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Rapt and En-chanted: Carmelo Bene's Voice and the Beyond of Theatre

Giulia Vittori, Francesco Chillemi, and Carlo Alberto Petrucci

*Abandoning Occidental usages of speech,
[this objective and concrete language of the theatre]
turns words into incantations. It extends the voice.
It utilizes the vibrations and qualities of the voice.
It wildly tramples rhythms underfoot. It pile-drives sounds.
It seeks to exalt, to benumb, to charm, to arrest the sensibility.
It liberates a new lyricism of gesture which,
by its precipitation or its amplitude in the air,
ends by surpassing the lyricism of words.
-Antonin Artaud*

*What is most comprehensible in language is not the word itself,
but the tone, the intensity, the modulation,
the tempo with which a series of words is pronounced
– in short, the music behind the words, the passion behind this music,
the person behind this passion, thus everything that cannot be written.
-Friedrich Nietzsche*

*Poesia è risonar del dire oltre il concetto
(Poetry is the saying echoing itself beyond the concept)
-Carmelo Bene¹*

A provocative theatre artist, film director, thinker, and a well-read intellectual, Carmelo Bene (1937–2002) was among the most iconoclastic Italian and European theatre theorists and innovators. Despite being relatively known and studied in France (with his works translated into French,² and with his intellectual relationships with leading personalities the likes of Jacques Lacan, Pierre Klossowski, and Gilles Deleuze), in the Anglophone world Bene remains almost unknown when compared to other major figures of Italian theatre, such as Eduardo De Filippo and Nobel laureate Dario Fo.³ In a commemorative documentary on Bene's legacy, *Carmelo Bene. La voce che si spense* (2003, Carmelo Bene: The Voice that Died Out), Fo himself stated:

¹ All translations are our own, unless otherwise indicated. These citations are taken from: Antonin Artaud, *The*

² Bene's works, translated by Jean-Paul Manganaro, were published by P.O.L. in three volumes between 2003 and 2012. Moreover, a conference entirely devoted to Bene, with the title "D'Après CB" was held in Paris at the Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art [National Institut of Art History] on January 8 and 9, 2013.

³ Bene met Deleuze in Paris during his participation at the Festival d'Automne in 1977. The following year they published together the volume *Sovrapposizioni* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1978). Regarding Fo's appreciation of Bene see "Ciampi, Fo, Ovidia: «Nessuno è stato libero come lo è stato lui»,» *l'Unità*, March 18, 2002; "Costanzo 'Era un genio', Fo 'Spregiudicato uomo di teatro', Sgarbi 'Polemiche poi sopite,'" *Il Gazzettino*, March 18, 2002; "Dario Fo: 'Era un architetto della magia,'" *Il Tirreno*, March 18, 2002. The above articles were published without the authors' names.

Carmelo Bene was a great man of theatre, who, just like all men of theatre who mattered, broke with traditions. He was astounding, he was a mold-breaker who would blow blinkered people's narrow minds. He was one who turned the rules upside-down and never forgot the first rule in theatre: there are no rules. Obviously, his attitude provoked opposition from the traditionalists, but then he finally won. He won and had success in the whole of Europe.⁴

Recently, a set of Bene's works have been published in English for the first time.⁵ With this essay, we therefore intend to provide a first introduction to Bene, specifically aimed at an international audience. For this reason, a consistent section of our paper is devoted to the analysis of two performances by Bene—a live reading of Dante's *Divine Comedy* and a theatre production of Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio*—that ingeniously re-interpret these world-renowned Italian masterpieces. In point of fact, these works stand out as ideal case studies to exemplify Bene's methodology and achievements. We also provide an extensive bibliography, which may serve as a useful resource to foster Benean studies in the Anglophone countries. Bene's work has the potential to spark interdisciplinary conversations across a variety of fields, including but not limited to Italian studies, critical theory, European theatre, performance philosophy, and aesthetics.

A prolific and eclectic polymath, Bene authored an impressive number of works across a variety of media (e.g., literature and film)⁶ but dived into theatre throughout his whole career. Since his early productions, he was acclaimed a genius by major Italian intellectuals such as Ennio Flaiano, Alberto Arbasino, and Pier Paolo Pasolini.⁷ In recent years, prominent artists like Romeo Castellucci and Oliviero Toscani praised Bene's art.⁸ In particular, while talking about

⁴ See "Carmelo Bene. La voce che si spense" (puntata 3), accessed December 15, 2019, 27:30–28:09, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2M21H655wFk>.

⁵ Carmelo Bene's *I appeared to the Madonna* came out in March 2020 and *Our Lady of the Turks* in January 2022. Both were translated by Carole Viers-Andronico and published by Contra Mundum Press, NY.

⁶ After the publication of two novels, *Nostra Signora dei Turchi* (1966, *Our Lady of the Turks*) and *Credito Italiano* (1967, *Italian Credit*), Bene devoted himself to cinema (1968–1973). *Nostra Signora dei Turchi* (1968) was awarded the Special Jury Prize at the *Venice International Film Festival*, and was also appreciated abroad by the American avant-garde film community and the French Nouvelle Vague. Set in Apulia, Southern Italy, *Nostra Signora dei Turchi* is a metafilm disclosing cinematic techniques and questioning the cult of cinema. The same iconoclastic, parodistic style marks two subsequent films, *Don Giovanni* (1970) and *Salomè* (1972), which Gilles Deleuze would later consider as notable examples of *crystal-image*. Deleuze defines the "crystal-image" as a "direct image of time," namely, a shot where the memory of a past event is recalled and actualized by the presentness of the "actual image" on the screen. In a crystal-image, therefore, past and present merge into each other. See: Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 190–191.

⁷ Bene performed as Creonte in Pasolini's movie *Edipo re* (1967, *Oedipus Rex*). Starting from the sixties, many of his plays were reviewed by both Arbasino and Flaiano (See Alberto Arbasino, "Sesso e svergognatezza la vera avanguardia," *La Repubblica*, 6 February 1976; *Ibid.*, "E dopo Artaud, solo Carmelo," *L'Espresso*, 28 March 2002, 158–159; Ennio Flaiano, "Pugnalate Salomè ma non fatele i baffi," *L'Europeo*, 15 March 1964, 81; *Ibid.*, Noia e nevrosi del dottor Faust," *L'Europeo*, 27 January 1966, 72; *Ibid.*, "La revisione del terrore," *L'Europeo*, 10 November 1966, 113; *Ibid.*, "L'Amleto-Bene s'è rifugiato in cantina," *L'Europeo*, 6 April 1967, 86.

