

Precarity on Stage: the Creative and Political Dimensions of Affect in Ceresoli's Theatre Production *La Merda*

Monica Jansen

Abstract

The theatre monologue *The Shit / La Merda* won several prizes. This play on humiliation and anger can be linked to precarity in various ways. Firstly, the woman's narrative on her proximate television audition reveals how socio-economic precarity in Italy conditions young people and females in particular. The play unravels the fallacy of post-feminist emancipation. Secondly, the piece also ex-

emplifies Italian mobility and the “trans-national.” Thirdly, the female's “subjectivation” to the neoliberal logic is not only a humiliating experience but also a potential for resistance. It cannot be thought separately from the “cruel optimism” of the good-life fantasy. Finally, affect also functions as cultural activism within the context of Teatro Valle Occupato.

The Precarious Voice of a Nude Body

The focus of this paper on a new Italian theatre of precarity departs from the play *La Merda*, a 55-minute monologue written by Cristian Ceresoli between 2010 and 2012, performed by Silvia Gallerano and initially produced by the self-founded Frida Kahlo Productions. From a self-produced play, conceived in precarious conditions, it has become an example of the internationalization of Italian theatre productions. It has won several prizes at the 2012 Edinburgh Fringe Festival, among which the Fringe First Award for Writing Excellence, the Stage Award for Best Performance, and the Edinburgh Sell Out Show.¹ The piece has been translated into English as *The Shit* and has been performed in different languages around the globe, thanks to the company's international producer Richard Jordan.² Performances in Italy and abroad are often sold out, and the *La Merda* tour has been hosted in Australia, Latin-America, Europe (Denmark, France, Germany, Lithuania, Portugal, Spain) (Mariani), and is programmed to be performed in Brussels in 2018 as well (KVS-Koninklijke Vlaamse Schouwburg, 26-27 January). Ceresoli considers himself to be a self-taught 'nomad' writer and director, living between London and Rome,³ feeling his work to be more appreciated abroad than in his home country: in Italy access to the play has been hindered because of censorship (Mariani).

In *La Merda*, the actress Gallerano gives voice to a young woman who, naked and seated under the spotlight on a high chair, tells the public with a childlike voice about her audition for a television show. The experience of this young, never-grown-up woman in the process of being examined in order to be included or rejected by the system of capitalist production, embodies the condition of precarity. In Italy, the cultural representation of precarity has produced a consistent corpus of

¹ For all the awards, see Ceresoli's website.

² Until now into Greek, Danish, Czech, Spanish, Gallego, Portuguese, French, and German (Mariani).

³ He presents himself in the English version as follows: "Cristian Ceresoli was born in Gaza in 1975. He lives and works wherever he can: Edinburgh, Rome, Turin, London, Naples, Milan, Lenola or New York. Practically from birth up to the age of twenty he watched television avidly, and in particular, the channels owned by MP Silvio Berlusconi. In 1995, he started travelling, haphazardly here and there. After working as a waiter, librarian, farmhand, performer, factory worker and street stall hawker, he began writing in 2005. *The Shit* is his first real work" (Ceresoli 3).

contemporary narratives on (non)labour to such an extent that it is recognizable as a genre with a common thematic and stylistics.⁴ For the purpose of this analysis the following definition of precarity by Alice Bardan, formulated to identify a number of Italian films as typical of a new European cinema of precarity, can be used as a starting point:

on the one hand, the multiplication of precarious and unstable forms of living, an insecurity of income and livelihood that nowadays affects a variety of social groups (from unskilled workers to academics), and, on the other hand, new forms of political struggle and solidarity that go beyond the traditional models of the political party or trade union. (qtd. in Hipkins 29)

Waiting for her dream to come true, her confession or ‘stream of consciousness’ works as a catalyst, mixing memories of the past with her living present. This play is, however, not merely the personal story of a precarious woman troubled by bulimia, sexual abuse, and lack of self-esteem, or, instead, a metaphor of the “anthropological mutation” brought about by capitalist consumer society, as it is advertised in the English edition and on Ceresoli’s website with quotations by the Italian filmmaker, poet, and writer Pier Paolo Pasolini.⁵ It also resonates with memories and experiences of the contemporary crisis the audience—addressed as “the humanity” (Ceresoli 6)—can identify with, and which stem directly from Ceresoli’s and Gallerano’s own experiences. In an interview, Gallerano explains how she and Ceresoli, born in 1974 and in 1975, respectively, have both grown up with a sense of inadequacy, of humiliation, imprinted in their adolescent bodies, which explains why they elaborated the play in a “visceral” more than a rational way (Mariani).

