

*Platea** by Giulio Paolini and Carlo Quartucci, 1982

Music by Giancarlo Schiaffini, produced by La Zattera di Babele.

First performance: Genazzano, Castello Colonna, Sala Martino V, 22 May 1982.

Other performances: Kassel, Staatstheater, 18 and 19 June 1982 (on the occasion of *Documenta 7*); Venice, Teatro Malibran, 6-8 June 1984 (on the occasion of the *41st Venice Biennale*); Erice, Cinema della Vittoria, December 1985.

* The title *Platea* has a twofold meaning: on the one hand, it is the Italian for “orchestra seats” and also the image visible on the curtain-cloak worn by the actress; on the other, it is an acronym for Penelope (P), Laertes (L), Anticlea (A), Telemachus (T), Eumaeus (E), Antinous (A), all characters from Homer’s *Odyssey*, who appear in this performance as well (T/N).

“The performance totally invades the space of the theatre. On the tiers where the spectators are seated, amidst plaster casts, a group of actors mime an action. The scene is actually made up of an immense curtain-cloak, on which the image of a traditional orchestra section has been painted; an actress pulls and wrap the curtain-cloak around her body” (A. Mammì, in *Giulio Paolini. La Casa di Lucrezio*, exhibition catalogue, Spoleto, Palazzo Rosari Spada (Casalecchio di Reno: Grafis Edizioni, 1984, p. 71).

“Ulysses (the spectator) stands facing the characters as he waits for the performance to begin.

Platea is the attempt, proven to be impossible to carry out, to stage the idea of a performance from start to finish.

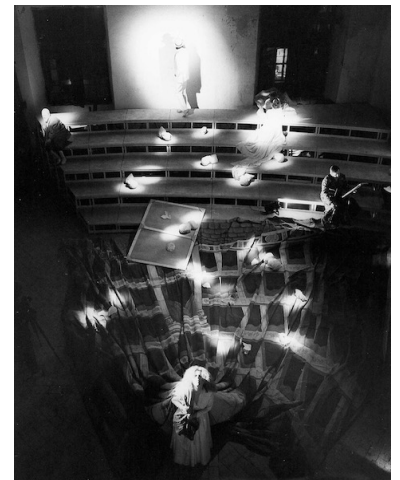
The fact that the performance never comes about, that is, that it cannot be seen or listened to as something suited to the spectator’s intellectual synthesis, is established by the very premises from which it arises.

In 1978, for an exhibition held at the Museo Pignatelli Cortes in Naples, I showed a piece that consisted in a silent assemblage made up of six chairs, upon which were lined up the ‘portraits’ of six Homeric characters designated to recognize the figure of Ulysses.

Who, then, if not the spectator, was being called to the stage?

No one could be certain of his or her own role, of course.

Now that we really are inside a theatre, the chances of this happening no longer seem likely. Here then, around Penelope (the costume she wears is the uninhabited shell of the theatre cavity itself, the suffocated clamour of what [of everything that] does not take place), arranged according to the rule of acrostics which dictates the sequence: Laertes, Anticlea, Telemachus, Eumaeus, Antinous.





Penelope's wait, complementary to our own, is entrusted to the void destined to reveal the cardinal points of the tragedy: a word without voice is the memory of an unknown latitude, populated by absences that force us to bear witness" (G. Paolini, "Platea è il tentativo...", 1982, revised version of the English translation published in *Sipario. Balla, De Chirico, Savinio, Picasso, Paolini, Cucchi*, exhibition catalogue, Rivoli, Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea [Milan: Edizioni Charta, 1997], p. 263).

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