⁸ Castellucci talks about his admiration for Bene in several occasions. See "L'enigma Carmelo Bene," in *Per Carmelo Bene* (Milan: Linea d'ombra, 1995), 61–65; "Altoparlanti, per Carmelo Bene," in *A CB. A Carmelo Bene*, ed. G. Costa (Rome: Editoria & Spettacolo, 2003), 27–29; "À Carmelo Bene," in *Marco Bellocchio, Carmelo Bene*, eds. D. Bax, C. Béghin (Bobigny: Magic cinéma, 2009), 123. Lorenzo Mango discusses a possible relationship between Bene and the *Societas Raffaello Sanzio*. See *La scrittura scenica* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2003), 89.

Bene's first movie, Toscani stated: "*Nostra Signora dei Turchi* [*Our Lady of the Turks*] was for me a revelation [... Bene] had a voice that sounded like an orchestra."⁹

Among the precursors of the new wave of Italian experimental theatre that emerged in the late sixties and early seventies (e.g., the *Cantine Romane* and the *Scuola Romana*), Bene pursued a renewal of theatrical performance in anti-Aristotelian, non-mimetic terms. He played his first title role in Albert Camus' *Caligula* in 1959, after obtaining performance rights directly from the author. He then opened his avant-garde *Teatro Laboratorio* space in Trastevere, Rome.¹⁰ As Antonio Attisani recalls, in those years, "There were endless calls and manifestos for a theatre that would resist the spectacle, for an art to be presented instead of represented—an art intended as work on oneself and a path to knowledge."¹¹

Bene's friendship with The Living Theater members is meaningful in this regard. At that time, the Living Theatre used to work and live in Rome: "They would come in mass to my performances, and I would go to see theirs. Although we were at the antipodes, we shared a common intention of *dismantling the scene*."¹² The set designer Salvatore Vendittelli recalls a conversation that Bene had with Judith Malina about a performance he staged in 1961, *Gregorio: Cabaret dell'800* (Gregorio: A Cabaret from the 1800s):

Talking about *Gregorio*: five years later [1966] watching the end of *Mysteries* by the Living, I saw again the same end I had staged. I went to compliment Malina in her changing room, and she triumphantly told me: "It's true, I saw your work at the Ridotto of Eliseo Theatre, and I was shocked by it: that image at the end was the most excellent way to express mutism, the impossibility of saying."¹³

Although both the founders of the Living and Bene took inspiration from Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty and its criticism of Western representational aesthetics, Bene's performances displayed a unique aesthetic, which was grounded in a specific dramaturgical approach and acting style. For Malina and Beck, the event was intended to shock spectators physically and emotionally, creating devised scripts about topical subjects and choosing site-specific locations where spectators and actors were displaced from their canonical, frontal relationship. On the other hand, Bene mainly performed in proscenium theatres. While aiming to make the proscenium the source of innovative events, he maintained some traditional features of theatrical representation, such as the distance between actors and audience. To do so, he focused on the Western dramatic canon, staging subverted versions of dramatic and literary classics (by Shakespeare, Marlowe, Collodi, Huysmans, Masoch, and Sade among others), undermining their original narratives and meanings through a dramaturgy of cuts, amendments, and insertions of other literary sources.

⁹ "Oliviero Toscani Parla di Carmelo Bene," accessed 14 December 2019, 0:25–0:29,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1CFo3-IjPB4>; 1'16"-1'18". About Bene's cinema, see also Mario Masini, *My Films with Carmelo Bene* (Venice: Damocle, 2020).

¹⁰ Despite having performed in unconventional venues at the beginning of his career, thanks to the celebrity acquired with his movies, Bene gained access to prestigious stages such as Teatro alla Scala (Milan) and Teatro Argentina (Rome). In 1988, he was appointed as artistic director of the Venice Biennale International Theatre Festival.

¹¹ Antonio Attisani, "Carmelo Bene. Discesa dal Monte Carmelo," in *L'arte e il sapere dell'attore* (Turin: Accademia University Press, 2017), 402. For an account of the Italian neo-avant-garde theatre, see also: Mario Prospero, "Contemporary Italian Theatre," *The Drama Review* 22, no. 1 (March 1978): 17–32.

¹² Bene and Dotto, *Vita di Carmelo Bene*, 182. Emphasis added. In Italian and specifically in this context *scena* means both the play's scene and the work done and performed on the stage to enact it.

¹³ Salvatore Vendittelli, *Carmelo Bene fra teatro e spettacolo* (Turin: Accademia University Press, 2015), 21.

According to Bene's approach, theatre is cross-disciplinary in nature, encompassing a variety of artistic forms: it can be a play, a devised piece, a concert, or a reading. It is the transformative quality of the performance that determines whether a performance is "great theatre."¹⁴ Theatre is the *locus* where the perception of one's identity is blurred and intersubjective connections among actors and spectators can occur. Indeed, "The theatre, the great theatre, is primarily a non-place; it is, therefore, safe from any history. It cannot be witnessed by anyone [...] No matter how hard a spectator tries, they should never be able to describe what they heard, nor to define the feelings by which they were possessed during their abandonment onto the theatrical event."¹⁵ It is not difficult to retrace here the influence of the Artaudian opposition to speech-based theatre, that is, the canon of Western theatre. In *The Theatre and Its Double*, Artaud identifies dialogue as the foundation of such theatre, and states: "Dialogue – a thing written and spoken – does not belong specifically to the stage, it belongs to books, as is proved by the fact that in all handbooks of literary history a place is reserved for the theatre as a subordinate branch of the history of the spoken language."¹⁶ Artaud rejects dialogue and speech, and is instead in favor of a performative act capable of overcoming the categories of verbal language, which are perceived as an obstacle to deep expression and communication: "All true feeling is in reality untranslatable. To express it is to betray it. But to translate it is *to dissimulate it*. [...] All powerful feeling produces in us the idea of the void. And the lucid language which obstructs the appearance of this void also obstructs the appearance of poetry in thought."¹⁷ Yet a considerable distance remains between Artaud and Bene. The former considers the stage to be "a concrete physical place that asks to be filled and to be given its own concrete language to speak."¹⁸ He also imagines a form of theatre that "draw[s] efficacy from its spontaneous creation on the stage, to the degree that it struggles directly with the stage without passing through words."¹⁹ On the contrary, Bene regards as naïve the very idea of a spontaneous creation independent of speech. In fact, the eradication of representation can only be achieved by impeding the intentionality of speech. As Camille Dumoulié observes,