⁴ See on this topic, among others, Chirumbolo.

⁵ “*La Merda* is driven by a desperate attempt to pull ourselves out of the mud, the latest products of the cultural genocide aptly described by Pier Paolo Pasolini since the modern consumer society began taking form. A totalitarianism, according to Pasolini, even more repressive than the one of the Fascist era, because it is capable of crushing us softly” (Ceresoli 3). See also the author’s website.

The play's narrative is divided into three parts, and is introduced as follows: "It's a tragedy in three movements: The Thighs, The Cock, The Fame and one counter-movement: Italy" (Ceresoli 6). The stream of consciousness is rhythmically composed as a music score, and Ceresoli is keen to liken his performance to a rock concert (Mariani). The importance of rhythmical modulation has also been essential for the English "self-translation": Ceresoli underlines that he decided together with Gallerano to take the risk of working on a translation that would keep the Italian metric and musicality. The actress is not so much a character as she is a "mask". The introductory note to the play has it that "some vocal masks (or characters) often appear from the literary score, and take *possession* of the voice" (6; original emphasis). The stage directions inserted in the text are about how the "vocal mask" should interact with the "voice": "the voice abandons her vocal mask, then in a crescendo, as if determined to kill" (Ceresoli 11, 23); "As before a firing party, the voice alternates the vocal mask with the pure voice, in a syncopated and variously alternated rhythm. In crescendo" (28).

This vocal body is nude, a choice of the author turned into a spontaneous gesture by the actress during *La Merda's* first awarded Italian performance in Udine, where she decided to take off her Baggio football shirt (Mariani). In this way, the female character is not identifiable with "somebody," but her nakedness directs the attention of the viewer to a human or animal body that is exposed as such, without arousing any erotic or sexual connotations (Mariani). Her nudity, furthermore, turns this comical character into a tragic and grotesque figure, her body being a tangle or a bulk that is continuously transformed and decomposed in various ways (Mariani). Besides the character's nudity being functional for her changing roles between subject and object of scrutiny and revelation, its provocation also has a direct and unpredictable impact on the public. Before the play begins, Gallerano is seated with her back turned on the audience and when the auditorium gets filled up, she slowly starts to twist her body and turns it around in search of contact with those sitting most near to her (Mariani). Following Hal Yamanouchi's method, a Japanese actor based in Italy, the actress considers her body to be the vehicle that leads her to the character. She also uses the

image of her body as an instrument playing the score. Gallerano says to perceive the young woman she performs as an “alter ego” who is always with her, and to behave on the stage like the “She” is feeling during that particular séance (Mariani).

During the performance, Gallerano is, in short, a female body transversed by contrasting emotions. Each movement alternates the predominant affects of humiliation and indignation in a crescendo, but the woman who is moved by them is never reduced to the one-dimensional role of the victim or, on the contrary, of the “beast.” In the introductory note to the play she is said to be “chasing success with serious and beastly ferocity and lucid, killing determination” (6). The “process of humiliation” has been the starting point for Ceresoli and Gallerano, both as the condition of violence inflicted on human bodies in present times, and as the precarious condition of creative workers who have to “pray” others to grant their work the right to exist (Mariani).⁶ The expression of rage is accentuated by the red lipstick enlarging the actress’s mouth and contrasted by her childish hairdo. This emotion of anger is highlighted by the international press and used as a catchphrase to promote the play.⁷

Occupational Precarity and the “Showgirl Effect”

Starting from the play’s narrative from a socio-economic point of view, it is related to conditions of precarity in Italy, regarding to youth and women, but also to the category of creative workers. As has been shown in a number of studies, the state of young people in Italy at the beginning of the twenty-first century can be called, in one word, precarious. To quote Gianluca Argentin, “Italy is [...] a country characterized by incredibly high occupational penalisation of young people. The entry phase into the labour market is characterised by long-term unemploy-

⁶ Since February 2004, San Precario, patron saint of precarious workers, has appeared in various Italian cities as the saint to pray to when all hope is lost. See on this phenomenon Tari and Vanni.

