

Comedy, Tragedy, and "Universal Structures" Societas Raffaello Sanzio's *Inferno, Purgatorio, and Paradiso*



By Margherita Laera

Photo 1: *Inferno* (2008). The back wall is lifted enough to reveal the feet of the performers.

Photo: Luca del Pia

The trilogy, *Inferno, Purgatorio, and Paradiso*, directed by Romeo Castellucci of Societas Raffaello Sanzio, opened at the Avignon Festival in July 2008. While other theatre works inspired by Dante Alighieri's *Divina Commedia* (1304–21) have taken the work quite literally, in Castellucci's production one does not find Beatrice, Vergil, devils, or sinners. The trilogy's reference to Dante is not textual but pre-textual, as the company's response to the poem is a production which asks the same questions raised by Dante more than seven centuries ago. What are Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven in the third millennium? How can one represent them? How can one communicate them to a contemporary audience? With three extremely different shows, the Italian theatre company continues their exploration into the notion of the tragic, questioning the role of the artist, the power and limits of representation, and the notion of spectatorship.

During the course of an hour-long Skype interview on 15 July 2009, Castellucci and I talked about his *Divina Commedia*. I began by asking him how he started working on the project. "I started from the title," he replied.

Everyone knows what *Inferno* means, even those who have not read Dante. Everyone of us, in the course of everyday life, has experienced a moment of Hell, and the same thing can be said of Purgatory and Paradise. I am referring to intimate

Margherita Laera is a PhD student in Drama at Queen Mary, University of London. Her thesis about contemporary adaptations of Greek tragedy is due for completion in December 2010. She is a freelance journalist writing about arts and culture for Italian publications such as *Vogue* and *Wired*, and she is the London theatre correspondent for the Italian theatre review *Hystrio*. Her translation of Jean-Luc Lagarce's play *Nous, les héros* (1995) was published in March 2009 by Ubulibri (Milan). www.margheritalaera.com



Photo 2: *Inferno* (2008). Romeo Castellucci is attacked by seven German shepherd dogs.

Photo: Luca del Pia

spaces and mental states, not physical places.

With its 15,000 verses, Dante's *Commedia* is one of the most profound, imaginative, and celebrated works of European literature. Why did Castellucci decide to undertake such an arduous challenge?

It is a bad idea to tackle the *Divina Commedia* because it does not lend itself to any kind of representation. It is one of the greatest works of art, because it really is a work of the imagination, not only of the author, but also of the reader. A flowing river of sounds, images, and feelings take place in the Beyond. It is a place that doesn't exist, and where anything can happen. The Artist thus takes on this unprecedented responsibility of creating new worlds that don't actually exist. To answer your question, why did I want to stage the *Divina Commedia*? I must confess, I don't really know. I can tell you that the title of a show for me is a "door" that leads into it, it is a promise, a promise that something will happen. I didn't want to make an erudite work, but I knew this was a very dangerous undertaking, and this danger inspired me. For Italians, Dante is the father of the mother tongue. The *Divina Commedia* marks the birth of the Italian language. The holy dimension of this work, which makes it so dangerous, also interested me very much. It was not so much a question of representing Dante, but of *being* Dante today.

As Nicholas Ridout has suggested (*Creating Worlds* 9-12), the idea of "creating worlds" is one that defines Societas Raffaello Sanzio's artistic project, in so far as their theatre does not aim at representing the world, but at creating an alternative reality which obeys its own laws and in which time flows at a different pace.

So how did Castellucci imagine Hell?

From the very beginning, I thought *Inferno* would represent the idea of the masses, the people, movements, waves, both in a choreographic sense and in an emotional one. *Inferno* does not have a clear-cut chronological development, so much so that in every city we go to we change the sequence of actions that take place onstage. It is a show that opens itself up to the city, since it also features a cast of seventy to eighty extras among the inhabitants of the host city. The extras are not just decorative, they become part of the writing of the show.

In what follows, I try to recall the memories of the three productions, which I saw in London in April 2009.

As the lights go down in the Barbican Theatre for the performance of *Inferno*, the Artist—Castellucci himself—comes onstage. "My name is Romeo Castellucci," he declares. Seven German shepherd dogs come in, held leashes by their respective trainers. Someone helps the Artist put on a black reinforced protection suit and then the dogs are released. They attack and bite the Artist while he lies on the floor [Photo 2]. Shortly afterwards, the dogs are taken away and someone places a dog fur (a symbol of sin?) on the Artist's back. This first scene functions as prologue and reinterprets Dante's first *Canto* where the poet is attacked by three animals symbolically representing three deadly sins: the lion (pride), the leopard (lust), and the she-wolf (greed). After Castellucci's prologue where the Artist is attacked by the seven wolf-dogs (is greed the only relevant deadly sin in the twenty-first century?), there is no more dialogue in the show and he is not seen again onstage.