In this lies a major difference between Carmelo Bene's theatre and that of Artaud. Even though the latter wanted to use all possible elements (phonic, sonorous, gestural ones) against meaning and language, he has always done so in the name of an authenticity that theatre could have shown: both "the language before words" in the *Theatre and its double* and, later, the search for a true language. [...] Against the dream of the origin [...] the theatre of Carmelo Bene multiplies the caves, the sets on stage, building a world without referent and without foundation [...].²⁰

Against Artaud's "pathos de l'authenticité,"²¹ Bene's theatrical research aspires to uncover an original, unsayable void of meaning, and to restate it as a broken dream: Artaud's pathos de l'authenticité – which no actorial interpretation of textual meaning could grant – gives way to the

¹⁴ Carmelo Bene, *La macchina attoriale*, interview by Pietro Ruspoli and Tonino del Colle, Raidue, 1998.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, 37.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 40–41.

²⁰ Camille Dumoulié, "Chôra ou le chœur de la voix," in *La ricerca impossibile* (Venice: Marsilio, 1990), 57.

²¹ *Ibid.*

staging of the realization of its impossibility. Bene, therefore, calls for a theatre where such a void should not be filled but made to emerge in its impossibility of being expressed. Bene elaborates, “It is necessary to disarticulate language, to find its black holes, in order to finally abandon ourselves to the signifier.”²² Dario Fo witnessed how such a feature in Bene’s work was present since almost the beginning.

Maybe for his way to perform it, *Majakovskij* was the play that surprised me the most because, even in this case, Bene broke with tradition. He could do so, for instance, by whispering some excerpts then almost crying, then screaming and taking long pauses or rushing with the lines one after the other. As a result, he was able to put you [as a spectator] in the condition to feel and understand the poems through the rhythms, the sound, the melody, rather than through meaning.²³

Bene used a truly unique expressive acting style (including his refined body language and vocal technique) that, instead of illustrating the logic of speech, worked towards disarticulating its common meaning, echoing the hidden nuances of words, revealing their antonyms, and expanding the spectators’ imagination. In this regard, it is worth clarifying that Benean theatre distances itself from deconstruction as well. According to Derrida, verbal language is seen as the very structure determining subjectivity and chronology; nevertheless, for Bene, the timelessness of the proscenium (both a physical and a metaphorical space) enables the actor to bring back an archaic “voice” capable of suspending the discursive practices of metaphysical thought and challenging the audience to experience a quasi-ecstatic rapture beyond logo-linguistic mediation.²⁴ To this end, says Bene,

[i]t is crucial to paralyze the action and reach what I like to call the “act.” While the action is something historical, connected to the project, the act is oblivion: in order to act, one needs to forget. Otherwise, it is impossible to act. This is why the meaning of the word “actor” should definitely be reformulated. While the “actors” are usually understood as the ones who make the action progress, lending their voice to characters, I go in the opposite direction. I move toward the act, namely toward the establishment of the void. This is what *actorial sovereignty*, or *hyper-humanity*, means. To do so, however, one needs to deconstruct language, shifting the emphasis from the signifieds to the *signifiers* which, as Lacan says, are stupid, are the angel’s smile. It is necessary to reach the unconscious, the unknown, the oblivion of the Self.²⁵

²² Bene, *La macchina attoriale*.

²³ See “Carmelo Bene. La Voce che si spense” (puntata 4), accessed 15 December, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5xC033rKFvg>. Different editions of the performance exist, and it is hard to figure out to which one of them Fo is referring. In fact, Bene staged the first version of his “show-concert” (a reading of poems by Majakovskij) in 1960 and restaged it in 1962, 1968, and 1980 when he added poems by Aleksandr Blok, Sergej Esenin, and Boris Pasternak. A television edition was also produced in 1974 under the title of *Quattro diversi modi di morire in versi* (Four Different Ways of Dying in Verses).

²⁴ On this aspect, see Francesco Chillemi, “Carmelo Bene and the Overcoming of Logocentrism: Epiphany of the Primordial Voice in the Eclipse of Meaning,” *Annali d’Italianistica* 29 (2011): 253–267.

²⁵ Umberto Artioli and Carmelo Bene, *Un dio assente. Monologo a due voci sul teatro*, eds. Antonio Attisani and Dotti Marco (Milan: Medusa, 2006), 124. Bene’s quotation of Lacan is taken from: Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar, Book XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1998), 20.

For Bene, this is a *theatre of the non-representable*, a theatre of darkness and emptiness; a darkness and an emptiness performed on the stage to invoke that which any performance cannot but fail to re-present on the stage, namely: the immediate, undefinable presentness of every act of signifying. Bene's theatre seeks that primeval dimension which lies at the very foundations of signification and which, therefore, no meaningful sign can exhaustively refer to. It is a theatre that explores its own failure. But how did Bene attempt to achieve such a goal? After almost ten years of overwhelming theatrical activity, he took a break from theatre and became active as a movie director, realizing five movies from 1968 to 1973.²⁶ When Bene returned to the stage, at the end of this experience, he started making large use of voice over, microphone, and amplification, by relying on technology to achieve the negation of representation. As Lorenzo Mango notices, "The problem for Bene is not really to erase the signs of representation but to push them to the threshold of their impossibility, so as to reveal their artificial nature and extraneousness to the horizon of signification."²⁷ Microphones and amplification became the privileged means that enabled Bene to push the limits of language to the point of preventing the audience from identifying the provenance of any voice and sound.

The late Seventies inaugurated the so-called "concerts season," during which Bene began to collaborate with the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, by invitation of Maestro Francesco Siciliani. The collaboration resulted in a number of works including the adaptations of *Manfred* (1979) by Byron-Schumann, *Hyperion* (1980) by Maderna-Hölderlin, and *Egmont, un ritratto di Goethe* (1983, Egmont, a Portrait of Goethe) with music by Beethoven. These almost-solo performances share similar features, namely: the use of music and a large use of amplification through which Bene's readings are delivered to the audience. The technological use of the actor's voice constitutes an essential part of Bene's aesthetics across media, from opera to drama and poetry. In *Lorenzaccio* (1986), in order to make apparent the distance of Bene's production from the original work by Alfred de Musset, the script of the latter is expunged, and, during the show, the speakers diffuse a recorded radiophonic reading of the play in voiceover.