⁷ The initial page of the booklet, for instance, reproduces, among others, the following quote from *The Guardian*: “A piece so literally and metaphorically naked, raw and angry that you leave the theatre feeling as if you’ve had all your skin scraped off” (Ceresoli 3).

ment and the risk of job loss is higher among the young generation than among adults” (79-80). This situation is even worse for females:

Italy is an emblematic case of the Mediterranean welfare system where labour market regulation and workfare are designed to support the male bread winner; not surprisingly, this system disadvantages young people and females and affects birth rates and new family formation processes. Indeed, Italian young people have shown a very slow transition into adulthood, leaving their parental home very late. (80)

The young woman staged is therefore framed not only by the condition of youth precarity—her lack of schooling could also point to the fact that “in terms of education system, young Italians have [...] shown lower levels of education compared with their European peers” (Argentin 79)—but also by working conditions of females in Italy.

Furthermore, Gallerano’s decision to recite *La Merda* in 2013 during her pregnancy (Mariani), could be seen as a way to visualise the problem of the conciliation of motherhood and work.⁸ Female precarity embodied by this girlish woman who aspires to work in show business is also a clear reference to the Berlusconi-era, which turned young women into “dangerous consumers” and “post-feminist” entrepreneurs,⁹ giving way to what Danielle Hipkins has labelled “moralizing discourses”:

In the Italian context, there has been a particular focus on the entanglement of the desire for consumer goods with what is deemed sexually inappropriate female behavior in the figure of the girl. In this form of ‘slut-shaming,’ commentators are repeatedly drawn back to the figure of the girl, over whom there is an assumed right to comment, rather than the more intractable issue of corrupt (male) political power. (22-23)

⁸ See on this topic Del Boca and Giraldo; Tobío. See also Jansen.

⁹ A reference is made here to what Rosalind Gill has called “a post-feminist sensibility” typical of neo-liberal societies. As is shown by Stefania Benini, its “themes, tropes, and constructions” are all present in the Italian mediascape during Berlusconi (88).

Analysing the representation of the *velina* or the ‘showgirl effect’¹⁰ in recent Italian film narratives, Hipkins asks herself if they provide “resistant potential” to the “narrative ‘denigration’ of girls, in particular to the association of beauty culture with stupidity and culpable promiscuity” (24). This is precisely one of the aims of *La Merda*, to show that this ‘body’ is not so much morally judged or commented upon but is gifted with its own agency and, in the end, succeeds in formulating some form of contradictory resistance. Two other female characters in *La Merda* are worth mentioning in this context. One is the lady who ran the beauty centre the play’s protagonist frequented when she was thirteen years old because of her exuberant thighs. To the girl, this lady represents freely acting entrepreneurship:

[...] it was me who, while there, with my thighs and the electrodes stuck into my flesh, was listening to her fancying that good-looking lady, in her early sixties, with a red shirt torn over her breast leaving one sole tit uncovered, hard, and firm, while marching to conquer her freedom and her dignity as a female worker towards a new future made up by a new woman making *her* own decisions about *her* career and *her* life and *her* future. (Ceresoli 9-10; original emphasis)

The other female character is the girl’s mother whose care, to use Hipkins’ words, can be described as “deadly, but sympathetic” (28). She fosters her daughter’s fantasy of self-fulfilment and the daughter, in her turn, is dependent on the desire to correspond to her mother’s expectations. Both regard television as the equivalent of success and the mother-daughter relationship in this sense is a “deadly” one because it does not envision a realistic, emancipatory line of flight from precarity. Dreaming about her success, the girl imagines her mamma to watch her “from home and me just talking and talking to this famous young man, a tv presenter, and yes, you know, it is my moment” (25). Although

