

Chiara Guidi's Theatre for Children within the Scope of the ARGOS Project: The Case of Staging the Play *La Terra dei Lombrichi* as an Object of Experimental Observation

By Venetia A. Theodoropoulou¹

Abstract

This paper appertains to an observatory research study conducted within the frame of the ARGOS European research Project and explores the development and the impact of the creative process of an artistic project in the field of contemporary performing arts. This refers to the staging of the theatrical play *La Terra dei Lombrichi* by Chiara Guidi, intended for a child audience (Italy, 2019). On the basis of a qualitative empirical setting in combination with the use of several associated bibliographical and Web sources for data acquisition, the present study is focused on an overview of the conceptual and methodological premises of the aforementioned project, and their application in practice. Its aim is to offer a spherical and comprehensive insight into its evolvement both at a micro- and macro-scopic scale through a critical-interpretive approach. It argues that it constitutes a paradigmatic case of a multi-visual operationalisation in the field of theatre for children, denoting also that the creative process of an artistic oeuvre may not simply form a preparatory stage for its realisation, but, in fact, it may represent, up to a point, an interesting part of its presentation in its own right. Drawing on theoretical patterns from the fields of childhood and theatre studies, it aspires further to feature its extrapolated contextualisation in the Western cultural sphere, by unveiling that it is permeated by the dialectical agency of an amalgam of various childhood and art perceptions that reflect evolving historical trends inscribed on the axis of both art and science.

¹ PhD Candidate, Department of Theatre Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of the Peloponnese, theovenetia@gmail.com.

I wish to express my **special thanks** to the chief team of the “**Societas Raffaello Sanzio**” Archive, especially to its director **Claudia Castellucci**, as well as its curators, the academic advisor **Dr. Eleni Papalexiou** and the documentary advisor **Dr. Avra Xepapadakou**, for their valuable contribution to the writing of this paper, by providing me with access to its material and useful guidelines for its selection.

I. Introduction

i) The ARGOS Project

ARGOS is a European innovative cultural project framed within the “Creative Europe Cooperation Projects – Culture” Program (2018-2021) and funded by the European Union. It involves the complementary collaboration between partners from several backgrounds (researchers, artists, cultural workers, students and spectators).² As described, “its aim is to create a new community of observers that studies the practice of creation and builds a polyphonic narrative that will interpret the cross-cutting dynamics developed during the creative process in the field of performing arts.”³

The ARGOS Project’s name derives from the Greek mythology and, more specifically, is associated with the mythological figure of “Argus the Panoptes” or “Argos,” who represented a perpetually alert giant with multiple eyes, being characteristically known for his remarkable panoramic vision. Analogously, the ARGOS Project refers to a multi-visionary approach formed on the basis of a wide spectrum of views pertaining to various groups of participants - “watchers,” with a special focus on the artistic creative process in the context of contemporary performing arts.⁴

The ARGOS Project is based on the partnership of five research teams affiliated to five European Universities: the Rennes 2 University (France), which is the coordinating institution, the University of Antwerp (Belgium), the University of Lille (France), the University of Lisbon (Portugal) and the University of the Peloponnese (Greece). It also involves the organization of a network of activities conducted by five artistic collaborators. These are the following: the “Au bout du plongeur” association (France), the “Mousses Nomadic Arts Centre” (Belgium), the “Théâtre National de Bretagne” (France), the “Teatro Bando” (Portugal) and the theatre company “Societas” (Italy). The program endures 30 months and takes place in five locations

² “Towards Acts of Creation and Dynamics through Cross-Collaboration in the Performing Arts,” *Argos Newsletter*, no. 1 (Fall 2019), [https://mailchi.mp/d7f1c4dc0ac6/newsletter-1?e=\[UNIQID\]](https://mailchi.mp/d7f1c4dc0ac6/newsletter-1?e=[UNIQID]).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

(Italy, Belgium, France, Portugal and Lebanon). It entails the conduction of five experimentations that respectively engage five different forms of observation: virtual, integrated, intercultural, participatory and creative.⁵

ii) The ARGOS Experimentation in the Form of Participatory Observation:

The play *La Terra dei Lombrichi* by Chiara Guidi - Societas (Cesena, Italy, December 2019)

The present Experimentation of the ARGOS Program was concentrated on its participants – observers’ direct and active involvement in the creative process of a performance in the field of theatre for children. This concerned the staging of the theatrical play *La Terra dei Lombrichi. Una tragedia per bambini (The Land of the Earthworms. A Tragedy for Children)*,⁶ which is designated for children by the Italian dramatist, director and actress Chiara Guidi, an active member of the well-established Italian theatre company “Societas” (formerly named as “Societas Raffaello Sanzio”).⁷ The whole research project was conducted at the “Theatre Comandini” in the Italian city of Cesena in December 2019.⁸

The ARGOS Experimentation comprised a series of certain interlocking activities that involved, except for the presence of members of the artistic team (director, actors) and spectators (children, educators), the active participation of all the members of its own research team,⁹ including the writer of this paper, and students. More specifically, the main associated activities concerned the following: an introductory seminar by Chiara Guidi on the philosophical and methodological background of her artistic work to the members of the ARGOS group and the students, several consecutive workshops with

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ This staging does not refer to the play’s debut, which was realized in 2014 at “Teatro Comandini” in Cesena. Chiara Guidi and Alice Keller, *Nella Terra dei Lombrichi* (Cesena: Puerilia/Societas, 2016), 55.

⁷ Chiara Guidi and Cristina Ventrucci, “The Errant Method as a ‘Children’s Art Theatre,’” *Performance Research* 23, no. 1 (2018): 68, [https://doi: 10.1080/13528165.2018.1460450/](https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2018.1460450). For a comprehensive and well-informed overview on the company’s history and activities, see further Eleni Papalexiou and Avra Xepapadakou, “About SRS,” ARCH-Archival Research & Cultural Heritage. The Archive of “Societas Raffaello Sanzio,” October, 2017, <https://www.arch-srs.com/srs>.

⁸ More specifically, its duration covered the period from 9 December 2019 to 14 December 2019.

⁹ One of the members of the ARGOS research team participated also as an actor in the play.

actors of the play, including acting and scenic preparations for its staging, the presentation of the show, as well as a closing meeting for an overall discussion on the commonly experienced creative involvement of this artistic project between Chiara Guidi, the actors of the play, the members of the ARGOS Project and students. In parallel, regular organizational meetings between the group members of the ARGOS Project were held, mostly centered on several associated practical arrangements. Lastly, respective individual interviews were conducted by them with Chiara Guidi and other participants in this Experimentation, such as actors, educators, students and the ARGOS researchers themselves.

During the aforementioned activities, with the aim of maximizing the observation outcomes, a wide range of monitoring techniques were employed by the ARGOS research team, often in combination with each other and on a case-by-case basis, such as video and audio recording, photography and note-taking. The basic languages used throughout the project were mostly Italian and French, as well as, occasionally, English.

1. Viewing through the Microscope of ARGOS

1.1. The Artist's View: Chiara Guidi's Artistic Philosophy

Chiara Guidi identifies as the foremost and ultimate purpose of art in general the attainment of beauty, the creation of an enchanting aesthetic result.¹⁰ Theatre, in particular, is viewed by her as the observatory of one's being and as a path to the discovery of life's mystery. She prioritizes its aesthetic functionality over its potential didactic or entertaining contribution.¹¹

¹⁰ Field notes.