Throughout his career, Bene resorted to the classics while often reinterpreting their dramaturgy. In his *Romeo and Juliet* (1976) for instance, Bene played the character of Mercutio and refused to die, extending his life on stage way beyond the Shakespearean tragedy. In *Hommelette for Hamlet* (1987), Bene added Guido Gozzano's *La signorina Felicita* to the literary sources of Shakespeare and Laforgue to emphasize his willingness to leave his world and start a new life. In the following sections, we explore how Bene put this conception of theatre into practice by examining two examples, *Lectura Dantis* (1981) and *Pinocchio, ovvero lo spettacolo della Provvidenza* (1998, Pinocchio, or the Spectacle of Providence). These performances demonstrate how Bene's studied exploitation of the employed technologies allows for the transformation of the literary texts into primeval sounds and gestures that, as impromptu signifiers, contrast any attempt to force a univocal meaning onto a given text.

²⁶ After *Nostra Signora dei Turchi* (1968), which was awarded the Special Prize of the Jury at the Venice Film Festival, *Un Amleto di meno* (1973, One Hamlet Less) was presented at the Cannes Film Festival, while *Hermitage* (1968), *Capricci* (1969, Tantrums), and *Don Giovanni* (1970) were screened in the same city at "Quinzaine des réalisateurs" making him known in France.

²⁷ Lorenzo Mango, *La scrittura scenica*, 80.

Lectura Dantis: Getting Lost in the “Poetry of the Voice”

August 2, 1980: a bomb devastates the Central Railway Station of Bologna, killing eighty-five people and wounding hundreds more.²⁸ This is one of the most ferocious terrorist attacks in Europe since World War II. July 31st, 1981: a special event has been organized to commemorate the victims of this neo-fascist massacre. More than one hundred thousand people gathered for hours under the Bologna towers, waiting for the event to begin. On the terrace of the Asinelli Tower, Bene suddenly appeared and received a roaring welcome. Bene’s performance consisted of the reading of a selection of Dante’s cantos from the *Divine Comedy*, as well as sonnets from *Rime* and *Vita Nova*. The choice of Dante’s poetry in this context was intended to celebrate the beauty of Italian as a tribute to the cultural identity of the country. Nonetheless, in addressing the audience at the end of the performance, Bene made a provocative remark: “Although I would like to thank the spectators, I must remind everyone that, being mortally wounded myself, I have dedicated this show not to the dead, but to the wounded of the horrendous carnage.”²⁹ With this comment, Bene attested to the importance of not wallowing in grief for the dead. He intended to spare a thought for the survivors of the attack and the Italian people who, remaining alive, have the ethical duty of dealing with the burden of such a political event, pondering how to behave in its aftermath. In this way, Bene rejected any contrived commemoration of the dead, urging the spectators to focus on the present to envision a different future.

A notable accomplishment of Bene’s career, this performance constitutes an example of his expanded idea of theatre (its philosophical tenets and praxis), which aims at triggering a quasi-ecstatic connection between the actor and the spectators.³⁰ Two years after this event, in 1983, Bene published his autobiography *Sono apparso alla Madonna* (I Appeared to the Madonna). A chapter of the volume is entirely devoted to the performance, and its title indeed derives from his *Lectura Dantis* in Bologna. Thanks to the amplification of his voice diffused to the large audience, and to his position atop the Asinelli Tower, Bene imagines his appearance to the square below him as being similar to witnessing a Madonna’s epiphany.

Lectura Dantis provides an excellent example of Bene’s performative praxis. Here, he *performs the text* through a musical use of the voice, supported by technology. His sophisticated vocal technique serves to accentuate the rhythm and sound of the verses beyond their conceptual meaning, while technological devices (e.g., amplifiers, microphones, and loudspeakers) allow his voice to project from the Asinelli Tower to the streets and squares all around. The Dantean lines acquire an exceptional spatial dimension and spinning rhythm: Bene’s voice, enhanced and distorted by technology, potently reverberates everywhere, inebriating the audience with its rhythmic melody. Dante’s poetry ideally suits Bene’s aesthetic vision, according to which the subject should not be able to describe the experience of taking part in a truly transformative event. Indeed, his reading of the verses complies with Dante’s concept of ineffability – the inability to fully express in words his experience of standing before the divine presence (“trasumanar per verba / non si poria”).³¹

²⁸ The terrorist attack followed a series of many others perpetrated by both left and right-wing militant organizations from the late 1960s to the early 1980s in Italy.

²⁹ Carmelo Bene, *Lectura Dantis*, 31 July 1981, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SMY-tAyP_I.

³⁰ For example, see this recording of Bene reading the sonnet “Tanto gentile e tanto onesta pare,” 24 December 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BVhacdyG-IA>.

³¹ Dante Alighieri, *Divina Commedia*, “Paradiso”, I, vv. 70-73. “To soar beyond the human cannot be described / in words.” Translated by Jean and John Hollander, *Paradiso* (Austin: Doubleday, 2007).

Yet far from betraying the original verses, Bene's reading makes Dante's lines clearly understandable, allowing their material (phonic and musical) component to re-emerge. This way, the atmosphere and dramatic intensity of Dante's poetry is enhanced, and the modified syntax of the texts contributes to new nuances of meaning. Helga Finter observes that, "by the acoustic aura of the reverberation halo, the structure of the verse is displayed as transcendental poetic voice transfigured as the voice of the Other. On the other hand, the singular voices of the figures, represented as drive-determined vocal images, gain by this technique a density of corporality and sensuality."³² As a result, Bene's voice bridges the performer's "inside" to those of the spectators. Or, in his own words, "the inside moves to another inside – voice-listening and voice-heard, intimate because displaced and subtracted from one another. The speaker and the listener are detached *in* nature and reattached *in* technology."³³ Thanks to this mingling of agents and effects, the subject loses the sense of individuality in her perception. Bene seeks a heuristic of the text where a porous subject combines activity and passivity, merging Self and Other.