A glass cube is brought center stage. Inside a group of young children are playing with bright toys. Is this Castellucci's take on Limbo, the abode of unbaptized souls? A man with blond hair enters and takes pictures of the

audience with an old-fashioned camera and a big flash. He is Andy Warhol, a modern-day Virgil, the Artist's guide to the Underworld. The children continue playing and are unaware of the audience. The glass cube is covered with a black sheet and taken offstage while the children's voices become very loud.

A little girl comes onstage and plays with a basketball. The black wall behind her lifts up. Beneath is a skull, which gets crushed when the wall is lowered down again. She plays with the basketball while voices and noises can be heard. Then, brightly dressed people of all ages slowly enter and lie down before the girl, like a river of men and women. [Photo 3] They roll towards the back of the stage while the girl remains center stage with her basketball.

A woman comes forward and takes the basketball from the girl. A man does the same, then another man, then a little boy and so on. An old woman comes forward, takes the ball and starts eating it. [Photo 4] The back wall is lifted again, the feet and calves of the performers are revealed below it. [Photo 1] A mirror is brought onstage and the audience sees itself reflected in it. [Photo 5] A skeleton crawls across the stage. [Photo 6] A man and a woman hug and kiss. A dog fur is placed between the two lovers. Then,

other people enter and start kissing and hugging. Mothers and fathers attempt to strangle their children. Others hug one another and their hugging turns into strangling. A man kills a woman, another man stands between two women and hugs them in turn, then screams.

Andy Warhol returns. On the back wall, titles of Andy Warhol's paintings appear: *Campbell's Soup*, *Self Portrait* (1964), *Electric Chair*, *Skull* (1970), etc. A big black cube is brought onstage and a group of people climb on it one by one and then fall backwards, and disappear.

A piano appears and is lit with fire. Water is poured on the floor. A projected text appears on the back wall: *To you actors of Societas Raffaello Sanzio who are no longer here*. A few actors lean backwards in a back-bending exercise [Photo 7], then another actor mimes cutting their throats and one by one they fall. Everyone mimes cutting the throats of others who fall, rise again, and again are killed. Only an old man is left standing. He looks lost. A boy with a basketball enters, places the ball on the floor, and hugs the old man. He then mimes cutting the man's throat. The boy places the ball under the grandfather's head and leaves. A white horse enters and a bucket of blood is poured on its back. [Photo 8] Andy Warhol, wearing a dog fur, reenters

Photo 3: *Inferno* (2008). Brightly dressed people of all ages lie on the floor.

Photo: Luca del Pia



Photo 4: *Inferno* (2008). An old lady tries to bite a basketball.

Photo: Luca del Pia



and takes photographs of the audience. A crashed car is brought on and Andy Warhol gets in the car. Blackout.

As the role of seventy local extras becomes fundamental in *Inferno*, I asked Castellucci how he worked with them during rehearsals.

We normally cast a number of people of different physical aspect and age. In the show they simply represent “the people.” I worked with ten actors

and seventy extras who usually know nothing about theatre, and with whom we only rehearse for a few days. So the professional actors’ experience and skills are in a way dispersed among a number of totally unaware people. There is no narrative in the show so we worked with exercises on different feelings, but never with improvisation. (I have never been able to work with improvisation, it’s like an *horror vacui*, I like

Photo 5: *Inferno* (2008). A mirror reflects an image of the audience.

Photo: Luca del Pia



Photo 6: *Inferno* (2008). A skeleton crawls across the stage. Photo: Luca del Pia



working with structure, with physical laws.) When I have seventy extras on stage who are not familiar with the theatre, the pedagogy is reversed: I can't teach them anything, their knowledge is already

perfect, I only need to interpret and arrange what they already know. We worked with themes, human affections, and during the show we see a series of expressions of feelings. I believe I found this aspect in Dante's *Inferno*, where there is a sense of attachment to life and a nostalgia of the beloved ones. When Dante talks to the dead he always talks about their past life, highlighting their hunger for life which is so human.

In Societas Raffaello Sanzio's *Inferno*, there are only two historical figures: one is Castellucci himself in the prologue, and the other is Andy Warhol. I asked the Italian director to tell me more about these two characters:

I come onstage not as an actor but as myself, since I declare my identity and I say: "My name is Romeo Castellucci." I do not say "I am Romeo Castellucci." It is a name someone else has given me, so that the show becomes not an autobiography but a universal biography. This element is taken from Dante since he introduces himself in the beginning, and all of the reader's experiences go through his body. In a certain sense, Dante's body is always present throughout the journey. Dante very frequently addresses the reader, he calls him by name: "E tu, lettore" ["And you, reader"], so he turns his back to the representation and looks at us. It is the same device you can find in the painting *Las Meninas* by Velázquez. The Artist stops working and looks into the spectator's eyes. This mechanism of looking is very complex and initiates a very strong sense of identification. The *Divina Commedia* is