¹¹ Guidi clearly opines on this matter as follows: «Δεν πιστεύω ότι το θέατρο πρέπει να είναι επεξηγηματικό ή πληροφοριακό. Η τέχνη μας βοηθά να παρατηρούμε την ύπαρξή μας» (“I don't believe that theatre should be explanatory or informative. Art help us to observe our being”); my translation). Γιώργος Καρουζάκης, «Chiara Guidi: “Η Τέχνη μας Βοηθά να Παρατηρούμε την Ύπαρξή μας”», *Karouzo - A Place for the Arts* (16 Δεκεμβρίου, 2015) [Giorgos Karouzakis, “Chiara Guidi: ‘Art Help us to Observe our Being’,” *Karouzo – A Place for the Arts* (December 16, 2015)], <https://www.karouzo.com/i-tehni-mas-voitha-na-paratiroume-tin-iparxi-mas/>. In a similar manner, she expresses the following: “I believe that theatre must not entertain or inform, but capture us in a game of

Regarding her own art, Chiara Guidi defines as the starting point and the basic motor of her artistic creativity the pervasive and powerful agency of a passion, which will initially enable the ignition of her artistic inspiration. This always derives from a profound and esoteric emotional quality.¹² In addition, a main and essential source that, complementarily, fuels her artistic stimulation and, by extension, her artistic productivity is memory. In that respect, Guidi stresses that art is generated in memory: more particularly, it originates in the artist's memory and it ends up in the spectators' memory.¹³

Chiara Guidi does not seem to draw her dramaturgic interests from the mainstream thematic reservoir of the theatre for children. Her dramaturgy comprises a wide range of themes selected by her that are commonly considered as complex and, hence, not easily communicable to children.¹⁴ Moreover, the schematization of her dramatic creations is anchored on a triadic pattern of scenic parameters that are taken in primary consideration by her and are identified with action, space and time. The interweavement of these main operational dramaturgic strands evokes a chain of interlinking questions that shape accordingly and in a definitive way her artistic creations. In order to deal with them, she delineates that she is in need of children, asserting that their agency is highly conducive to the formation of the respective responses to them.¹⁵

With reference to the art of narration, Chiara Guidi believes in its open and inclusive character, sustaining that everyone could potentially act as a narrator on certain terms. She argues that the exercise of the narrative practice constitutes an arduous task, requiring patience and diligence, and involving questions that lead to the production

not-knowing, just like children do."Guidi and Ventrucci, "The Errant Method," 75. Also, she elaborates further: "I believe that my work lies between childhood and the voice because of the ability that young people have of raising something that cannot yet be seen and believing in that which is not yet there. I invite them inside a theatre and search for their way of being, perhaps to recover my own voice and to grasp within myself the mystery of life." Ibid.

¹² Field notes.

¹³ Ibid. Guidi's emphasis on memory's relation to theatre, interestingly, recalls similar conceptual patterns in the context of the art of memory. More particularly, it evokes, in a sense, classical techniques applied by mnemonists in the past for its empowerment, when memory was conceived by them as an intuitively familiar and sacred place likened to "a brightly-lit theater of the world." See further Patrick H. Hutton, "The Art of Memory Reconceived: From Rhetoric to Psychoanalysis," *Journal of the History of Ideas, Inc.* 48, no. 3 (1987): 374, 380.

¹⁴ Field notes.

¹⁵ Ibid.

of knowledge, although its aim is not didactic or school-orientated, at least in terms of her own art.¹⁶

A central, crucial and characteristic dramaturgical issue in Chiara Guidi's work is the role of voice in it. Guidi regards theatre as the locus of the gaze and emotion as the core of its reservoir, identifying voice as the precious carrier of the latter.¹⁷ The contribution of the voice lies in its powerful effect of sharpening the vision, rendering it more penetrating and erosive and facilitating, in that way, the capture of reality's quintessence. As pinpointed by the artist: "The theatre is the locus of the gaze, but it is a gaze that grounds a feeling, which digs up figures and destroys them, the way children destroy their toys to see what is inside. If it's true that it was the word which initially named things, then we need to find those things again through voiceA voice that beats, beats, beats . . . and warms."¹⁸

Her view on voice's key role for the exploration of reality, especially regarding its special association with visualization, is elaborated by her as follows: "Maybe what I do in my work is use voice as a paradigm through which to investigate reality, as a way to look at and save images from the avalanche of consumption. The voice allows me to dig pictures out of the real, to imitate them, to feel all the sonic weight an image carries."¹⁹

Chiara Guidi's pivotal interest in voice pertains, in fact, to the supremacy of its sensorial and emotional impact over its semantic dimension, a condition considered by her as highly linked to children and worth seeking in the domain of theatre.²⁰ She clarifies further that: "When we are happy, or sad, we say very few words—and it is the voice that communicates the intensity of what we are feeling. This is especially true for children. It is in this space that we need to search for the childhood of theatre and for its voice."²¹

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid; Field notes.

¹⁸ Valentina Valentini and Chiara Guidi, "To Act by Singing," *Critical Stages/Scènes Critiques, The IATC journal/Revue de l'AICT*, no 16 (December 2017), <http://www.critical-stages.org/16/to-act-by-singing/>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Field notes.

²¹ Valentini and Guidi, "To Act by Singing."

Guidi's particular adherence to the child's gaze on reality stems also, as stressed by her, from the power of its animistic effect on it: «Είναι σαφές ότι ο όρος *φωνή* [η έμφαση δική μας] δεν περικλείει μόνο τον εκπορευόμενο από το σώμα μου ήχο. Ενυπάρχει στη φωνή μία δυνητική παρουσία. Κάθε αντικείμενο έχει μια φωνή. Στο σημείο αυτό αισθάνομαι ιδιαίτερη εγγύτητα με τα παιδιά και την ανιμιστική θεώρησή τους πάνω στην πραγματικότητα» (“It is clear that the term *voice* [our emphasis] does not only encompass the sound emitted by my body. There is a potential presence residing in the voice. Each object has a voice. At this point I feel a particular closeness to children and their animistic view on reality”); my translation).²²

In addition, Guidi's major attention to voice, especially in connection with children, lies also in her particular interest in the original and still unprocessed character of their language. In her own words: «Το παιδί έχει μια ιδιαίτερη σχέση με τη γλώσσα. Δεν έχει καταφέρει ακόμη να την ταξινομήσει. Με ενδιαφέρει, με πολλούς τρόπους, η δράση, όσα συμβαίνουν πριν από την ταξινόμηση της γλώσσας» (“The child has a special relationship with language. They haven't managed to sort it out yet. I am interested, in many ways, in the action, in what happens before language classification”); my translation).²³

But, at the same time, Guidi's focus lies on the voice's opposite pole as well, by her, equally, according great importance to the state of silence, which is also analogously deemed as a meaningful and worth seeing site.²⁴ In her point of view, voice is essentially rooted in silence: “Voice is born from an abysmal silence; a silence the voice also returns to, after having spoken, untainted by what it has said.”²⁵ In this regard, as acknowledged by her, the matter of silence is taken into high consideration in her artistic work and, consequently, it occupies a noteworthy, distinct and accordingly signified position in her artistic creations.²⁶ From a similar perspective, she adds further that she, interestingly, recognizes a particular kind of silence behind

²² Ιωάννα Κλεφτόγιαννη, «Η Κιάρρα Γκουίντι Θέλει να Μάθει στα Παιδιά να Φοβούνται», *Popaganda* (21 Οκτωβρίου, 2015) [Ioanna Kleftogianni, “Chiara Guidi Wishes to Teach Children to Be Afraid” (October 21, 2015)], <https://popaganda.gr/art/kiara-gkouinti-theli-na-mathi-sta-pedia-na-fovounte>.

²³ Καρουζάκης, «Guidi: “Η Τέχνη μας Βοηθά”» [Karouzakis, “Guidi: ‘Art Help us’”].

²⁴ Field notes.

²⁵ Valentini and Guidi, “To Act by Singing.”

²⁶ Field notes.

the words of the child, which features as another challenging dimension for her artistic approach.²⁷

However, voice's instrumental role in visualization highlighted in her artistic work is not regarded by her as fully sufficient for the completion of this purpose. In fact, this requires the supplementary, albeit equally autonomous, agency of music, which is viewed as conducive to the revelation of reality in its wholeness, by, in effect, conveying, inexpressibly or implicitly, its invisible dimension. Guidi puts it that way: "A staging of a text should grant access to its invisible side - this is something that cannot be done through interpretation or voice only; it has to be done through music: entrusting the text to music to see the contradictory "background" of things without expressing or representing them."²⁸

Apart from the aforementioned focal points on the axis of Chiara Guidi's artistic formulation, her approach unavoidably integrates the matter of spectatorship, which is highly valued by her. In general, she recognizes the uniqueness of each spectator and she is interested in the formation and evolution of their own opinion.²⁹ Within the scope of her own theatrical work, her primary focus is on the child audience, although, as she argues, adult spectators could similarly act as children: «Το κοινό κάθε ηλικίας μπορεί να είναι όπως ένα παιδί. Δεν δουλεύω, όμως, με τα παιδιά γιατί θεωρώ την παιδική ηλικία όμορφη ή αθώα, αλλά επειδή τη θεωρώ τρομακτική» ("Audience of every age can be like a child. Yet, I don't work with children because I consider childhood beautiful or innocent, but because I find it scary"; my translation).³⁰ Her interest on children as spectators stems from her classification of them as different from adults³¹ in combination with her regard on childhood as intriguingly intimidating, in spite of her acknowledgement of the naiveté and the authenticity of the children's gaze.³² Given her conviction that the child represents a whole cosmos as a separate entity, which is worth exploring by adults, she points to

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Valentini and Guidi, "To Act by Singing."