Bene's interpretation of Dante's lines aims to emphasize the sound of poetry rather than the meaning. His ongoing act of self-listening while reading revivifies the lines' original density, giving a sense of their deepest significance beyond the paraphrased meaning. Bene said in recalling this event: "In order for the miracle to happen, it is necessary for the 'I' to disappear in the act of saying."³⁴ This is what Bene defines as a "theatre of absence": the absence of meaning, the absence of the Self, and eventually the absence of the traditional actor, who is here asked to become an *actorial machine* (*macchina attoriale*).³⁵ Bene explains:

What is an actorial machine? First of all, it must be something amplified. Amplification is a strange thing. Amplification is not at all a blowing up, that is, a magnification; instead, it is like looking at this page. If I look at it this way, I can see and hear it; on the contrary, if I put this [page] nearer and nearer to my eyes, the contours disappear, and I cannot see anything. [...] [Therefore,] I always need (*I*, so to speak) to read, to be said, and not to re-port, to re-view, to re-cite [...]. The theatre is in the *act*, that is, in the immediate, in what a philosopher³⁶ called the *immediate vanishing*: the presence is at the same time the absence.³⁷

His *Lectura Dantis* aimed therefore to perform a reading as "immediate vanishing": below the tower and through the streets – only Bene's voice seems to exist. There is no place for the actor – in other words, no place for any character interpreting the lines, or any characterization of the situation the poems describe. In a seminar held at the University of Rome in 1984, Maurizio Grande introduced Bene's work as follows:

³² Helga Finter, "Love for Letters or Reading as Performance: Carmelo Bene's *Lectura Dantis*," (lecture, University of Notre Dame, April 2, 2006). The text of the lecture is accessible at: <https://sciami.com/scm-content/uploads/sites/9/2016/11/Helga-finter-Carmelo-Bene-Dante-reading-as-performance.pdf>.

³³ Bene and Dotto, *Vita di Carmelo Bene*, 339.

³⁴ Carmelo Bene, "Sono apparso alla Madonna," in *Opere* (Milan: Bompiani, 1995), 1130.

³⁵ For a more detailed analysis regarding the concept of Bene's "macchina attoriale" see P. Giacchè, *Carmelo Bene: Antropologia di una Macchina Attoriale* (Milan: Bompiani, 2007).

³⁶ Bene is referring to Hegel. With regard to the interrelation between being and nothingness, the philosopher maintains that, "their truth is [...] this movement of the immediate vanishing of the one in the other: becoming, a movement in which both are distinguished, but by a difference which has equally immediately resolved itself." See *Science of Logic*, translated by A.V. Miller (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1999,) 83.

³⁷ Bene, *La macchina attoriale*.

The “I” is based on the principle of externalization, the principle of representation. Through the “I,” I represent myself in the world, I establish that social game that is a theatrical game of recognizing the others in the language and the exhibition of myself as an image. This is what the voice is for. It’s the support of the different levels of emotional, mental, psychological, artificial intensities of this game of roles, which is life regulated by theatre.³⁸

Grande’s reflection constitutes an essential key to understanding the operation that Bene carried out on the voice. According to Grande, in Bene’s theatre,

representation comes as *phonè of the subject*, meaning presence of the subject to himself within the *phonè*, as affirmation of a presence subtracted from the time, a condition of presence of the being captured in the voice. As to Carmelo Bene, the *phonè* of the actor becomes the instrument of a subjectivity that does not step back behind a character or behind a mask, to whom, literally, one lends their voice. Here, the actor’s voice denies the premises of representation by ceasing to be a prosthesis of the I-person.³⁹

Barely visible from the height of the tower, Bene’s silhouette disappears, as if forgotten behind the seduction of his voice. As its amplified sound touches places and penetrates bodies, vision increasingly vanishes, and imagination takes over. The disembodiment occurs by working on the materiality of the voice: it is an embodied disembodiment, with an intent and effect of oblivion. The “reading-oblivion” is indeed another distinctive element of Bene’s theatrical performance. Bene explains:

If I read, even in the concerts, it is neither because I need to remember [the script] nor because I presume that the written text corresponds to the oral. No! There is instead a profound idiosyncrasy between the written and the oral... I do read to forget: thus, reading as oblivion; reading, paradoxically, as non-memory. One must become stupid, stupid, infinitely stupid, in order to reach a state of abandonment.⁴⁰

According to this manifesto, the actor’s voice, implemented with complex technological support, should explore the empathetic *poetry of the voice* rather than the logical *voice of the poetry*.⁴¹ As

³⁸ “Carmelo Bene: Phonè e Immagine – Completo,” accessed 26 December 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iXHjNhpqBDY>.

³⁹ Maurizio Grande, “L’uso della strumentazione elettronica nell’ultimo Bene,” in *Il suono del teatro*, ed. Renato Tomasino (Palermo: Acquario, 1982), 78–79, 83.

⁴⁰ Bene, *La macchina attoriale*.

⁴¹ From the early seventies on, Bene’s research explored the potential of technology as a tool to combine voice and musical phrasing. Based on the conception of voice as *phonè* and of actor as *actorial machine*, his work on poetry and music ranges from *Quattro modi diversi di morire in versi* (1974, Four Different Ways to Die in Poetry), a compound of modernist Russian poetry, and the *Lectura Dantis* (1981) to the recordings of Italian poets, such as Giacomo Leopardi’s poems in *Voce dei Canti* (1997, Voice of the Songs) and Dino Campana’s *Canti Orfici* (1994, Orphic Songs). At the request of conductor Francesco Siciliani to work on classical music repertoire, in 1978 Bene transformed Schumann’s symphonic poem *Manfred* into an *oratorio* by employing a particular style, the *voce orchestra* (orchestra voice) and sound effects. Subsequently, Bene collaborated with such contemporary classical music composers as Bruno Maderna (*Hyperion*, 1980) and Salvatore Sciarrino (*Lectura Dantis*). In the late seventies

Bene points out, “the word is never used to express the ‘concept’ [...] If I limited myself to only translate the concept, the result would be a dismal prose, artistically speaking.”⁴² Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and sonnets, which surround the listeners, now appear in a transfigured, yet enthralling, shape. Resuscitated by Bene’s voice, the texts are continually reinvented: the *terzine* are metrically altered, words and syllables are unusually stressed, and the narrative flow is continuously fragmented by interruptions, interjections, suspensions, and accelerations.