Photo 7: *Inferno* (2008). Brightly-dressed people of all ages engage in a back-bending exercise. Photo: Luca del Pia

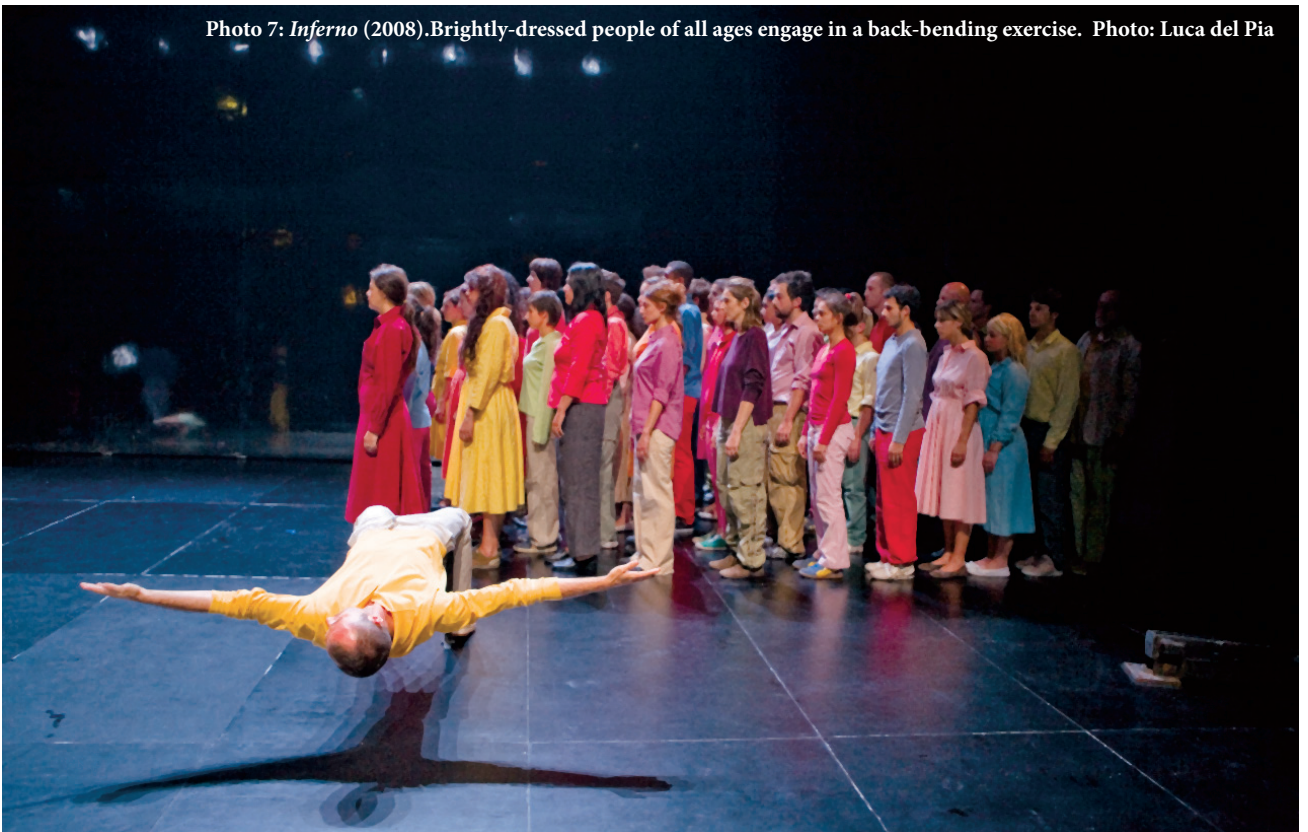




Photo 8: *Inferno* (2008). Red paint is poured over a white horse's back.
Photo: Luca del Pia

the first meta-linguistic work where the poet is inside his own fictional representation. This is a very modern element, which I wanted to keep in the beginning of *Inferno*, when the dogs attack me.

Is Andy Warhol the twentieth-century Artist's guide to the Beyond?