²⁹ Field notes.

³⁰ Καρουζάκης, «Guidi: "Η Τέχνη μας Βοηθά"» [Karouzakis, "Guidi: 'Art Help us'"].

³¹ Ibid.

³² Field notes.

their respective special approach to them by the latter.³³ She argues that a prerequisite for the realization of a connection with the child's world is the exploration of their special culture, especially by way of the adults' familiarization with fables and several associated narratives that concern it.³⁴

1.2. Chiara Guidi's Play *La Terra dei Lombrichi*

1.2.1. The Plot

The play *La Terra dei Lombrichi* is a tragedy for children, which is mainly intended for a child audience, including also the participation of adult spectators. Its plot pivots around the bipolar theme of life and death, drawing on its inspiration from the ancient tragedy *Alceste* by Euripides.³⁵ According to the tragedy's storyline, Alceste's acceptance to die in place of her husband Admetus entails her descent to Hades, meaning the Underworld, which is situated in the dark depths of the earth. But, there, by Heracles' favorable intervention, she will finally be able to emerge to the earth's surface, namely the Upperworld. Thus, she will come to life again, leaving the earthworms to their endless upward and downward movement that marks their perpetual passage between the two earthy worlds. This development represents an unusually hopeful ending for a tragedy.³⁶

In analogy to Euripides' *Alceste*, in Chiara Guidi's play *La Terra dei Lombrichi* its principal heroine Love (Amore), in search of her dead friend (Amica), she will pass, with the Chorus' assistance and with the escort of the children, through the Land of the Earthworms, where darkness reigns. There she will meet her beloved friend, offering to replace her, so as to bring her back to life. In the end, both heroines will get out of the Underworld enlightened and alive. Love will transfer the Light to the

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Guidi and Keller, *Nella Terra dei Lombrichi*, 55.

³⁶ See further Ευριπίδης, *Άλκηστις*, επιμ. και μτφ. Δανιήλ Ι. Ιακώβ (Αθήνα: ΜΙΕΤ, 2012), τ. 1-2 [Euripides, *Alceste*, ed. and trans. by Daniel I. Iakov (Athens: MIET, 2012), Vol. 1-2].

Earthworms, opening up to them and everyone else the hopeful prospect for enlightenment, meaning the dominance of life itself.³⁷

1.3. The “Errant Method:” The Child’s Gaze and the Adult’s Gaze at Play

1.3.1. The Conceptualization

Chiara Guidi’s *La Terra dei Lombrichi* is an open theatre form, meaning that it necessitates children’s participation in its dramaturgical development and its realization. It is based on the use of a practice conceptualized by Chiara Guidi and named as the “Errant Method.”³⁸

The Errant Method is anchored on the dynamics of the relation between adults and children, foregrounding the child’s viewpoint in the theatrical action, with their spontaneous tendency to take initiatives, connecting it with the adult’s perspective.³⁹ This method, whose name derives from the Italian verb *Errare*, in its twofold sense, meaning both *to wander* and *to make a mistake*, pertains to the ambiguous idea of errancy. By extension, it refers to an ongoing working process within the field of performing arts, where its participants, namely children and adults (actors, educators or parents), are ignorant of its result and subject to the risk of error.⁴⁰ In this regard, it constitutes an unpredictable errant movement from the known to the unknown, inverting the conventional and mainstream mode of teaching based on the axiom of the objective knowledge, and favoring instead the inventive knowledge, which leads to a vision that continuously generates challenging questions.⁴¹ As Chiara Guidi explains: “It is not a theory that precedes the action, but the result of a retrospective gaze on the work that has been done, fully recognizing the open, living questions that

³⁷ Guidi and Ventrucchi, “The Errant Method,” 73. See further details on the play’s plot in the original text: Chiara Guidi, *La Terra dei Lombrichi* (Cesena: Societas, 2019). Guidi and Keller, *Nella Terra dei Lombrichi*.

³⁸ Guidi and Ventrucchi, “The Errant Method,” 68 et passim.

³⁹ Ibid, 68.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 71.

⁴¹ Ibid, 70.

have accompanied it from the outset.”⁴² Thus, it unfolds the connection between art and reality and the discovery of a new way of seeing what is already familiar.⁴³ In other words, “in this way, theatre closely adheres to the inventive and pragmatic form of knowledge practiced by children, rejecting the stereotype of childhood imagination in favor of the primitive procedure of a pre-linguistic and tactile gaze.”⁴⁴

The development of Chiara Guidi’s particular interest in the child’s gaze, which was inaugurated during her former work as a member of the theatre company “Societas Raffaello Sanzio,” is associated with her realization of the prospect for deployment of its dynamics to present infinite possibilities or, interchangeably, impossibilities. This, as she elaborates, emerged as a hauntingly imposing challenge for its possession:

Theatre, which was already a practice and a research for us, was at a certain point marked by the eyes of children. And this mark gave it a new sense. Their gaze seemed to us like one that had to be “stolen:” we had to steal from children their way of seeing, the possibility they have of carrying out “exaggerated” actions, and their intuitive way of knowing how to see in things what they contain “in potentiality.” Children have the key to that which, for an adult, is “impossible.”⁴⁵

In the core of Chiara Guidi’s conceptual approach to theatre for children lies the stress placed by her on the sheer sensory quality of the child’s vision that is characterized, except for its excessive potentiality, by its deep clarity. More particularly, in the artist’s own words: “We would never have been able to conceive a theatre for children that, precisely because it was intended for them, made the images bland or reduced their symbolic reach, destroying the chance to see anything but the image itself.”⁴⁶

According to the artist the child’s vision, due to its lucidity, ingenuity and penetrability and its disconnection from the semantic aspect of language, constitutes an essential condition for the theatre’s viability and rejuvenation, being thereby

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid, 72.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 68.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 69.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

complementary to the adult's vision. The original quality of the child's gaze is essentially linked to their ability to suspend language, a fact that equates to a renewable and inquisitive look on reality, entailing a creative and transformative process that seems to approximate the functionality of theatre. By consequence, the Errant Method represents a fertile venue for the child's gaze and the adult's gaze, contributing to the interactive fulfillment of their potential. Here is the artist's standpoint:

Children know how to see the “contradictory” bottom of things, without expressing it. They know how to recognize different layers of presence and make them speak at the same time, without creating confusion. That is something closer to the status of theatre and performing arts. Theatre needs an “audience of children” who are able to suspend language, to rename actions, to become the very place they are looking at, to raise questions and to feel in the voice and in the sound of words not their meaning but the force of manifestation that dilates their borders and brings them together, present both in those who listen and those who are listened to. The Errant Method searches for the gaze of the child, and that of the adult. Together.⁴⁷

Children's close connection with theatre, in Chiara Guidi's view, is predominantly based on their special linkage to play that underlines accordingly their gaze. More particularly, child's play is parallelized with theatre's agency on the basis of its transfigurative power on actuality, that allows implicitly a transition from one reality into another and the configuration of a new dimension of visibility:

Children, with games, turn reality back into reality: in play, a force cuts through the visible. If a functional object like a chair can become, to a child's eye, a horse, then this chair manifests something different from what the eye normally sees. But this is also the essence of theatre: onstage, a thing always creates a relay to something else that is not on stage. And words themselves, according to how they are pronounced onstage, carry with themselves a different slant with respect to their own meaning.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Ibid, 72.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 74-75.