¹⁰ Hipkins explains that “‘Velina’ is a term that stands in for a whole panoply of television showgirls, who have ranged in age from 15 to 30, but have always invoked a performative mode of ‘girliness’” (22).

protective and suspicious, the mother puts herself at the service of the producers who want her daughter to be fat for the part:

but then she comes, and serves the coffee in our best china, with cookies, and says to me that she'll tell aunty but only her and if I need anything and then she smiles at me [...] I've got to go [...] and as I get to the main door she appears on the landing, in her slippers, and shouts at me, but in a whisper, not to disturb the neighbors, *do you eat, have you got enough to eat*, and I say yes, mamma. (27-28; original emphasis)

These ambivalent examples of post-feminist emancipation through sacrifice could be read as ironical comments on a system of false opportunities.

The Transnational Mobility of Precarity

The problem of youth unemployment as discussed above is also at the heart of a new migration phenomenon that has been labelled as “brain drain” but that is not entirely reducible to it (Tintori and Colucci 45). The example of Ceresoli, presenting himself as a ‘nomad’ writer and director, could be typical of this new kind of international mobility, which can be described as forced mobility and therefore “a stress test to democratic systems, through which the extent of their political and democratic legitimacy may be revealed” (Tintori 111-112), but which can also be applied to a global elite which has the opportunity of being flexible and, as such, “the language of mobilities features prominently in neoliberal regimes of migration management” (Ballinger 36). This double bind between free market mobility and resistance against neo-capitalist society embodied by the author himself, is paralleled by the play’s “virtual mobility,” which ideally speaking represents and re-mediate “the reality constructed by neoliberal governance” (Ben-Ghiat and Malia Hom 1). In a way, the play counters Ceresoli’s mobility with its opposite, immobility, and as such argues that “mobility must be conceived in relation to spatio-temporal fixities, or moorings, as well as experiences of stillness, waiting and even stuckness” (Ben-Ghiat and Malia Hom 3).

The young woman in the play is waiting for her moment to come without considering going abroad. At the end of the monologue she “covers her nude body with a green, white and red flag” singing the national anthem “desperate, unplugged and blues” (Ceresoli 31). Italian mobility has been brought back to its origins—Italy’s political Unification completed in 1870—as well as to its illusory promises.¹¹

The paradox of mobility and immobility also brings with it the category of the “trans-national,” defined by Emma Bond as a hyphenated notion. Italy, being a peripheral space, is “at once peculiarly trans-national and trans-nationally peculiar: historically a space characterized by both internal and external transit and movement, Italy itself can be imagined as a hyphenated, in-between space created by the multiple crossings that etch its geographical surfaces and cultural depths” (421). According to Bond, the body becomes a “privileged site of lived subjectivity” (416) from a transnational point of view on cultural production: “The body as a site of lived subjectivity in motion, of course, but also as itself able to communicate the ramifications and imaginings of movement, in a way that places space and time into a frictional dialectic” (422).

The dual edition of *The Shit / La Merda* could be an example of a transnational text that is conceived, through self-translation, in “Italianated” English and stages the female body and its vocal mask as vehicles for multiple, multilingual “lived subjectivities.” Also taking into account the play’s international success and reception, the precarity that constrains the woman’s behaviour is viewed at the same time as part of Italy’s economic and political crisis and as a symptom of globalized consumerism. A review of *The Guardian* combines both a local and a global perspective:

The particular application to Italian politics and society may remain obscure, despite the final image of Gallerano’s body wrapped in the Italian flag, but there’s no doubting the pulsating power and anger of the play. [...] this hour offers

¹¹ Ponte Di Pino inserts the play in a series of contemporary performances originating from Italy which all address and thematize the country’s crisis and decay.

up the psychic pain and distress and self-loathing of a young woman living in a world where celebrity and consumerism erode self-worth, who can only cry out in protest as she is forced to cannibalise herself. (Gardner)