One can see in him whatever one wishes, perhaps he is Satan himself, but perhaps he is like Virgil, or maybe both. Like the Latin poet Virgil, he is an artist who has already seen Hell. Warhol's Hell is the surface, the silence, the nothingness of language. For the character of Andy Warhol, I worked with a mask. He is my reference to an epoch, rather than to History, because with Andy Warhol, in a certain sense, History ends. The portrait of Mao Zedong and the portrait of a banana have the same value, so this must mean that History has been crashed. He goes onstage when the group of children are playing in the glass cube. With the children I worked on their unconsciousness, on the invincibility of their presence. I like working with alien presences on stage, like children, machines,

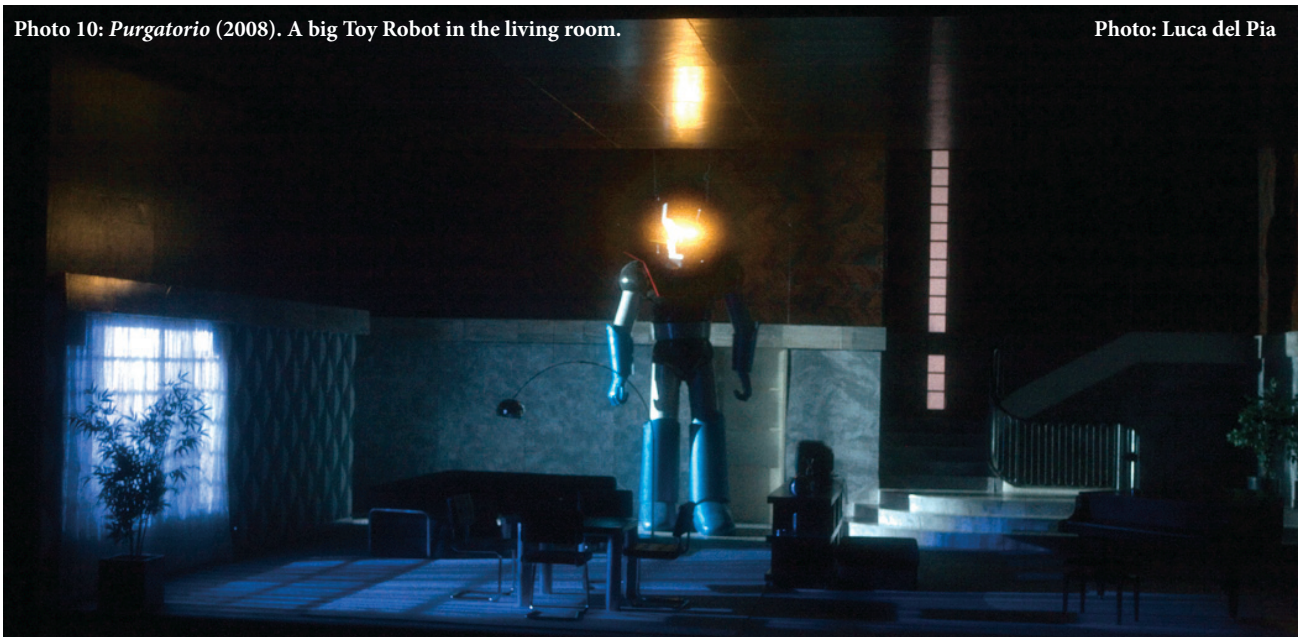


Photo 9: *Purgatorio* (2008). The Mother (Irena Radmanovic) feeds the Son (Pier Paolo Zimmermann).

Photo: Luca del Pia

Photo 10: *Purgatorio* (2008). A big Toy Robot in the living room.

Photo: Luca del Pia



animals, etc. There is no hierarchy of roles in my theatre: everyone and everything, including technology, participates in the same way. My preoccupation is to provide a wave of feelings which are able to touch the spectator simultaneously through all elements onstage.

The music and soundscape for *Inferno*, composed by American musician Scott Gibbons, also plays a very important role in the production.

I would say his music is essential to my work. Scott works with natural sources, never with a synthesizer. The sources he used this time were relative to the human body, to human voice and breath, but he also captured the sounds produced during a human autopsy, the sound of bones and blood. There is nothing macabre here, when the sound of a dead body is rendered music.

Compared to *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* is a totally different “place” and Castellucci employed an entirely transformed approach. The show not only communicates a distinct feeling, but it also presents a sense of time and a notion of spectatorship that are completely changed from the first part of the trilogy. Of the three shows, *Purgatorio* is the most “theatrical,” as Castellucci puts it, since it presupposes a linear sense of time and a consistent narrative.

Purgatorio never changes in the international tour. The structure is fixed, there is a beginning and an end, causes and effects. The dramaturgy was already complete before we started rehearsals. So unlike with *Inferno*, rehearsals for *Purgatorio* were not a creative moment, their purpose was to verify and sometimes resist the existing structure. I have chosen the actors with care, since they needed to have a psychological intensity.

Castellucci also added that in *Purgatorio*, a certain

suffering is implied in seeing the show:

Purgatorio means purification, catharsis, so it is like a Greek tragedy. Where there is something to purge, there is excrement, violence and treachery. We don’t really know who needs to be purified: maybe the spectators need to purge themselves from the things they’ve seen.