Guidi's perspective seems to encompass a twofold dimension that mostly characterizes child's play, which refers to its association with both imagination and imitation. This duality interconnects the spheres of fantasy and reality. The child's imagination through play, even though not the one overarching and prioritized by her, appears to be vital to theatre's development. Guidi believes that «το θέατρο έχει ανάγκη τα παιδιά, γιατί μόνο μέσα από εκείνα μπορεί να πηδήξει στο κενό που ανοίγει η φαντασία του παιχνιδιού, ελέγχοντας και δοκιμάζοντας τη γλώσσα» (“theatre needs children, because only through them can it jump into the gap that play's imagination opens up, controlling and testing language”; my translation).⁴⁹ But, except for the imaginative power of child's play, even more vividly showcased by Guidi is the imitative impetus developed by it in the context of a pragmatic tangibility. She describes that process as such:

Imitation is central to child's play. The chair is a horse, and that horse is wholly perceived, with all the senses. The child wants to smell, hear, touch, act, get up, get closer. Children allow you to understand wonder; the kind of wonder that makes the jaw drop, unpolluted by words, connected only to action, to doing. It is similar to what Robinson Crusoe experienced when he was catapulted into another world where all the usual objects had lost their names - in renaming them, he made words follow matter. And, lastly, child's play is imitative. In order to imitate a cow, I have to listen to it, smell it, see how it moves its head, its tail...An imitation is not just a soft toy version of the cow: it relies on closeness, on lived experience. For me, this practical awareness is crucial: the realism of experience, not only in order to make art, but also to find sense in life.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Μάνια Ζούση, «Το Θέατρο Έχει Ανάγκη τα Παιδιά», *Η Αυγή* (17 Οκτωβρίου, 2015) [Mania Zoussi, “Theatre Needs Children,” *Avgi* (October 17, 2015)]. Similarly, Guidi expressed her opinion on children's imagination as such: «Εγώ, απεναντίας, έχω εμπιστοσύνη στην κουλτούρα των παιδιών και στη φυσική ποιητική τους φαντασία που με επανασυνδέει με τη ζωή» (“I, conversely, trust children's culture and their natural poetic imagination that reconnects me with life”; my translation). Κλεφτόγιαννη, «Η Γκουίντι Θέλει να Μάθει στα Παιδιά» [Kleftogianni, “Guidi Wishes to Teach Children”]. In a wider context, another comment by Guidi on the imagination's instrumental role in her work is the following: «Αναζητώ... τη μοναδικότητα και τη φαντασία του θεατή. Ειδικά σήμερα, που ο πολιτισμός μας έχει την τάση να ωθεί τη φαντασία στο περιθώριο» (“I am searching... for the spectator's uniqueness and imagination. Especially, nowadays, that our culture tends to marginalize imagination”; my translation). Καρουζάκης, «Guidi: “Η Τέχνη μας Βοηθά”» [Karouzakis, “Guidi: ‘Art Help us’”].

⁵⁰ Valentini and Guidi, “To Act by Singing.”

According to Guidi, this imposing approach to reality through play employed characteristically by children engages the development of an inventive and highly creative dialectical dynamics with it, thereby leading to the genesis of what she calls the “childhood of theatre,” which essentially represents this sphere of agency. This, as she argues, asserts a dutifully rigorous methodological approach of a high standard for the retention of the child’s radiant gaze:

With their play, what’s more, children rename things; they open places up to other places. They transform objects even while leaving their form unaltered. Matter speaks to them. Everything has a voice. And they listen to it. It is a way of proceeding by encounters, by clusters of sense that in any case let others pass by. It is a way of inserting one’s own inventions and representations within reality. It is *the childhood of theatre*. So, a theatre intended for children must lead us beyond all limits, and be sublime; our technique must be superlative, in order to sustain their radiant gaze.⁵¹

By consequence, the child’s gaze, due to its remarkably powerful effect on the representation of reality, appears to be elevated by Guidi as the capstone of “the theatre of childhood,” as outlined by her: «Το παιδικό κοινό διαθέτει την ικανότητα να βλέπει και να ακούει εκείνο που δεν είναι εκεί. Μέσα από τα παιδιά αναζητώ το θέατρο της παιδικότητας, για να τα προσκαλέσω σε σκηνικούς χώρους που συνδημιουργούμε, έχοντας την ανάγκη του βλέμματός τους. Μπροστά στο παιδικό βλέμμα η μορφή δυναμώνει, ενώ χωρίς αυτό εξασθενεί» (“Child audience avails the ability to see and hear what is not there. Through children I search for the theatre of childhood, so as to invite them to stage spaces where we co-create, having the need of their gaze. In front of the child’s gaze the form is fortified, while, without it, is enfeebled”; my translation).⁵² Thus, the search and the development of the child’s gaze in interaction with the adult’s that dominate Guidi’s conceptualization of the Errant Method seem to adhere to her above aspirational artistic vision.

⁵¹ Guidi and Ventrucci, “The Errant Method,” 70.

⁵² Ζούση, «Το Θέατρο Έχει Ανάγκη τα Παιδιά» [Zoussi, “Theatre Needs Children”].

1.3.2. The Implementation

1.3.2.1. The Preparation of the Show⁵³

After Chiara Guidi's introductory seminar to the ARGOS research group on her artistic philosophy and method, as broadly illustrated above, including a comprehensive history of her overall work on theatre for children and the presentation of its evolving prospects, a series of associated practical arrangements were initiated for the staging of the play *La Terra dei Lombrichi*. These comprised the realization of several workshops with actors by the director combined with various scenic preparations during the following days, culminating, at the end, to the presentation of the show.

The original workshop with actors by Chiara Guidi was, at a preliminary stage, focused on vocal acting. The director initially provided a general outline of her artistic approach and specific guidelines to the actors on their voice's treatment. These mostly concerned the regulation of their voice's expressivity, as a prerequisite for the appropriate acting rendition of the psychological profile of the play's characters. In that context, the acting workshop included the out-of-stage vocal practice by the actors of selected short parts of the play script, entailing, secondarily, their complementary respective bodily expression. This process, which engaged the rotating participation of all the actors of the play, called for the vocal performance by them of selected extracts of it, either individually or in alternated combinations of cooperative couples. During this activity, Chiara Guidi's intervention was frequently apparent and expressed by her complementary functioning as an open acting model, so as to convey more precisely and, hence, more efficiently her dramaturgic conceptualization and her directing orientation to the performers. Subsequently, on a more advanced level, the acting practice was contextualized within the whole theatrical setting, accompanied with the heightening of a corresponding bodily expression by the performers.

⁵³ The information included in this section is based on field notes in the context of the present observatory research.

The following workshop with actors by Chiara Guidi involved multiple repetitive and intensive acting exercises in the context of the actors' predefined roles, which concerned several scenes of the play, as well as a parallel work on several associated scenic preparations. These activities were again framed by the director's systematic interjectory agency. She concentrated on the provision of pertinent suggestions on the appropriate use of the actors' voice, especially in relation to the attainment of the desirable rhythm, volume and intonation. In addition, these were accompanied by her meticulous and rigid directions on the proper rendition of occasional silent pauses, wherever applicable, according to the script. In parallel, the workshop comprised the director's attentive and spherical coordination of the proper integration of music, sound, light and other scenic effects into the stage ensemble in line with the requirements of the play.

The first part of the subsequent acting workshop included the initial gathering by Chiara Guidi of the whole group of actors with the purpose of her offering to them further directions on the play's staging and responding to their possible respective queries. This session mainly included regular and painstaking acting rehearsals, combined with the actors' respective costume dressing and the transformation of their appearance according to their role's requirements. These processes were, moreover, in attunement to a gradually intensified and a more active integration of the several scenic effects in the play's staging. During this workshop Chiara Guidi's presence continued to be highly active and it was expressed by her provision of a set of concrete and meticulous directions to the performers, mostly on their acting style, with a special emphasis on the treatment of their voice, as well as their bodily movements and poses. Also, occasional brief communications between the director and her stage assistants intervened for the suitable arrangement of several practical scenic matters.

The second part of the last acting workshop included the final rehearsal before the opening show. During its development the director's role was tacit and discreet, as there was no interruption by her of the whole process. She seemed to devote herself on a highly concentrated and reflective observation of it, often moving and changing viewpoints throughout its progress, obviously with the purpose of acquiring a

spherical view of it and achieving any possible improvements. At the end of this rehearsal, Chiara Guidi offered an overall feedback to the actors and her colleagues, without omitting to express her thanks, in a praising way, to them as well. It is worth noting that the actors' attunement to her directions was constantly high, as they corresponded to them, up to a substantial degree, with remarkable motivation, consistency and flexibility, both on an individual and group level.