The Australian *ABC* has it that “[a]lthough its resonance is uncomfortably general, it’s conditioned by Italian politics. It recalls, for example, how television celebrity and political and sexual power meet in the figure of Silvio Berlusconi, and how a culture of celebrity feeds a returning tide of European neo-Nazism” (Croggon). In an interview by the Portuguese journal *Sábado*, Gallerano suggests that the public was not really aware the play was about Italy, and so she and Cristian found out it was about critical issues relevant also outside their home country, and that, unfortunately, Italy, like in the past, had proven to be on the avant-garde of those negative trends (Bertrand). Both actress and author avoid to speak about their creation in terms of political theatre: Gallerano’s ambition is to be able to reach with the audience, through her character’s outing, some form of “understanding” (Valdés), and Ceresoli underlines that his work is full of anger without being political, although it takes the society of the spectacle as its target. The political aspect is only one element among many in the piece, and the author does not want to take any position but to express a poetical point of view (Horta). A number of reviews mentions Pasolini as the main source of inspiration. In an interview by *Público*, Ceresoli specifies he is particularly interested in Pasolini’s idea that today’s fascism is even more dangerous because it is difficult to recognize, understand and observe, and the play therefore represents the hypothesis of a society that slowly advances towards suicide, by metaphorically leaning out too far until finally falling on the rail tracks. Ceresoli, however, denies his piece to be catastrophic as he instead uses his power to fight and to react (Frota).

The Ambivalent Resistance of Precarity and Precariousness

The image of the train tracks used by Ceresoli in the interview is a recurrent one in the play, and has the ambivalent meaning of having the courage to risk to bring about change, or instead to kill oneself and to renounce on any active role in history. The young woman in the first movement says she always “looked at the sky” (8) and found the courage to “cross the yellow line” and to “jump” (7), notwithstanding her being “a small one” and having that problem with her thighs (7). Her daddy always told her “that the heroes who beat the shit out of the Austro-Hungarian empire and made our nation were all just *starving little midgets*” (8; original emphasis). He refers to freedom fighter Giuseppe Garibaldi’s army of “red shirts,” and Garibaldi is also the author of one of the epigraphs that precede *La Merda*’s text: “Cowards, mercenaries and crooks always ready to kneel before all tyrannies” (4). This lesson to be a “free man” and to resist fascism is countered by her father’s suicide, when she was thirteen years old, leaving him “squashed all over the tracks” (10).

The historical narrative of resistance,¹² and the counter-narrative of humiliation produces a hybrid kind of resistance in the young woman’s stream of consciousness that could be symptomatic for the condition of precarity. Both narratives join hands in the final movement, when the female protagonist makes herself up for the audition, in order not to “miss” her “train”; her “appointment with history” (30):

And so, all this big, me, I’ve got to earn it by myself, my big chance, my first step in the world that counts, the world that those *starving little midgets*, with their red shirts, built for us, for me, and those others who *resisted*, with their fight for a free country, yes, it is, and me, even in their name, I must be a new woman, free, and I must make it, and if they’ve said fat, so it is, and if they want me fat, fleshy, opulent and large, so me that’s the one that I will be. (25-26; original emphasis)

¹² Cf. in the second movement: “I’m not laughing and I stay there, and resist, because it’s thanks to the *Resistance Movement* that Fascism is over and our country exists, yes, and I stay there” (Ceresoli 23).

Her resistance becomes grotesque the moment she spurs herself to “resist” in order not to lose from her body all the stuff she ate,¹³ and finally to eat her own shit and to be just like the nation wants her to be: “And I’m ready, fat, fleshy, opulent, large, fetid. I’ve got greasy dimples all over my face, and in my head. Like this, as they want me to be. And it doesn’t disgust me *anymore*. No. *Nothing* disgusts me anymore. THE MALE SEX OUR FLAG, THE MALE SEX OUR FLAG” (31; original emphasis). The maximum of humiliation is reached the moment the protagonist gives voice to her “counterfinale,” and sings a “comical anthem to disgust, sung with masterful technique” (31).