The scene opens in a big kitchen of a bourgeois apartment. The Mother is drying the dishes, wearing a grey skirt, a white blouse and high heels. No sound can be heard, everything is still, lonely, and uncannily quiet. Then, “Sweetheart?” she calls. The Son appears with a toy robot in his hands. He sits at the table, she prepares the meal and brings him a plate. “Have you still got your headache?” she



Photo 11: *Purgatorio* (2008). The Father (Sergio Scarlatella) takes off his rubber mask.
Photo: Luca del Pia

asks, breaking an odd silence. The Son nods. “Take your medicine then.” [Photo 9] The Son get his pill and takes it. “Is he coming tonight?” the Son asks. The Mother does not answer and keeps cooking.

Later, the Son watches TV in his room. There are toys all around and it’s dark. The mother comes in and says “I need you. Come with me to the living room.” The Son takes his robot with him and goes into the living room. It’s dark and a huge version of the same robot is standing in the middle of the living room. “Where are you?” asks the Son. [Photo 10] He looks for the robot with a flashlight.

In the following scene, the lights are bright in the living room. There is a piano on the right, armchairs and sofas on the left. The Son enters, sits on the floor and reads a book. As the noise of a car pulling up outside the house can be heard, the dog barks and the Son leaves. A man enters the room; he is wearing a brown suit and a red tie: “I’m home!” he says. The Mother comes to greet him and the Father complains about his business trip. “I will heat up your dinner,” the Mother says, and leaves the room. A sense of stiff and disturbing artificiality can be observed in the relationships between these characters.

At this point a line of projected text appears over the stage anticipating the action onstage. The subtitle reads: “The Third Star will drink a little more whiskey,” then the Father pours himself a drink. “The Third Star will ask the First Star if he can eat in the living room,” then the Father asks the Mother if he can have his dinner in the living room and the Mother comes to set the table. While

he eats in front of the TV, the Mother goes to check on their Son. “The Third Star will not be hungry anymore,” then the Father stops eating and leaves his food on the plate. The Mother comes back and notices the Father has not finished his dinner. He gets up to hug and kiss her. “Where is my hat?” he asks. In response, the Mother starts sobbing: “Please, not tonight, please, no.” The Father ignores her and goes to look for his hat, then asks the Mother to go and fetch the Son. As the Son comes in with the Mother, the Father asks him how he is doing and then puts his cowboy hat on. “Will you come with Dad? Let’s play the cowboy like last time.” Father and Son go upstairs hand in hand, while the subtitle reads: “The three Stars go upstairs and listen to music.” The stage remains completely empty as a unsettlingly invisible but audible scene of sexual violence unfolds outside the spectators’ view. We hear music coming from upstairs, then: “Nooo,” cries the Son. “Stop it!” screams the Father. We hear bangs, cries and weeps. “Open your mouth, again!” says the Father, then a few minutes of horrifying silence. The Father comes back downstairs; he looks tired, wobbles on the staircase, his shirt outside his trousers. He sits at the piano, wearing a facial mask with a bald head. He takes it off and plays a melancholic tune. [Photo 11] The Son appears with torn clothes. He takes his Father’s hands off the piano, climbs on his lap. “Everything is over,” he says, and hugs the Father. [Photo 12] Blackout.

Castellucci’s “obscene” child abuse scene imitates Greek tragedy’s alleged taste for offstage violence, but the still emptiness of the bourgeois living room makes the sequence



Photo 12: *Purgatorio* (2008). The Son (Pier Paolo Zimmermann) forgives the Father (Sergio Scarlatella).

Photo: Luca del Pia

even more unbearable. Five long minutes of sexual abuse unfold outside the spectators' view, turning them into disconcerted eavesdroppers. Though the violence happens offstage, its impact is not reduced; rather it is magnified by making spectators imagine the unimaginable. Talking about the notion of "obscene," Castellucci drew a parallel between Greek tragedy and *Purgatorio*:

When the drama becomes unsustainable, one conceals everything. So at the peak of the drama, there is nothing to see. But it's not a true concealment, it's a double exposure, because this violence falls entirely within the personal sphere of the spectator. If you want to make a bloody and brutal scene, you have got to hide it because only this way can it become effective. This is not decorative violence, it's not media violence, it's an intimate, individual kind of violence. That's why for some people it's hard to sustain.