All in all, during the preparation of the show Chiara Guidi's directions in practice, more particularly in the context of the application of the Errant Method, proved to be in high compliance with her artistic philosophy. Interestingly though, maybe the crux of the whole creative process was, in a sense, the building of an *a priori* vivid relationship between the adult actors and the prospective child viewers, at least on the part of the former and even in the absence of the latter. This followed from the fact that in the major part of this preparatory phase children's presumed presence was particularly and constantly highlighted by the director, either directly or indirectly, resulting, in a way, to be established, prior to their advent. Guidi's frequent vivacious comments on several matters on child spectatorship and the actors' prompt response to them, as expressed through their continuous interest in it, often in the form of pertinent articulated queries, appeared to result in the creation of a permeating and powerful, albeit subjective, common feeling of their implied presence. Thus, in this regard, it seemed that a kind of theatre that unveiled an invisible side of reality, consistently aligned with its creator's conceptualization, had, in a way and up to a certain degree, already started to show itself prior to the predefined presentation of its show.

1.3.2.2. The Presentation of the Show⁵⁴

After the completion of the necessary preparations for the staging of the play *La Terra dei Lombrichi*, the presentation of the show was consecutively followed. This

⁵⁴ Ibid.

addressed to an audience of elementary school students and their school teachers that escorted them.⁵⁵

Upon children's arrival at the "Theatre Comandini" and from the beginning of the opening performance their introduction to its atmosphere appeared impressively immediate and dialectical. During the show their participation was greatly active through their spontaneous initiatives and their expressiveness was all-pervading through their authentic reactions, revealing their variant emotions, such as desire, fear, concern, anxiousness, melancholy, calmness and joy that followed the dramaturgic flow of the play. Their relationship to its characters became increasingly empathetic and interactive, judging by their respective exclamatory comments and queries addressed either directly to the actors, who impersonated them with great enthusiasm, or to their educators and their peers. Especially the performers exhibited a high interest in listening to children's views, allotting adequate time for their development, responding to them in a warm and expressive manner. This condition certainly demonstrates the intensification of the bond developed between the various participants of the show, which constitutes, in effect, a prime aim of Guidi's artistic approach. Also, the use of selected costumes and scenic effects throughout the performance seemed to arouse efficiently children's surprise, curiosity, interest and enthusiasm.

At the same time, the participation of educators as co-observers of the same artistic creation with children appeared greatly positive on many levels. Although their role was less active than children's, the play seemed to draw their attention, considering their continuous reflective focus on it. Their presence, which was discreet and pleasant, seemed complementary to children's. The educators embraced positively all their reactions and responded to them promptly and accordingly. Their participation certainly contributed to the accentuation of children's feelings, which in essence reflected on them, even non-verbally, and the development of their thoughts, which were often communicated to them. It seemed that children were partially in need of their presence, so as to share the immediate, mainly emotional, impact of the aesthetic

⁵⁵ The show was staged twice during the conduction of the respective ARGOS Experimentation, more specifically on 13 and 14 December 2019.

experience in progress. But this appeared to be the case vice versa, albeit in a different way.

During the performance Chiara Guidi was in a way omnipresent, not only from the position of the artist-creator but from that of the spectator as well, although being, to a great extent, in obscurity. She acted as a discreet and distanced deep-thinking gazer, who seemed to be incessantly absorbed in a reflective analysis on the development of the play, with reference to the responses to it by all its spectators and with a particular focus on children's characteristic reactions. After the presentation of the show, Guidi expressed her gratitude to the group of actors and her colleagues for their contribution to the artistic outcome.

Eventually, the last impression on this artistic event was the dominance of a pervasive feeling of gratification and enchantment by it, while the passage from the sphere of fantasy to that of reality proved highly subtle and normal, as was exactly the case at the beginning, albeit in a reverse way, gradually encircled by a demystifying aura.

2. Viewing through the Macroscope of ARGOS

2.1. The Researcher's View: Theatre for Children by Chiara Guidi as another "Argos"

In view of the processes activated during the staging of the play *La Terra dei Lombrichi* by Chiara Guidi within the frame the ARGOS Experimentation, as a characteristic example of her work on theatre for children, both as a dramatist and as a director, our critical analysis will be forwarded on the basis of the examination of the following points: her ideology on childhood, her pertinent artistic philosophy and method, as well as their intertwining aesthetic transubstantiation in praxis.

An overview of the childhood ideology that underlines Chiara Guidi's artistic work, with a special focus on her creation *La Terra dei Lombrichi*, not only in connection with child spectatorship, but with her treatment of the child as a narrative subject in

her dramaturgy, displays that this is marked by an amalgam of several interweaving, either complementary or divergent, and even contradictory, strands of thought.

On the one hand, her conceptualization of the child as a different entity from the adult, with its own separate personality and special culture, as a creature of superior insight and, perhaps in a sense, wisdom, with a natural and authentic gaze on the world, as the embodiment of enlightenment and hope, as well as her overall stress on the emotional power of childhood and the child's agency, resonate, up to a high degree, the historically evolved Romantic idea of childhood in Western culture. Apart from the above qualities, according to this historical trend, which continues, up to a certain point, to have an impact nowadays in several facets of culture, including the field of art, childhood appertains to a special, in fact, the most important, period of human life, representing a mystified, idealized and enchanting condition of it.⁵⁶ Romantic echoes of that kind, such as children's association with a different and mysterious world, veiled by a "magical" aura, the approach of which by adults could lead to their enlightenment, are distinct in Guidi's view on childhood. This is characteristically encapsulated in her following statement: «Τα παιδιά είναι για εμάς ένα μυστήριο. Εμείς δεν είμαστε αυτά. Δεν μπορούμε πια να είμαστε. Δεν μπορούμε να τα γεμίσουμε με εμάς. Μπορούμε να τα προσκαλέσουμε σε ένα κατάλληλα παρασκευασμένο σημείο και εκεί, όπως στο σπίτι της μάγισσας, να τα ακούσουμε και να κλέψουμε λίγα από τα μυστικά τους. Λίγη από τη φλόγα τους!» ("Children are a mystery to us. We are not them. We cannot be anymore. We cannot fill them with us. We can invite them to a suitably prearranged place and there, as in the witch's house, we can listen to them and steal some of their secrets. A little of their flame!"; my translation).⁵⁷

⁵⁶ The origins of the Romantic ideology of the child are found approximately in the second half of eighteenth century Europe and its main exponents were the prominent philosopher and pedagogue Jean Jacques Rousseau, and several major Romantic poets. For more details on this issue, see further Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500*, 2nd ed. (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2005), 58-72; David Kennedy, "The Roots of Child Study: Philosophy, History, and Religion," *Teachers College Record* 102, no. 3 (2000), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249400150_The_Roots_of_Child_Study_Philosophy_History_and_Religion.

⁵⁷ Κλεφτόγιαννη, «Η Γκουίντι Θέλει να Μάθει στα Παιδιά» [Kleftogianni, "Guidi Wishes to Teach Children"].

On the other hand, however, Guidi's childhood perceptions seem to reflect simultaneously a blend of several counter-images to the associated Romantic ideology and even Romanticized images of ambiguous character, recalling, up to a certain degree, the so-called "deficit theory of childhood." This approach, which is essentially rooted in the Western philosophical tradition, refers to "a perennial symbolization of the child as both deficit and danger,"⁵⁸ only with the prospect of their future development, and their subordination to the adult.⁵⁹ Guidi's depiction of childhood as frightening and her emphasis, notably regarding the quality of the child's gaze, on its unpredictable, subversive and rather potentially uncontrolled character seem to be suggestive of this stream of thought. In addition, her special focus on the child's original and sheer gaze on reality, especially with regard to their association with a pre-linguistic or a preliminary, under development, linguistic context, and with play, indicating their affinity to a rather alienated world, which encompasses realities and meanings different from the adult's world, seems to develop their portrayal as an unfamiliar creature and an exoticized other. Taking into account all the above points, what becomes apparent is the attribution of a kind of primordial genuineness to the child that mostly echoes a refined primitivism related to them.⁶⁰ In essence, this appears to rather connote, up to a point, the diachronically and interculturally emergent image of the "savage child,"⁶¹ or else, what is, analogously, called, in scientific terms, the "tribal child."⁶²

⁵⁸ Kennedy, "The Roots of Child Study."