Bardan, in the working definition of precarity quoted earlier, makes a distinction between a precarious condition and precarity as a resistant category. In *State of Insecurity*, Isabell Lorey shows how neoliberal governmental precarization maintains the illusion of individual security “through the anxiety over being exposed to existential vulnerability” (90). As there is no commonly shared precariousness (100), any kind of resistance can only be formed within its relational difference: “In uncertain, flexibilized and discontinuous working and living conditions, subjectivations arise that do not entirely correspond to the neoliberal logic of valorization, and which may resist and refuse it” (103).

The naked female body on the stage enacts resistance through subjectivation and by doing so, she makes visible the impasse of the fantasy of the good life as described by Lauren Berlant in *Cruel Optimism*. Precarity as a resistant identity cannot be thought separately from the existential notion of precariousness. According to Berlant, new aesthetic forms emerged in the 1990s to register “a shift in how the older state-liberal-capitalist fantasies shape adjustments to the structural pressures of crisis and loss that are wearing out the power of the good life’s traditional fantasy bribe without wearing out the need for a good life” (7). In this context, *Cruel Optimism* “turns toward thinking about the ordinary as an impasse shaped by crisis in which people find themselves developing skills for adjusting to newly proliferating pressures to scramble for modes of living on” (8). Berlant argues that the impasse induced by cri-

¹³ “Take courage. Resist. No. Stand up. No. Resist. Get out of the toilet. Resist. No. I can’t make it. Resist. Coming. Stand up. Keep it in. Coming. No. Coming. No. See. I, see. From. My. Ass. Pieces of youngster in their red shirts, in my shit” (29).

sis and the “ongoing activity of precariousness in the present” are better described “by the notion of systematic crisis or ‘crisis ordinariness’ and followed out with an eye to seeing how the affective impact takes form, becomes mediated” (10). She thus makes a claim to an “affective realism” that manifests the “attrition of a fantasy, a collectively invested form of life, of good life” (11).

This contrast between optimistic scenarios and fraying fantasies reaches the dimension of the uncanny in the second movement of the play, when the woman tells about her problem with “males”—“not healthy and cheerful males, more like cripples” (17)—that mistake her “mercy” for “a fantasy” of her “sucking them off” (17). She narrates the disgusting situation she was in as a teenager of her sucking the penis of a handicapped classmate without him even saying goodbye to her after her performance (20). For her, this has been a lesson for life that taught her to be like those females working for television who to the general managers “must have touched their penis so many times, [...] but with a sense of sacrifice that yet, in the end, always pays off” (21). The lesson she learned, therefore, is the following: “I learnt to do what you need to do on certain occasions, because even if there’s something disgusting you, you can get used to it” (21). This kind of adjustment to the “crisis ordinariness” Berlant speaks about is certainly a form of reactive “subjectivation” to “the neoliberal logic of valorization” (Lorey), but it becomes resistant the moment it has been incorporated as a “poetic of immanent world making” (Berlant 8). It corresponds simultaneously to the other two epigraphs that precede the play: “It’s time for some commercials, stay tuned” (Maria De Filippi, Italian Tv Superstar); “Don’t be afraid [...] that I am stinking enough myself to be capable of not feeling tied to all this shit” (Pier Paolo Pasolini).

Precarity, Affects and Cultural Activism

Finally, this example of “affective theatre” has been rehearsed, developed, and performed within the context of the Teatro Valle Occupato (TVO) initiative, which has resulted from the precarious working con-

ditions theatre professionals in Italy have to cope with.¹⁴ From 2011 to 2014, the eighteenth-century roman theatre Valle has been occupied by a group of activist-practitioners who called themselves the “communards” and has been transformed into a cultural commons. According to Alice Borchì,

[t]he experience of TVO is an example of how artists can have an impact on society, not only on matters of cultural taste and ethics, but also on law and economics. In fact, Teatro Valle can be seen as the place from which the Italian debate on the commons has evolved and, in some form, become a reality. In the three years of the occupation, the communards, besides working on the theatre’s programme, also organised demonstrations and events to support social inclusion, civil rights and artists’ rights. Nevertheless, the decision to occupy a public theatre can be seen as the most important form of cultural activism they undertook: this gesture re-appropriates and affirms artists’ and cultural professionals’ self-determination, work and dignity. (127)