Whilst one is tempted to read a reference to contemporary society in the allusion to child abuse, which continues to produce distressing headlines and is one of the biggest targets of internet censorship in Europe, Castellucci rejected any reference to current affairs and proposed a biblical interpretation of violence in which the relationship between Creator and Creature is explored in a "blasphemous" fashion:

The familial dimension of violence is something that the Greeks have taught us. Matricide, infanticide, uxoricide and so on. When one talks about the origin of violence, one talks about the origin of society, of the nature of human relationships. For this reason violence always means treason, it is always a kind of killing. The fact that in *Purgatorio* we staged child abuse can be seen as a reference to our society, but the idea that one would see in *Purgatorio* a reference to all these horrible chronicles about pedophilia actually disturbs me, it is a coincidence which I would happily do without. That scene in *Purgatorio* is not about the morbid curiosity of the media, it is much more deep and intimate. It is a ghost, a fantasy that every child has. There are psychoanalytical and social interpretations, but the most fascinating is the biblical and theological reading. The idea that the Father sacrifices the Son on a mountain (in *Purgatorio* Father and Son walk up the stairs, like Abraham and Isaac on



mount Morijja in the *Bible*), but then the Creator needs to be forgiven by the Creature. There is the weakness of the Creator and the strength of the Creature. This has been the real scandal of this production, because many people have rejected the fact that the Son forgives the Father. But the act of creation is a violent act for which the Creator needs to be forgiven. So God asks for our forgiveness.

According to *Purgatorio*'s parable, God is haunted by sense of guilt for having committed the original sin, that is, for having created Man. This extreme act of violence upon his Son is an attempt to end his dependence on the Son and an effort to seek his forgiveness. Claudia Castellucci, cofounder of the company, explains the idea of God's original sin, the creation of Man, as the "need to be seen by others" through a creature who will reflect his own

image:

The Son represents a type of fatal mistake, created in the distracted tiredness after a long period of hard work. He is perhaps the consequence of a feeling of the Father's satisfaction, which demands to be seen by others. The Son is destined to forever reflect the Father's image and will always represent that original need to be seen. This is original sin, which is attributed to Father and not Son. (*The Need for Consolation*, 14-15).

The Son's forgiveness marks the end of chronological time and physical space: "It's all over," he says to the Father. Therefore, the second half of the show constitutes an inversion of time, space and relationships. It's dark except a blue round window is projected on a black curtain. The Son turns his back to the audience and looks outside the blue window. [Photo 13] Music, voices and cries can be heard. The Son watches a procession of dark clouds, dark flowers, a thunderstorm, red flowers, dry poppies and a bamboo forest: it's the creation of Eden played back to front. At last the Father appears from behind the bamboos with his cowboy hat on. [Photo 14] He stands behind the round screen and begins to shake. As the curtain lifts, the Father is now in the living room. It's empty and dark and he moves irrationally, falling on the floor as though having epileptic convulsions. A very tall actor dressed like the Son comes in

Photo 13: *Purgatorio* (2008). The Son (Pier Paolo Zimmermann) watches a procession of flowers outside the window.
Photo: Luca del Pia

Photo 14: *Purgatorio* (2008). The Father (Sergio Scarlatella) appears in a bamboo forest wearing his cowboy hat.

Photo: Luca del Pia



and watches his movements. [Photo 15] The Son tries to copy the Father's movements by lying belly down on his body. The Father rises and goes upstairs and the Son starts shaking on the floor. A black circle above the stage begins to move. Inside it is a set of rotating black lines which slowly fill the circle. [Photo 16] The curtain falls. Blackout.

The second half of *Purgatorio* is perhaps as disturbing as the first. After the flower sequence, a shrunken and quivering Father faces an oversized and menacing Son who tries to imitate his moves. The slightly David Lynchian feel to the scene (the cowboy, the inversion of roles and the nightmarish atmosphere) is topped by a sense of unease as the two actors fake what looks like an epileptic crisis. This sequence, which is supposed to suggest "the Father trembling like newborn flesh sink[ing] back to the beginning of time" (*The Need for Consolation* 15), is surely as unrepresentable as the violence of rape, and as "obscene" as blasphemy.

Of the three productions, *Paradiso* is the one that changed the most from Avignon to its international version. In Avignon, rather than a show, Castellucci created an installation. The venue was an old gothic church where the floors were covered with mirrors and flooded with water. [Photo 17]

We had to come up with a different solution for the international tour, since in Avignon it was so site specific. I wanted the installation to happen inside the spectator's eyes, not in front of them.

In Avignon there was no human presence, the effect was that of an abyss, as the ceiling was reflected on the floor. The installation could be seen through a round black window and the only object inside the church was a burned piano. A black flag sometimes blocked the view from the round window like an eyelid. The same round opening can be found in the tour version of *Paradiso*. In both versions, the installation remains an optical device.

In the international version, the experience begins as the audience walks into a big bright room with high ceilings. Inside the room there is a white box with only one circular opening. Only a few people can go into the box at any given time. Once inside the white box, everything is pitch black. It is hot and very humid. There is a sound of dripping water. In the beginning it is impossible to see where the water is, and whether it is real water or just the sound of it. One can only guess it is real water because of humidity, but it takes at least a few minutes for the viewers's sight to adjust from bright light to no light at all. Then one can begin to see, very slowly, the scene which is taking place before one's eyes. A man can be seen from the waist up at the top of the wall opposite the circular entrance. A warm waterfall flows from the top of the wall down onto the floor. The man waves his hands, he is trying to move but he is trapped in the wall. Is he trying to get out towards the audience or to get inside, away from the audience?