⁵⁹ See further *ibid.*

⁶⁰ Particularly indicative of this frame of thought developed by Guidi is her following statement: "Children are people from the ancient world! We have to trust the way they seek reawakenings and overturnings, basing themselves not on reasoning but on experience which, in its very essence, needs time, is fragile and creates a link between that which has been and that which will come." Guidi and Ventrucci, "The Errant Method," 75. Also, as previously quoted, Guidi's parallelism between children's wondrous pragmatic view and Robinson Crusoe's alienation to a different world that involved its experiential renaming by him, similarly, echoes a kind of primitivism attached to childhood. See *supra* note 50.

⁶¹ As Jane O' Connor pinpoints, Chris Jenks refers to the historical emergence of a conceptual nexus of certain attributes that form the depiction of children as "little savages." This representation evoked further the need for their proper socialization and acculturation. It was especially linked to certain strands of the early nineteenth-century European ideology of childhood, which could be, evidently, associated with pertinent social perceptions and practices at that time referring to primitive "savages." However, according to Jenks' approach, the emergence of the concept of the "savage child" is not exclusively historical, but, in effect, it represents a diachronic and intercultural construction of childhood in continuous coexistence and challenge with others. Jane O' Connor, *The Cultural Significance of the Child Star* (New York-London: Routledge, 2008), 22. See further Chris Jenks, *Childhood* (London: Routledge, 1996). Furthermore, the diffusion of the powerful concept of the "savage child," which found its expression in respective, either factual or fictional, cases, eventuated in its evolvement into a catholic cultural symbol of spiritual quality, potentially concerning all children.

The emergence of this image entailed further the need for examination and interpretation of the child's culture, with an emphasis on the exploration of their idiomatic language and their special relationship to play, as integral, characteristic and central elements of it, with the aim of their understanding.⁶³ From this standpoint, this representation of childhood appertains to the scientific theorization referring to its infantilization.⁶⁴ Caterina Satta outlines the so-called "Infantilism" as follows: "Infantilism, as a cultural construction through which to read different expressions of child adult relations, expresses and represents all of the myths, discourses and doctrines which encompass the world of children. It appears also as a form of *exotification* of childhood, mythicizing the child's otherness to adults and promoting images of the child with semblances of the *noble savage*."⁶⁵

In the context of "Infantilism," the mystified otherness ascribed to childhood, due to its ambiguous quality, may, by extension, elicit divergent and heteronymous approaches to it in practice. A common trend is the consequent underestimation of the child's being conceived by the adult as a "subaltern" and, consequently, the

Referring to Newton's study of feral children, Jane O' Connor emphasizes that: "the 'savage' child who is found living at one with nature becomes at once fascinating and frightening for what he/she can tell us about what it really means to be human and the negligible robustness of what we consider to be our essential selves. Tying in fictional and true stories of feral children such as Romulus and Remus, Mowgli, Kaspar Hauser, and the Wolf-Children of Mindapore, Newton demonstrates how such narratives cross the line between art and life again and again as the protagonists become vehicles for debate about profound spiritual matters rather than being treated as actual, real people. They become, in a sense, more than simply children—a potential which all children who break through the accepted boundaries of childhood seem to possess." Jane O' Connor, *The Cultural Significance of the Child Star* (New York-London: Routledge, 2008), 27. See further Michael Newton, *Savage Girls and Wild Boys: A History of Feral Children* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002).

⁶² The widely circulated cultural view on childhood associated with primitive attributes was expanded even in the domain of science, founding its ultimate expression in the formulation of the termed "tribalchild" perspective. This approach, which evolved into one of the most influential social-constructionist conceptual and theoretical models of childhood, recognizes the development of a separate cultural world by children and it is focused on the understanding of its particular functional patterns. It was mostly represented by Peter Opie's work on children's culture, especially as expressed through play, which was conducted in the 1950s and 1960s. Catherine Burke, "Theories of Childhood," in *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood in History and Society*, ed. Paula S. Fass (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), 3: 821-823. Caterina Satta, "Simply Child's Play? Reconfiguring Child-Adult Relations in a Leisure Place for Children," *Poiésis - Revista do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação-Mestrado - UNISUL, Tubarão* 4, no. 8 (Jul./Dez. 2011): 263.

⁶³ For childhood's particularity in relation to play and language, see further Satta, "Simply Child's Play?" *passim*.

⁶⁴ See further *ibid*, 262 – 267.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 263. Satta's purposeful choice for capitalization of the initial letter of the term "Infantilism," is used by her to match the capitalized theoretical concept of "Orientalism" by Edward Said, as a paraphrase to it, and is related to her effort to underpin further her respective argumentation. See further *ibid*, 262.

diminution of their cultural status, along with the furtherance of the adult's cultural dominance over them.⁶⁶ This proceeds mainly from the child's lack of mastery of the dominant communicative and cultural codes, meaning, notably, the standard language, which constitutes the main determinatory factor for the adult's hegemony and the child's powerless agency in the cultural sphere.⁶⁷ At the other end of the spectrum, through the interpretive lens of "Infantilism," the notion of childhood's otherness, especially with its Romantic associations, may generate adults' fascination for the approach of its original specificity, especially in relation to play and language. This fact may, subsequently, lead to a glorified pursuit by them for the discovery of its enchanting facets, encompassing, hence, the risk of its fetishism.⁶⁸

While Guidi's approach to childhood seems to be permeated through by certain elements of "Infantilism," in the respect of its suggested exotification and primitivism, it does not, however, appear to be pejoratively nuanced, but, on the contrary, it is positively valued.⁶⁹ In fact, child's special language and play are considered by Guidi as key components of an ideal model for the acquisition of a worldview, which is worth proposing to adults. Consequently, Guidi regards the child's point of view, although through the primitivism's prism, as superior to the adult's. In spite of the presence of such elements in Guidi's approach that suggest the conceptualization of a fetishized childhood and her enchantment by it, as mainly expressed in practice by her fascinating pursuit for "stealing" the child's gaze, it seems that there is, up to a certain degree, a counterbalance to it. This is mostly evident in the artist's additional inclusion of the adult's perspective in her Errant Method, as a necessary and significant prerequisite for the revelation, and even the underpinning and advancement of the child's perspective, with a view of deploying their mutual complementarity.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Ibid, 263-264 et passim.

⁶⁷ See further *ibid*, 263-266.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 265-266.

⁶⁹ With reference to this point, an explicitly positive evaluation by Guidi concerning children, which denotes that her attitude to them is not pejorative, is the following: «Δεν αντιμετωπίζω τα παιδιά ως βρέφη – για μένα, αυτή η αντίληψη είναι εντελώς ξένη – αλλά ως μια διαφορετική κατηγορία θεατών» ("I do not treat children as infants – for me, this perception is completely foreign– but as a different category of viewers"; my translation. Καρουζάκης, «Guidi: "Η Τέχνη μας Βοηθά"» [Karouzakis, "Guidi: 'Art Help us'"].

⁷⁰ See *supra* note 47.

Miscellaneous views on childhood, as illustrated above, are distinct not only in Guidi's formulation of her artistic philosophy and the implementation of her artistic method, but also, in connection with them, perhaps more poignantly, in her artistic creations in the form of associated imagery in the dramatic narrative. In her dramaturgy, notably in the case of the play *La Terra dei Lombrichi*, there is a conspicuous projection of several narrative representations of childhood, relating to the image of the Romantic innocent child but also to the image of the savage child, as depicted above. More particularly, the dramatist attempts an exploration of childhood's ambiguous and controversial character, by posing, simultaneously, an open question about it. This is expressed through the conveyance of a bipolarized associated imagery attached to the child by adults that denotes attributed qualities to them of either a positive charge ("buono" (good), "la forma più perfetta di essere umano" (the most perfect form of human being), "un amore diventato visibile" (a love that has become visible), my translation) or a negative purport ("turbolento" (turbulent), "egoista" (selfish), "capriccioso" (capricious), "vendicativo" (vindictive), "senza dolcezza" (without sweetness), "senza pazienza" (without patience), "sporca dappertutto" (dirty everywhere), my translation).⁷¹

Chiara Guidi's oscillation between the enchanting and the disenchanting aspects of childhood seems to dovetail contemporary developments regarding its conceptualization in Western culture that tend, in a way, to envelop all of them. In a wider context, "disenchantment" as a concept that particularly was promoted by the well-known sociologist Max Weber at the beginning of the 20th century, referred to the process of the intellectualization or rationalization of the modern world by means of science's apparatus.⁷² In other words, science, from that perspective, was regarded as the most important agent in defying the irrational ways of thinking, thereby contributing to the decline of the up to that point dominant magic worldview. Weber elaborated further this idea like that: "Daß es also prinzipiell keine geheimnisvollen

⁷¹ Guidi, *La Terra dei Lombrichi*, 3; Guidi and Keller, *Nella Terra dei Lombrichi*, 12-13. Moreover, in the first textual version of the play the quotation of an additional positive attribute to the child is traceable, referring to the identification of it with genius, a representative characteristic of the Romantic ideology. Ibid, 13. For the Romantic interweavement of the concept of genius with childhood, see further Kennedy, "The Roots of Child Study."