This experience of occupation and re-appropriation has shown how a cultural initiative organized as a commons can become an alternative practice that is continued with the occupation of other cultural buildings along the Italian peninsula.¹⁵ On a European level, TVO has been awarded the 2014 ECF Princess Margriet Award “in recognition of its collective energy in making culture a space for people to join in, where culture becomes a process that produces new values and forms of social life” (“2014 ECF”). A summary of TVO’s concept and political practice of the commons can be found in a 2014 special issue of *openDemocracy*,

¹⁴ See Borchì: “Since 2008, the Italian government has cut public expenditure for the arts. In fact, the public expenditure for culture decreased from 0.9% of the gross national income in 2009 to the 0.5% in 2011” (127).

¹⁵ On 27-28 March 2017, *La Merda* was performed in the Teatro Coppola in Catania, which has been occupied in December 2011, following the example of TVO. In their occupation statement, “Per un teatro dei cittadini” (“In favor of a theatre for citizens”), the occupiers present themselves as Sicilian theatre professionals who are always obliged to flee and to emigrate, being the first victims of a policy that does not recognize the economic and civilizing value of cultural work. See Teatro Coppola.

with a special focus on the political role played by affects in the formation of a participatory cultural citizenship. Asked to comment on the TVO and similar artistic projects, professor of politics Engin Isin argues that he is

encouraged by the possibilities that these open-ended and experimental acts are staged or enacted as expressions that sharply bring out the contradictions, injustices, anomalies, paradoxes, oppressions, and inequalities of the way in which we govern ourselves, states and societies - without knowing the direction they individually or collectively steer these events towards. (par. 11)

What appears to him to be the significant quality of these acts “is that they work through affects.”

To conclude, *The Shit / La Merda* therefore also functions as an “art-effect” in Isin’s terminology, a cultural practice that acquires its meaning and value through dialogue and also through repetition, in its continuous movement in time and space and in interaction with different “humanities” affected by precarity around the globe. The kind of resistance asked from the audience by this theatre of precarity for citizens is one of identification with humiliation, following Gallerano’s comprehensive embodiment of the “She” on the stage, and one of disgust in accordance with Ceresoli’s conviction that to be angry should be a civil right (Hindse).

