruct the historical memory, the



Figure 2. “Gruppo Teatro Laboratorio Arti Visive”, Pinocchio, 1970, Riccardi family archive.

connection between people and places by digging into oral history, written tradition, or experience. All this originates from the issue of urban regeneration, which leads to a revitalisation of the visibility of cities and city government by redefining many spaces that are abandoned and therefore prey to crime and degradation. Renovation operations pave the way for the re-appropriation by citizenship of public spaces and create new reasons for affection and bonding with the urban environment (Perelli, 2006).

A significant performance is “My Land” (see Figure 3) staged between 1981 and 1983. The work offers itself as a homage to the poet Libero De Libero by investigating the history, values, and traditions of the director’s homeland. In this singular performance, some of Libero De Libero’s verses are read out starkly by the recorded voice of a child. Of the poet from Ciociaria you can perceive the soul, the feeling, the attachment to a province seen as memory, as an umbilical cord because Riccardi is from Frosinone, and it is there that he had his most authentic human and artistic experiences.

Riccardi, wearing a white dress and a red scarf, settle the stage with poor, everyday materials, and symbols. On the stage there is a table that is like a wagon, a fiber suitcase tied with string, some flour, a tape recorder in operation, some old utensils, some clothes, some white plywood silhouettes depicting people placed in scattered order in the background, and even an old woman wrapped in black shawls that miraculously becomes a maiden in a wedding dress (Renna, 1982). In the gesture of tracing the silhouettes on the blackboard and defining their features, we believe that Riccardi perhaps seeks a return to his childhood, to his family. Gian Carlo Riccardi in “My Land”

The image follows in the footsteps of Libero De Libero’s poetic work, the

stages of his literary and existential childhood and that of the theatre with its double, just as this artistic form has contributed over time to creating in the artists of his generation the desire to fulfil themselves in the world by representing themselves (Fusco, 1982).

The whole play is, as if it wanted to take us back to a childhood we have never experienced, to that childhood that is portrayed as it should be: without dogma, without content, but with an avalanche of outlines of images to be filled in (Riccardi, 1989).

“My Land” repropose Riccardi’s encounter with his father. After his father’s death, the author rediscovers slumbering feelings and evokes childhood events, customs, and traditions such as the “wedding” and the “death of a man” all brought to a figurative level (Passa, 1981). Its action acts in a liberating sense in comparison to the various fears that haunt the man of the consumer society, tending more than ever to a frenetic activity that would like to exorcise the fear of death, but which calls it back again and again, the more it would like to push it away (Siro, 1982).

In 1997, the “Teatro dell’Immagine” was founded as a continuation of the theatrical discourse begun by Riccardi with the “Gruppo Teatro Laboratorio Arti Visive” in 1962. Gian Carlo Riccardi, assisted by his son, composer Francesco Riccardi, created a concert-theatre. Those represented are no longer spectacles but visual concerts, performances with the only purpose of opening the doors to the “voices from within”, to the “affabulations” of the human unconscious that, dormant and forgotten by television and mass-media representations, claim to exist (Consalvi, 2007). The performances are accompanied by music that is not



Figure 3. “Gruppo Teatro Laboratorio Arti Visive”, *My Land*, 1982, Riccardi family archive.

musical commentary, it is actual music created for the performances and linked to the content of the work. The works of these years move away from the contestation and violent themes of the first avant-garde experiments, using a poetic and subdued language. Through his works, Riccardi no longer shouts his malaise, his feelings, his rejection of a decadent society, but whispers it. His performances, like the paintings, become more symbolic, and the director, as a wise old man and sometimes as a curious child, hides behind the curtain to discern a reaction in the audience.

The play “Opera” is a representative performance of the “Teatro dell’Immagine”. It presents the existential itinerary of the average man, the “bourgeois” gentleman who encompasses in his day the reiteration and “tics” of the same, un-touchable moments: home, office, home, office, church, pizzeria, home, office... The average man, with no aspirations, no intentions, and no hopes, accepts all this as identification of “living” (Coccia, 2010).

In “Opera” (see **Figure 4**), the music delineates a story in the real space of the stage as if to reinforce the monotonous life of the opera’s protagonist, Mr Pertica, enclosed within the habit of gesture in his world of an anonymous clerk. A character who makes mechanical movement his passage of time, centred over the years in a life without joy or pain but loaded only with the regret of vanished objects and people. It will be a mysterious and invisible presence that will shake him out of his daily slumber, an unexpected Puck, who leaves him a package on the table that he greedily opens in a series of endless Chinese boxes, to arrive at the last wrapping from where a key emerges. An object that leaves Mr Pertica with the possibility of a choice and the spectator with the understanding of a wrong way of living a life. A key, therefore, a turning point (Mirabella, 2010).

At this point the spectator is called into question, the ending is open and launches questions to the audience, but also a provocation. Everyone, in fact, sooner or later finds a key, and must have the ability to understand what it can open up and what perspectives it can open up for them. This is also an invitation to be self-critical and to distance ourselves from the society in which we live, that makes us all homologated and incapable of reacting before the horror and banality (Bisci, 2010).

“Opera” is the theatrical work of an artist who is unable to accept the ugliness of the world, and all that it entails. Precisely for this reason, he does not spare harsh criticism of today’s society and its most disturbing faces, through the language of art. The author, therefore, puts everyday life and its hellish nature under the magnifier, which becomes a metaphor for a non-life.

Humanity is mostly made up of people who do not live, but allow themselves to live and see no way out of a situation of mediocrity in which, of necessity, they end up wallowing, because they have no alternative. This is also the case for the protagonist, at least until a strange character, who has remained aloof on the scene the whole time, almost a silent witness to “non-life”, makes his appearance to deliver him a strange and mysterious parcel (Mirabella, 2010).



Figure 4. “Teatro dell’Immagine”, Opera, 2010, Riccardi family archive.

5. Conclusion

Based on our reflexions and research, we can suggest that the theatrical plays and performances realised by the avant-garde artist Gian Carlo Riccardi represent events that are out of the ordinary.

These events, therefore, can be seen as events of the unusual.

In his performances, the gestures and images produced by his characters/actors are fundamental, and at the same time, the destruction of the word, resulting in a “poetry of the image” and a total break with traditional theatre.

The Psychology of Art and Literature analyses the psychological motivations that led the artist to the creation and realisation of a work and the environmental situations that determine it, as well as the symbolic elements found in a verbal or non-verbal text.

In Gian Carlo Riccardi’s plays, we believe that an audience that is not detached and not bound by conventions and habits is substantial, thus generating a profound and at the same time collaborative dialogue with the public. Riccardi’s theatrical plays and performances are staged both outdoors and indoors, echoing the experiments of the “Living Theatre” in which the link between work and place becomes fundamental, configuring site-specific strategies. Once again, therefore, the work-public relationship becomes substantial, which is why Riccardi’s works are part of the current of relational art. Riccardi has repeatedly been accused of producing subversive works, vehicles of a political ideology. In reality, the author looks at the contemporary world throughout his own gaze and feelings, trying to convey to the public the idea of an inner change against all conformism. On balance, we tend to believe that Riccardi undertook a radical and unprejudiced exploration into the territories of the unconscious, imagining fears, desires, associations, transgressions, dreams and visions (Riccardi, 1981).

The themes that have emerged most frequently in the author's plays and have been translated into new and innovative language basically concern childhood memories, sexuality, social homologation, illusion, hope and the rejection of the masses.

In conclusion, in Riccardi's works, there is a strong desire to recall his own childhood, roots and origins.

Riccardi, therefore, has made memory and introspection the main principle of his research.

Consent

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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