Bene’s performance in Bologna was a resounding success, which the Italian media, political leaders, and cultural figures unanimously commended in the following weeks. The actor himself later came to regard his reading of Dante in the painful commemorative context against terror attacks as “a unique event, the greatest of my life.”⁴³ The day before the performance, Bene had speculated on terrorism and Italian society at that time:

Imbecility is terroristic, indifference is terroristic, the shadow of the silent majorities⁴⁴ is terroristic. We should not talk about terrorists as if they were other-than-ourselves. [...] My reading of Dante is dedicated to the young marginalizing themselves. I trust their distrust. I trust that they will not become entangled in wars, peaceful carnages, or bloody peace.⁴⁵

To Bene, historical events should be understood beyond their impact on everyday politics, as he rereads texts through and beyond their historicity. Thus, according to Bene, rediscovering the poetry of an ancient writer like Dante can be used as a powerful means to recall a terror attack at the end of the twentieth century, ponder its consequences, and think about constructive responses.

As Bene calls indifference and imbecility *terroristic*, his critique of contemporary Western culture had to include its educational systems, through which political power affects life as lived by individuals, from their education to their life choices, affecting their attitude toward life. It is therefore not by chance that Bene chose the character of Pinocchio—childhood without restraints: an untamed marionette, who does not want to go to school—as a leitmotif of his career, producing several performances and a television adaptation inspired by Collodi’s world-famous tale.

throughout the eighties, starting with such live performances as *Romeo e Giulietta* (1976, *Romeo and Juliet*), *S.A.D.E. Spettacolo in Due Aberrazioni* (1977, *S.A.D.E. Spectacle in Two Aberrations*), and *Riccardo III* (1977, *Richard III*), Bene increasingly made use of a variety of new phonic devices to trigger metafictional effects (most notably, playback and asynchrony). This study on the voice and technology, combined with a refinement of the actor’s gesturality, becomes even more apparent in the play *Lorenzaccio* (1986). Here, to the end of reversing the cause-and-effect relationship between the actor’s gestures and the sounds his gestures produce, pre-recorded amplified sounds are used to dictate the actor’s movements. Bene’s research reaches its peak with *Hamlet Suite* (1994) – which transforms *Hamlet* into a live concert for two, a *voce orchestra* and an orchestra – and *Macbeth-Horror Suite* (1996), which merges Verdi’s opera with Shakespeare’s original play.

⁴² Carmelo Bene, *Il principe cestinato*, interview by Carlo Refele and Maurizio Grande, 1972.

⁴³ Bene and Dotto, *Vita di Carmelo Bene*, 242.

⁴⁴ Bene is referring to Jean Baudrillard’s socio-political treatise, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities* (first Italian edition: *All’ombra delle maggioranze silenziose, ovvero la morte del sociale* [Bologna: Cappelli 1978]).

⁴⁵ Bene and Dotto, *Vita di Carmelo Bene*, 241.

Pinocchio Overturned: The Unaware Omnipotence of Childhood

Bene was fascinated by *Pinocchio* from the beginning of his career and staged three editions of the work in the sixties (1962, 1964, 1966) during the era of the *cantine romane*, when basements were set up as experimental theatres. He then produced two more versions: one in 1981 and the last in 1998. In the 1981 edition, a voiceover was introduced in the play and the original cast was reduced to only him and Lydia Mancinelli. In the 1998 edition, the cast was limited to Bene and Sonia Bergamasco.

Bene's *Pinocchios* indeed epitomize his expressive, dramaturgical, and critical work on classics and the political dimension of his performances as a critique of power. The social rules and moral expectations the puppet learns in the attempt to elude them represent the operations of control that cultural and social power exercise over the spontaneity of infancy and the freedom of the subject's mind, body, and will. Bene's unusual (de)combination of body and verbal language transforms representation into a flow of untaught acts, a performance planned against the representation of power emerging through a coded language that reflects its values. Pinocchio performs the untaught, a voice that is revealed in the performative moment and not before. In doing so, the adoption of technological tools is still essential to achieve Bene's goals.⁴⁶ In a volume devoted to the 1981 edition of Bene's *Pinocchio*, Roberto Tessari insists on the meaning of *hypokrinesthai*, the act of answering under the inspiration of a superior entity, and associates such mystical ritual with Bene's practice: "The actor who defines himself as 'Absence of the Actor' is situated [...] at a metaphorical point. At this very point, where the actor himself speaks with a voice that is not his, 'what is hidden' is expressed again and forever."⁴⁷ The absence of the traditional actor is replaced by the actorial machine, who employs technological means. As Roberto Scarpa notices, amplification and playback become essential tools to the negation of representation that Bene was trying to achieve in his theatre:

The *play-back* is indeed the most impressive moment in the path that Carmelo Bene traces to cancel representation. It creates a double time: if the space in theatre keeps the three dimensions of our reality, from this point of view, in *Pinocchio* time has two dimensions. On one side, there is the present of the stage; on the other, there is the past, the voice, the tale.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ As technology became part of his experimentation, Bene constantly sought the most recent innovation in the field. In what follows, while staging the 1981 version of *Pinocchio*, Bene discussed the quality of the devices of the time, saying that its lack of development would negatively impact his own art. "Thanks to the cooperation with Pisa, what we have done is only a suggestion of what can be done. There is still much to be done. I would like to work only with audiolaser, with a laser lighting, not with these things. [...] We will die before having seen such amazing things. [...] I am disappointed because, since it cannot have a perfect technological quality, the sound cannot benefit from its full 'presence.' It is clearly compensated for by the volume, but with the risk of it remaining *only* volume. People cannot stand it, used as they are to drama, to representation, and hence to snoozing while in their seats, while the actor carries the voice. Now the fault is a bit of the people who are unused to the phonic instruments but the fault is also of the means that I consider to be inappropriate and still too unsophisticated. We cannot absolutely privilege the central area of the orchestra for which we usually conceive the sound direction (the so called 'direction'...) It's tough for the ones who sit below a speaker. There is still much to be done." See "Non trascurare le bambine...", *Conversazione di Carmelo Bene*, in *Pinocchio: "Summa ateologica" di Carmelo Bene*, ed. Roberto Tessari (Florence: Liberoscambio, 1982), 98.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁴⁸ Roberto Scarpa, "Nota in margine alla storia e alle tecniche dello spettacolo di Pinocchio," in *Pinocchio "Summa ateologica" di Carmelo Bene*, 113–121.