Castellucci added:

In the tour version of *Paradiso*, I was inspired by a short Conrad novel, *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* about the world of ships and sailing. In the book there is a description of a tempest in which a black sailor remains stuck on a wall and can't move, surrounded by pressing water. This made me think—I don't know why—of paradise, of the condition of passage, of dark waters which can represent the womb. The darkness of my *Paradiso* clearly means the opposite, it means light. So this way spectators can see the birth of

it is a light which blinds human sight, so in the end he goes back to darkness, where his journey had begun. I have tried to keep this spiritual and intimate dimension of light, which is not a physical light, in my version of *Paradiso*. I worked with two actors who take turns and we worked on their physical strain, their effort, their pain. It's almost like childbirth from dark waters.

Societas Raffaello Sanzio's *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso* imply not only a journey of the artist but also of the spectator. How does Castellucci understand the role of the audience throughout the trilogy?



Photo 15: *Purgatorio* (2008). The Son (Davide Savorani) watches the Father (Jurii Roverato) while he is shaking on the floor.

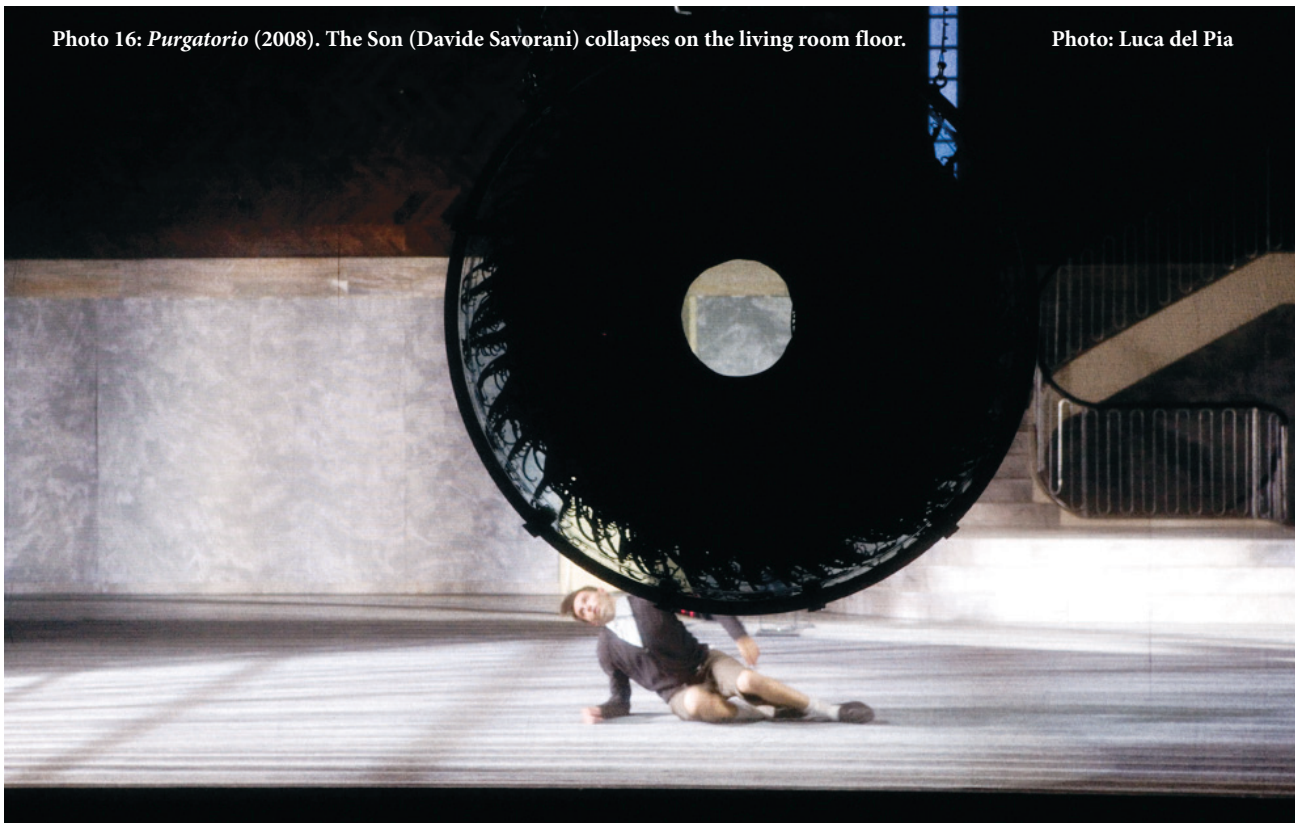
Photo: Luca del Pia

an image, which is born into their own retina. It is not an image which is immediately available, it is an image which one has to conquer or—I would like to say more—it is an image which one has to produce. It is the spectator with his/her own abilities who produces the image, with the ability to adapt to darkness and with the light which is already inside their eyes. The image of dark light and the idea of negative theology can also be found in Dante. In his *Paradiso*, Dante understands that the light of God cannot be seen,