Works cited

- Argentin, Gianluca.** "New generation at the crossroads: decline or change?" *The Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Italy: History, politics, society*, edited by Andrea Mammone, Ercole Giap Parini and Giuseppe A. Veltri, Routledge, 2015, pp. 77-88.
- Ballinger, Pamela.** "Beyond the Italies. Italy as a mobile subject?" *Italian Mobilities*, edited by Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Stephanie Malia Hom, Routledge, 2015, pp. 22-45.
- Ben-Ghiat, Ruth and Stephanie Malia Hom.** "Introduction." *Italian Mobilities*, edited by Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Stephanie Malia Hom, Routledge, 2015, pp. 2-19.
- Benini, Stefania.** "Televised bodies: Berlusconi and the body of Italian women." *Journal of Italian Cinema & Media Studies*, vol. 1, 2013, pp. 87-102.
- Berlant, Lauren.** *Cruel Optimism*. Duke University Press, 2011.
- Bertrand, Rita.** "Uma vida maldita a nu." *cristianceresoli official*, 20 May 2016, www.cristianceresoli.it.
- Bond, Emma.** "Towards a Trans-national Turn in Italian Studies?" *Italian Studies*, vol. 3, 2014, pp. 415-424.
- Borchi, Alice.** "Teatro Valle Occupato: protesting, occupying and making art in contemporary Italy." *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, vol. 1, 2017, pp. 126-129.
- Ceresoli, Cristian.** *The Shit / La Merda. Dual English and Italian-language Edition*. Oberon Books, 2012.
- Chirumbolo, Paolo.** *Letteratura e lavoro. Conversazioni critiche*. Rubbettino Editore, 2013.
- Cristianceresoli official.** Frida Kahlo Productions, 2013, www.cristianceresoli.it.
- Croggon, Alison.** "How a culture of celebrity feeds a returning tide of European neo-Nazism." *cristianceresoli official*, 6 March 2015, www.cristianceresoli.it.
- Del Boca, Daniela and Anna Giraldo.** "Why has the growth of female employment in Italy been so slow?" *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, vol. 4, 2013, pp. 485-99.
- Frota, Gonçalo.** "A destruição de uma identidade passa à tarde na TV." *cristianceresoli official*, 21 May, 2016, www.cristianceresoli.it.
- Gardner, Lyn.** "Extraordinary, terrifying and hard to ignore." *The Guardian*, The Guardian News and Media Limited, 22 April 2014, www.theguardian.com.
- Hindse, Caspar.** "Cristian Ceresoli: 'We'll get nowhere without anger'." *cristianceresoli official*, 2 Feb. 2015, www.cristianceresoli.it.
- Hipkins, Danielle.** "The Showgirl Effect: Adolescent Girls and (Precarious) 'Technologies of Sexiness' in Contemporary Italian Cinema." *International Cinema and the Girl. Local Issues, Transnational Contexts*, edited by Fiona Handyside and Kate Taylor-Jones, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 21-33.
- Horta, Bruno.** "A peça escandalosa que rejeita qualquer escândalo." *Observador*. Observador on Time, 21 May 2016, www.observador.pt.
- Isin, Engin.** "Acts, affects, calls." *openDemocracy*, 26 Feb. 2014, www.opendemocracy.net.
- Jansen, Monica.** "Carmen Covito's 'Tempo parziale'. Mothering and work in Italy in a nutshell." *Journal of Romance Studies*, vol. 3, 2015, pp. 33-48.
- Lorey, Isabell.** *State of Insecurity. Government of the Precarious*. Verso, 2015.
- Mariani, Laura.** "Il dramma dell'umiliazione. *La Merda* di Cristian Ceresoli e Silvia Gallerano, un successo internazionale (2010-2016)." *Mimesis Journal. Scritture della performance*, vol. 2, 2016, www.mimesis.revues.org/1145. Accessed 24 Sept. 2017.
- Ponte Di Pino, Oliviero.** "Il morbo italo: paranoia nazionale, blocco cognitivo e Nuovo Teatro del Grottesco." *Ateatro*, vol. 146, 2013, www.ateatro.it. Accessed 24 Sept. 2017.
- Tari, Marcello and Iliaria Vanni.** "On the Life and Deeds of San Precario, Patron Saint of Precarious Workers and Lives." *The Fibreculture Journal*, vol. 5, 2005, five.

fibreculturejournal.org. Accessed 24 Sept. 2017.

Teatro Coppola. *Teatro Coppola*, 2012, www.teatrocoppola.it.

Tintori, Guido. “Italian mobilities and the demos.” *Italian Mobilities*, edited by Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Stephanie Malia Hom, Routledge, 2015, pp. 111-131.

Tintori, Guido and Michele Colucci. “From manpower to brain drain? Emigration and the Italian state, between past and present.” *The Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Italy: History, politics, society*,

edited by Andrea Mammone, Ercole Giap Parini and Giuseppe A. Veltri, Routledge, 2015, pp. 37-48.

Tobío, Constanza. “Uneven paths: Women and welfare in Italy and Spain.” *Journal of Gender Studies*, vol. 2, 2015, pp. 1-18.

“2014 ECF Princess Margriet Award.”

European Cultural Foundation,
www.culturalfoundation.eu/pma-2014.

Valdés, Isabel. “Pura, maldida, descarnada vida.” *cristianceresoli official*, 19 March 2015, www.cristianceresoli.it.

Biography

Monica Jansen (1966) is Assistant Professor in Italian at Utrecht University. Her publications include: *Il dibattito sul postmoderno in Italia: In bilico tra dialettica e ambiguità* (2002);

The History of Futurism: The Precursors, Protagonists, and Legacies (co-edited, 2012); *Le culture del precariato. Pensiero, azione, narrazione* (co-edited, 2015).