⁷² See further Jeroen J. H. Dekker, "The Century of the Child Revisited," *The International Journal of Children's Rights* 8 (2000): 134,137-139 et passim.

unberechenbaren Mächte gebe die da hineinspielen, daß man vielmehr alle Dinge – im Prinzip – durch Berechnen beherrschen könne. Das aber bedeutet: die Entzauberung der Welt. Nicht mehr, wie der Wilde, für den es solche Mächte gab, muß man zu magischen Mitteln greifen, um die Geister zu beherrschen oder zu erbitten. Sondern technische Mittel und Berechnung leisten das”⁷³ (“There are in principle no mysterious incalculable powers that play a role. Rather we can master by calculation everything. But that means: the disenchantment of the world. No longer must we – like the savage for whom such powers existed – grasp at magical means to master or implore the spirits. But technical means and calculations accomplish that”; translation by Mitzman).⁷⁴

“Disenchantment” had an impact on the idea of the “Century of the Child” (1900), which was proclaimed by the prominent pedagogue Ellen Key and signified an intense interest in childhood and an orientation towards it, as an extension of the Romantic view on it.⁷⁵ More specifically, Jeroen Dekker sustains that:

First, a belief was born in the possibility of getting in principle knowledge of the children’s world *in toto*. At the end of the 19th century, child science flourished...All secrets of the young human being, including the so-called magic world of the child, should and could be approached scientifically...This rationalisation of the child and education, including its magic aspects, was incompatible with the romantic and enchanting image of childhood, developed by Rousseau and the romantic poets, and adopted by Key and the *Vom Kinde aus* movement.⁷⁶

While Weberian “disenchantment” introduces the rejection of the model of seeing the world adopted by primitive cultures in order to unveil its mysteries, Chiara Guidi’s similar turn, up to a degree, to the world’s disenchantment, is, in effect, expressed in a reverse way, namely through the adoption of a primitive-like view of it; and by using

⁷³ Max Weber, “Wissenschaft als Beruf,” in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre* [“Science as a profession,” in *Collected Essays on Science Studies*], ed. Johannes Winckelmann (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1982), 594, quoted in *ibid*, 138.

⁷⁴ Athur Mitzman, *The Iron Cage. An Historical Interpretation of Max Weber* (New Brunswick and Oxford: Transaction Books, 1985), 226, quoted in *ibid*.

⁷⁵ See further Cunningham, *Children Since 1500*, 171-200.

⁷⁶ Dekker, “The Century of the Child,” 138-139.

not science's but art's means. What the artist proposes as an instrument for the disclosure of the world's mystery is respectively the exploration of childhood's mystery and, to the extent that is feasible, the revelation of its cosmos. The world's and childhood's demystification could be, in essence, realized by adopting the child's view, which greatly simulates the savage's magical view. However, in Guidi's view, although this is equally grounded more on experiential activity rather than rational patterns of thinking, it is not conceived in the sense of a transcendental vista referring to a supernatural agency but rather as a wondrous outlook referring to a transfiguring pragmatic agency. By consequence, paradoxically, childhood's disenchantment evolves from its enchantment, since its demystification requires the assimilation of its "magical" agency by adults through the appropriation of its magical view. In that context, it seems that in Guidi's art childhood's demystification draws on the projection of its ambivalent character entailing the unfolding of both its disenchanting and enchanting aspects.

Yet, as another oxymoron, the disenchantment of the world by Guidi through her proposed assimilation of the child's view by the adult appears, eventually, to be conducive to the further establishment of the premises for its reenchantment. Her invitation for "seeing" the very essence of reality by basically debunking it, through the subversion, or even the deconstruction, of its imagery, at the same time, entails their *ad hoc* reconstruction and, by extension, the world's transformation. Given that this proposed gaze on the world is accompanied, from Guidi's perspective, by a respective gaze on one's self, in the sense of self-reflection, consequently this process elicits the enchantment of the beholders, in that case the theatre spectators, involving their own transformation as well by way of the apparition of new meanings as a result of the creation of new realities that concern them. Finally, the total outcome of this interaction generates a kind of "re-enchantment" of the world.

But this is not the case only in the theatre for children by Chiara Guidi. Her turn to the "re-enchantment" of the world seems to be contextualized in the wider diachronic movement of art. This, deviating from science's initially opposite course that, however, has recently been reversed in view of the realization of the attested by it wondrous elusiveness of invisible forces at work that as well surround the world, has

never ceased to highlight its “magical” aspects, contributing to the revelation of their entailing subversive meanings.⁷⁷ Erika Fischer-Lichte describes the process regarding art’s contribution to the world’s “reenchantment” as such:

The reenchantment of the world is accomplished through this linkage of art and life, which is the aim of the aesthetics of the performative...⁷⁸

When the ordinary becomes conspicuous, when dichotomies collapse and things turn into their opposites, the spectators perceive the world as “enchanted.” Through this enchantment the spectators are transformed...

By transforming its participants, performance achieves the reenchantment of the world. The nature of performance as event – articulated and brought forth in the bodily co-presence of actors and spectators, the performative generation of materiality, and the emergence of meaning – enables such transformation.⁷⁹

Regarding Chiara Guidi’s work on theatre for children, this re-enchantment of the world is realized through the transformation of both its child and adult audience, as well as, self-evidently, of the artist herself. Their metamorphosis is achieved through the generation of a polyphonic plurality of views on it enabled by a suitably arranged artistic setting by her. In other words, her artistic proposal forms a multi-visual, panoramic and kaleidoscopic approach that, alternarively, we might as well identify as an Argos-like observational operationalisation. Key processes included in this are extro-spection, retro-spection and intro-spection, mainly activated and developed by means of the interweavement of experience, memory and imagination. Conducive to their promotion is the configuration of a suitable artistic canvas, which features the interplay of voice, music and silence, orchestrated in such a way so as to disclose the transformative power of the image and its emotional impact, either in its presence or its absence.

⁷⁷ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance. A New Aesthetics*, trans. Saskya Iris Jain (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 206-207. Modern sciences, especially over the course of the second half of the 20th century, pointed to the presence of mysterious forces at work, both in nature and the human being, which, even if they can be explained rationally, they remain elusive. What is further evinced is, as Erika Fischer-Lichte puts it, that “humans are ultimately incapable of controlling the “invisible forces” that shape the world. Even if they aspire to govern and define these powers, they will always also have to let themselves be governed and defined by them.” Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 206.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 180-181.

Especially as far as the case of the play *La Terra dei Lombrichi* is concerned within the scope of the ARGOS Experimentation, it is surfaced that Guidi's proposed artistic model of "seeing" that, in a way, converges to the panoptic approach adopted by the aforementioned research project, is evident on several levels: in her artistic conceptual and methodological approach with respect to spectatorship, as well as the expression of her directing style in practice. Her attempt as a playwright to showcase a wide spectrum of various images on childhood constructed by adults, featuring both its enchanting and disenchanting aspects, to both a child and adult audience, is demonstrative of her endeavor for expanding the vision of all spectators. Also, her choice to foreground dramaturgical themes that tend to be conventionally "out of children's sight," namely disconnected from their culture by adults, falls in the same broad range of her artistic orientation. In this direction, even more apparent is, of course, her interest in intertwining the child's and adult's gaze with the aim of attaining a jointly panoramic view of reality, as expressed by way of the Errant Method's application, which, as discussed above, proved multifacetedly efficient in practice. Likewise, her panoptic directing approach, as mirrored in her continuous and systematic broad supervision of all, both backstage and downstage, processes involved throughout the preparation and the presentation of her theatrical work to the audience, attests her focus on the acquisition of a panorama of her artistic project concerning both the stages of its creation and its perception.