There is a dramaturgy of the spectator's position, which changes as the three productions unfold. The role of the audience is aesthetic, political, and may I say also spiritual—though this word is a dangerous one. I inherited this aspect from Dante, because his reader identifies with the poet all the way through the journey. The reader begins from the weight and gravity of *Inferno* and arrives to a disincarnated experience in *Paradiso*. We could summarize Dante's journey as a progressive change of viewpoint—on history, on people, on

Photo 16: *Purgatorio* (2008). The Son (Davide Savorani) collapses on the living room floor.

Photo: Luca del Pia



God, and on the meaning of life. In the end he understands that the light in *Paradiso* is a light that comes from inside himself. So I tried to recreate this journey of the spectator's eye, which becomes more and more "involving" but also more lonely. In *Inferno* there is this mirror effect, then in *Purgatorio* there is a sense of shame about what is happening, then in *Paradiso* you are alone facing the installation, you are swallowed by this hole which contains a dark light. This light is what Dionysius the Areopagite (first century AD) calls God's "negative light." I like to take the body of the spectator into consideration. The status of the spectator interests me much more than the status of the actor. Every show is different and is based on a different geometry, so it presupposes a different kind of spectatorship. However, I can't anticipate what the spectator will think. What happens in the spectator's mind is not my business. Theatre is an individual epiphany, so I have no control over the audience's reactions. I am not an inventor of forms, one cannot invent forms. I arrange and organize what is already there, what already belongs to the spectator.

Unlike most experimental drama, Castellucci's theatre is not primarily interested in a critique of capitalism's inequity. Instead, it plays with the archetypes of western culture and the human condition in a post-Warholian universe:

I don't believe that the theatre should address historical contingency. I don't want to talk about social issues and I don't want to denounce

injustices. It seems like too simple a scheme to me. However, my theatre is produced in this time, in this latitude, in this language, so it undergoes all the consequences of reality. But everyday life is not my objective, nor is it my point of departure. I like to think about more universal structures, which would be able to speak to a Chinese person or to a Brazilian person. I do not speak about Italy, nor do I speak of Berlusconi. I have no interest whatsoever in that. The idea that one would see a reference to all these horrible chronicles about pedophilia in *Purgatorio* actually disturbs me, it is a coincidence which I would happily do without. That scene in *Purgatorio* is not about the morbid curiosity of the media, it is much more deep and intimate.

After a two-year exploration of the mechanisms of tragedy with the eleven episodes of *Tragedia Endogonidia* (2002–04), Societas Raffaello Sanzio's adaptation of Dante's *Comedy* seems like a logical continuation of the same project, that is the investigation of "universal structures" and the tragic. Some say that tragedy and comedy are actually two manifestations of the same idea. Does Castellucci agree?

Tragedy and comedy are exactly the same thing, they have different masks but they are both answers to the absurdity of life. They question not just the mystery of death, but the reason we were born in the first place. One can laugh about it with comedy, or cry about it with tragedy, but the principle is the same. The problem is *being*

Photo 17: *Paradiso* (2008). The installation at Avignon. A burning piano and flooded floors reflecting the ceiling. Photo: Raynaud de Lage



here. There is nothing that interests me more than tragedy. It's the strongest, deepest, most radical, violent, and striking form ever invented, both from the point of view of aesthetics and of human relations. It is the most beautiful and honest thing. This is especially true in Western culture, as tragedy doesn't make sense in Eastern cultures. Its movements are simple, but they are carved inside our spirit. Tragedy has shaped Western aesthetics, and one cannot do without it. It is not simply a thing of the past, an archeological relic, it is totally projected into the future. It is inevitable.

SOURCES

Castellucci, Claudia. "The Need for Consolation (Notes on

Purgatory)." *Barbican Theatre Programme for Inferno, Purgatorio, and Paradiso*. London, 2-6 April 2009: 14-15.
Castellucci, Romeo. "The Divine Comedy." *Barbican Theatre Programme for Inferno, Purgatorio, and Paradiso*. London, 2-6 April 2009: 6.
Ridout, Nicholas, "Creating Worlds." *Barbican Theatre Programme for Inferno, Purgatorio, and Paradiso*. London, 2-6 April 2009: 9-12.
www.raffaellosanzio.org

Further Reading:

Claudia Castellucci, Romeo Castellucci, Joe Kelleher, and Nicholas Ridout. *The Theatre of Societas Raffaello Sanzio*. London: Routledge, 2007.