The performative act belongs to a present tense that has already passed in the moment it is accomplished, thus, it is impossible to catch it in a conscious state of mind. Bene would investigate this conundrum in his performance *Lorenzaccio, al di là di de Musset e Benedetto Varchi* (Lorenzaccio, beyond de Musset and Benedetto Varchi) and theorize it in a homonymous philosophical tale.

Pinocchio, ovvero lo spettacolo della Provvidenza (1998, Pinocchio, or the Spectacle of Providence), was the last of a series of distinct productions (performances and dramaturgies – *riscritture* [“rewritings”]) that Bene devoted to Pinocchio.⁴⁹ All the characters could be identified thanks to familiar costumes and masks, fully covering the actor’s head, making the actor look like a human marionette. Pinocchio and the Fata Turchina emerge as the leading characters of Bene’s interpretation of Collodi’s work. Sonia Bergamasco played all the characters except Pinocchio, played by Bene without any mask. For this last version, Bene chose to employ playback only for the characters’ voice, using the recording of the 1981 edition.⁵⁰

The Fata Turchina’s mask resembles a doll with movable eyes who robotically moves the lower part of her face as she talks. Dramatically different from the reassuring and protective original figure, Bene’s Fata Turchina awakens uncanny and disturbing feelings in the viewer. Significantly, Pinocchio, the only puppet in the play, is the sole character without a mask; Bene only wears a prosthesis, a long flexible rubber nose. The symbolism of the tale is thus reversed: an adult human personifies the wooden puppet and its innocent reluctance to abide by the rules of social life; conversely, the Fata becomes a horrific doll representing social order and conveying its values—Bene expressly asks who is talking through her, maneuvering her body. Yet, they both share a rare innocence, miraculously retained from the subject’s lost experience of infancy, when, as Giorgio Agamben advances in *Infancy and History*, experience has not yet been mediated by language. He writes, “A primary experience, far from being subjective, could then only be what in human beings comes before the subject – that is, before language: a ‘wordless’ experience in the literal sense of the term, a human *infancy* [*in-fancy*], whose boundary would be marked by language.”⁵¹ Reading Bene’s Pinocchio through Agamben’s idea of infancy, we observe how the former’s performance language in Pinocchio, too, goes after an idea of the original experience, sought through a combination of refined voice technique, playback, silence, and bodily expressivity in *Pinocchio*. Agamben further explains, “But, from the point where there is experience, where there is infancy, whose expropriation is the subject of language, then language appears as the place where experience must become truth.”⁵² Similarly, in Bene’s *Pinocchio*, if language reflects the social order of the subject and its conventional morality, the Artaudian cruelty of infancy – as Bene portrays it here – escapes it, counteracting it with a gestural and vocal performance capable of reviving a more direct, unmediated connection with the experience of life. Such life is here identified in Pinocchio’s resistance to abide by social and cultural rules. Pinocchio is the realm of infancy as experience par excellence, capable of criticizing the logocentric Western society and culture that infancy precedes; but also capable of

⁴⁹ The 1998 version of Pinocchio is currently the only one available to the public thanks to its television edition: <https://www.raiplay.it/video/2017/07/Pinocchio-ovvero-lo-spettacolo-della-Provvidenza-6968519d-6f1b-42cd-b291-40de62a166d7.html>.

⁵⁰ In that version, the Fata Turchina (the Blue Fairy) was played by Bene’s partner Lydia Mancinelli, and the puppet was performed by Bene, who also lent his voice to the male characters.

⁵¹ Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: Essays on the Destruction of Experience*, trans. by Liz Heron. (London: Verso, 1993), 47. Ibid., *Infanzia e Storia* (Turin: Einaudi, 2001).

⁵² Ibid., 51.

traversing that society and modifying it by showing a different truth – a truth that locates experience in the absence of teaching needs and moral rules.

The critique of the relationship between culture, society, and primal experiences is conveyed through an uncommon acting style and vocal utterance aimed at boycotting the conventional acting gestures, which Bene understands as conveying the discourse of cultural power. Instead of the realistic acting and emphatic diction taught in acting schools, Bene draws on the technique of the *cabotin*, the virtuosic and derisory street actor, and his *phonè*. The interpretation of the two actors and the adoption of specific devices disprove the moral underlying the Collodian story. For instance, the Fata's unnaturally mechanical mandibular movements deny the eternal beauty of Collodi's character, highlighting instead her connection to death. Although the skin of her mask looks deadly pale (her mask appears somewhat like a decomposed skull with doll eyes and puffed cheeks), the puppet life she depends on enables her to intervene and survive the domain of death. Furthermore, the tonal qualities of her voice compensate for her lack of facial expression. The vast range of sounds the actress uses – passing from the narrative to the dialogic register; from the scolding voice of a mother to the persuasive voice of a teacher; and from a delicate childish voice to fits of laughter – shifts the meaning of her sentences to other potential directions by playing on the exacerbation of the sound of the words.

Having his face covered solely by makeup and a long nose, Bene's Pinocchio shows, by contrast, a rich range of facial expressions, which serve as a counterpoint to the meaning of the text. As Pinocchio argues with his father Geppetto in receiving his advice, he makes his extreme discomfort apparent by shrinking his eyes, plugging his ears, continuously changing grimaces, and talking with his neck bent to the right shoulder. This stylistic strategy – which employs expressionist mimicry and gestural, and emphasizes the sound of words – is enhanced by the unsynchronized playback. In displacing the relation between the *said* and the performed, it mutates the original dialogues into a collection of memories gradually emerging from Pinocchio's unconscious mind.

Bene displays the double articulation of language as both a logically determined content (the *said* from the written text) and an inconceivable dimension (the *saying*, the event of language in its performative happening). Accordingly, through the systematic violation of common stylistic features of meaningful communication, his *Pinocchio* ends up compromising the coherence of the semiotic system and causing the narrative to be challenged.