Needless to mention that another token of Guidi's ongoing and unfolding artistic pursuit for the attainment of an all-encompassing vista on reality, as a salient objective launched by her work, particularly characteristic of her whole artistic vision, is her interest in including, additionally, other kind of gazes on it, apart from these of its predefined participants (children, actors, educators or parents), albeit on another level and on a special occasion. A case in point is, obviously, the active integration in the creative process of the play *La Terra dei Lombrichi* of the direct and close scientific gaze, as represented by the researchers-observers' view participating in the ARGOS Project, which, by definition, refers to a systematic and intensive multi-visionary approach.

Finally, despite the avowedly utopian proposal for gaining a sheer child's view *per se*⁸⁰ and the *a priori* objective difficulty of fully activating their primary and determining agency in the development of an open theatrical project,⁸¹ theatre for children by Chiara Guidi, as exemplified in the case of the play *La Terra dei Lombrichi*, through both the micro- and macro-scopic lens of ARGOS, undeniably constitutes a *par excellence* paradigmatic attempt towards the approach of these challenging aims. Thus, more broadly, it forms an interesting paradigmatic reference point for the exploration of conceptual patterns relating to childhood in the cultural sphere from art's perspective *vis a vis* with science's perspective. But, perhaps, its foremost contribution, apart from the discovery of multiple horizons of both visible and invisible worlds and the revelation of their various life meanings, appears to be rather the celebration of the powerfulness of this "ever-enchanting" vision itself and its *ad infinitum* spectacular pursuit, irrespective of the scope of view.

⁸⁰ Both the formation and the reception of an absolutely intact child gaze, detracted from its pertaining cultural context and unfiltered by the adult's gaze on it, namely being impervious to their predisposed interpretation of it, seem to be arguable. It rather appears that the child's viewpoint is ultimately the total result of an, up to a point, constant reciprocal interaction with the adult's, even on an implicit and unconscious level. On the matter of the child's social agency, see Barrie Thorne, "Sociology and Anthropology of Childhood," in *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood in History and Society*, ed. Paula S. Fass (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), 3: 774-775.

⁸¹ For instance, perhaps a characteristic indication of this difficulty seems to be the absence of inclusion by Chiara Guidi, within the framework of her initial artistic scheme, of an additional possible different course of dramaturgical action, potentially chosen to be followed by children, judging, at least, by the original narrative version of the play *La Terra dei Lombrichi*. More specifically, there are no noticeable directing (written) instructions covering the possibility of a different dramaturgic development, due to a potentially different kind of reaction by children from the most obviously expected by adults (that is a predominantly positive response) with reference to the impersonated Death's alluring invitation to them for following him to the unknown Land of the Earthworms. Guidi and Keller, *Nella Terra dei Lombrichi*, 39. However, a subsequent inclusion by the artist of this parameter in the same play, in the form of a respective addition referring to the possibility of a unanimous opposite response by the child spectators regarding the aforementioned dramaturgic point, is evident in a later textual version of it, attesting to her open-mindedness, flexibility and continuous interest for improvement of her creations. Guidi, *La Terra dei Lombrichi*, 13. This fact seems to underline, in general, the complexity of the task for an artist to undertake and realize an open theatre project, especially involving child spectators, since it primarily requires the maintenance by the former of an objective distance from a, by definition, subjectively formulated and/or orchestrated artistic scheme. Ironically, it seems that the approach of the child's gaze, in terms of their feelings and thoughts, is, in a way, more attainable through the (adult) artist's detachment from it. And, evidently, this is not an easily tractable matter in practice.

References

- Burke, Catherine. "Theories of Childhood." In Vol. 3, *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood in History and Society*, edited by Paula S. Fass, 818-826. New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004.
- Cunningham, Hugh. *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500*. 2nd ed. Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2005.
- Dekker, Jeroen J. H. "The Century of the Child Revisited." *The International Journal of Children's Rights* 8 (2000): 133-150.
- Ευριπίδης. *Άλκηστις*. Τόμοι 1-2, επιμέλεια και μετάφραση Δανιήλ Ι. Ιακώβ. Αθήνα: MIET, 2012 [Euripides. *Alcestis*. Vol. 1-2, edited and translated by Daniel I. Iakov. Athens: MIET, 2012].
- Fischer-Lichte, Erika. *The Transformative Power of Performance. A New Aesthetics*. Translated by Saskya Iris Jain. London and New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Guidi, Chiara. *La Terra dei Lombrichi*. Cesena: Societas, 2019.
- Guidi, Chiara, and Alice Keller. *Nella Terra dei Lombrichi*. Cesena: Puerilia/Societas, 2016.
- Guidi, Chiara, and Cristina Ventrucchi. "The Errant Method as a 'Children's Art Theatre'," *Performance Research* 23, no. 1 (2018): 68-75.
doi: 10.1080/13528165.2018.1460450/.
- Hutton, Patrick H. "The Art of Memory Reconceived: From Rhetoric to Psychoanalysis." *Journal of the History of Ideas, Inc.* 48, no. 3 (1987): 371-393.
- Jenks, Chris. *Childhood*, London: Routledge, 1996.

Καρουζάκης, Γιώργος. «Chiara Guidi: “Η Τέχνη μας Βοηθά να Παρατηρούμε την Ύπαρξή μας”». *Karouzo - A Place for the Arts*. 16 Δεκεμβρίου, 2015 [Karouzakis, Giorgos. “Chiara Guidi: ‘Art Help us to Observe our Being.’” *Karouzo – A Place for the Arts*. December 16, 2015].

<https://www.karouzo.com/i-tehni-mas-voitha-na-paratiroume-tin-iparxi-mas/>.

Kennedy, David. “The Roots of Child Study: Philosophy, History, and Religion.” *Teachers College Record* 102, no. 3 (2000): 514-538. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249400150_The_Roots_of_Child_Study_Philosophy_History_and_Religion.

Κλεφτόγιαννη, Ιωάννα. «Η Κιάρρα Γκουίντι Θέλει να Μάθει στα Παιδιά να Φοβούνται». *Popaganda*. 21 Οκτωβρίου, 2015 [Kleftogianni, Ioanna. “Chiara Guidi Wishes to Teach Children to Be Afraid.” *Popaganda*. October 21, 2015]. <https://popaganda.gr/art/kiara-gkouinti-theli-na-mathi-sta-pedia-na-fovounte/>.

Mitzman, Athur. *The Iron Cage. An Historical Interpretation of Max Weber*. New Brunswick and Oxford: Transaction Books, 1985.

Newton, Michael. *Savage Girls and Wild Boys: A History of Feral Children*. London: Faber and Faber, 2002.

Papalexiou, Eleni, and Avra Xepapadakou. “About SRS.” ARCH-Archival Research & Cultural Heritage. The Archive of ‘Societas Raffaello Sanzio.’ October, 2017. <https://www.arch-srs.com/srs>.

Satta, Caterina. “Simply Child’s Play? Reconfiguring Child-Adult Relations in a Leisure Place for Children.” *Poiésis - Revista do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação-Mestrado - UNISUL, Tubarão* 4, no. 8 (Jul./Dez. 2011): 252 – 270.

Thorne, Barrie. "Sociology and Anthropology of Childhood." In Vol. 3, *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood in History and Society*, edited by Paula S. Fass, 771-776. New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004.

"Towards Acts of Creation and Dynamics through Cross-Collaboration in the Performing Arts." *Argos Newsletter*, no. 1 (Fall 2019).

[https://mailchi.mp/d7f1c4dc0ac6/newsletter-1?e=\[UNIQID\]](https://mailchi.mp/d7f1c4dc0ac6/newsletter-1?e=[UNIQID]).

Valentini, Valentina, and Chiara Guidi. "To Act by Singing," *Critical Stages/Scènes Critiques, The IATC journal/Revue de l'AICT*, no 16 (Winter 2017).

<http://www.critical-stages.org/16/to-act-by-singing/>.

Weber, Max. "Wissenschaft als Beruf." In *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre* ["Science as a profession." In *Collected Essays on Science Studies*], edited by Johannes Winckelmann, 582–613. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1982.

Ζούση, Μάνια. «Το Θέατρο Έχει Ανάγκη τα Παιδιά». *Η Αυγή*. 17 Οκτωβρίου, 2015 [Zoussi, Mania, "Theatre Needs Children." *Avgi*. October 17, 2015].

Archives

The Archive of "Societas Raffaello Sanzio." Cesena, Italy.

<https://www.arch-srs.com/home>.

Spring 2020