Bene's interpretation of *Pinocchio* emphasizes the title character's existential journey towards his normalized place in society and culture as a painful experience. Likewise, despite her moral role in the story – namely, to help Pinocchio become a real child by leaving his puppet body behind – the Fata is a tormented soul. This is evident in several passages, including the episode of her resuscitation from death (a death due to her sorrow for Pinocchio's inappropriate behavior). When the two meet again, she tells him that she has grown up and is now ready to be his mother (instead of simply a sister, as she previously portrayed herself). Her new role almost causes the Fata to lose her delicate voice. She acquires a mature voice and reproving tone – even her crystalline laughter begins to fade away. While teaching him good manners, she makes a bundle out of her skirt, as if cradling an infant, training herself to become a mother. Yet, as she continues in her argument and scolds Pinocchio for his bad habits, suddenly something shakes her moral certitude: she starts aggressively squeezing the bundle, which has lowered to her stomach as if it had become her pregnant belly. Then, as she speaks, she violently punches it. Bene depicts an unhappy woman – who is even more unhappy as she feels compelled to tell Pinocchio to also abide by the social rules and thus become an adult.

Leaving puppethood behind to become human beings means therefore reaching adulthood and embracing the conventional rules of society. As the performance is set in a large room with a chess floor, Pinocchio and the Fata seem to lead their existence amid a mortal game, between the regulative measures of social order and the unruly realm of infancy. The Fata and Pinocchio present two different versions of the puppet: the Fata is the puppet whose strings are pulled by socio-cultural and political power; Pinocchio is a free puppet, the unmannered subject who has not yet conformed to any normative culture and is still rapt with an inborn joy. In spite of her instinct for rebellion, the Fata inflicts pain onto herself: she accepts the rules and imposes them on Pinocchio. In her puppet mask and costume, the Fata characterizes the ideal citizen as prostrate before the educational principles of a superimposed culture: a puppet in the hands of democratic power.

In particular, the Fata insists on the importance of going to school to finally become a true child and abandon the condition of puppet. In Bene's interpretation, however, school is the place for the eradication of life, experience, and creativity. Through the dialectic between Pinocchio, his father Geppetto, and the Fata, Bene's work reinterprets *Pinocchio* in terms of a critique of the educational system in contemporary Western societies. Bene dismisses education as a tool that political power makes use of to establish its sovereignty over life and knowledge. He indeed denounces as insincere the whole rhetoric of socio-cultural values, which, he claims, can only result in that homogenization of thought to which (cheering or protesting) masses are unknowingly subjugated. His art, instead, aspires to enable spectators to rediscover the precious uniqueness of their own potential as thinkers, and to therefore develop a personal path of inquiry and study.

Invited to the popular Italian talk show *Il Laureato* (The Graduate), Bene addressed the issue of education before an audience of college students from the University of Salento, Apulia. By referring to the etymons of *studere* (desire) and *schola* (rest, ease), he defends the value of studying against its institutionalization:

A student [...] is the one who desires. Nothing less: to desire! So, you see that *school* and *studying* are antithetic to one another! That is, they cannot coexist. [...] In order to learn, one should not attend an institution, where pupils are taught. To learn, one needs to unlearn what they learned, struggling twice and wasting their time; indeed, we should not get the state involved in this matter: the state should desist from governing! The state always imposes its codes... Otherwise, we end up with representation. And any representation is inevitably a representation of the state, alas. Did I make clear the antithesis between studying and school [as institutionalized education]? Studying implies desiring. On the contrary, school is a training ground for idleness; it targets sloths and slackers. Save yourselves while there is still time!⁵³

While these statements illustrate Bene's dismissal of the educational system of Western civilization, at the same time they call for an alternative to it, by shifting the focus from the concept of *school* to that of *student*. Driven by such an anti-humanistic slant, Bene underscores the importance of "de-thinking" Occidental thought and neutralizing the forms of power it generates. It all starts with a liberation of the conscience from the obligation to undergo

⁵³ Carmelo Bene, "Carmelo Bene a *Il Laureato*," 1996. 12:21–12:44; 13:06–14:01, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gOfOG705HNY>.

systematized education and follows with an invitation to choose what to study and how to learn. The preliminary step consists in the recognition and sometimes the rejection of those superimposed values, norms, and beliefs which, if passively introjected, contribute to impoverishing the richness of *singularity* – eventually reducing *it* to a de-finite ego, a falsely fixed identity, a fabricated social role.

In conclusion, by working on Dante's experience of pure sound leading to a miraculous-like event; Pinocchio's resistance to life normalization; and his own critique of schooling as a didactic system, Bene ponders the creative experience of theatre. Theatre emerges as a privileged way of thinking about reality and its social rules, capable of emphasizing the importance of perception and pushing the boundaries of individual freedom to a deeper understanding. Bene's philosophy gives rise to a praxis where the perpetual creativity of thought is caught in action in the very making of theatre (including dramaturgies as "riscrittura" and acting as *phonè* and "macchina attoriale"). In such processual action, thought reveals itself as irreducible to normative ideas. Bene's art suggests an ethical standpoint. While ideological certainties should be regarded as nothing but transient meanings, one should never lose their sense of wonder and always nurture their desire to explore the unknown.

In a neo-Nietzschean fashion, Bene's art incessantly conveys its ultimate message, a simple yet challenging exhortation: abandon yourself, be a masterpiece.⁵⁴ The rejection of the "I" is the only way to encounter the Other. Studying and performing are the path toward the oblivion of any objectifying pretension. Performance is a means to experience that "unaware providence of omnipotence" in which children and mystics are lost.⁵⁵ Bene once wrote:

There are stupids who have seen the Madonna, and there are stupids who have not. [...] But those who see the Madonna do not see her, like two eyes staring at two eyes through a wall: transparency is a miracle. [...] And such a miracle annihilates them: they do not see the Madonna; rather, they are the Madonna they see. [...] Those who see do not see what they see, those who fly are themselves the flying. The ones who fly do not know themselves.⁵⁶

In stultitia, stupor et revelatio.

⁵⁴ "Yesterday—would you believe it?—I heard Bizet's masterpiece for the twentieth time. Once more I attended with the same gentle reverence; once again I did not run away. This triumph over my impatience surprises me. How such a work completes one! Through it one almost becomes a 'masterpiece' oneself." See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case Of Wagner*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 157.

⁵⁵ Carmelo Bene, "La vita bambina," *Opere* (Milan: Bompiani, 1995), 1043.

⁵⁶ Carmelo Bene, "Sono apparso alla Madonna," in *Opere* (Milan: Bompiani, 1995) 1126–1127.