Benjamin’s weathered thresholds frame acts of incidental discovery, of aimless wandering, an invitation to linger, an invitation to cross over. A common, sometimes even weathered, threshold many an itinerant spectator traverses, whether incidentally, aimlessly or full of intention, is the foyer of a theatre or auditorium, the first of many frames for the space of playing. When I pass through the entrance doors to the theatre, conditions around these doors tell me if I am late, my anxiety increases when I see only a very few bodies rushing towards the ticket takers, or if I am about to attend a sold-out performance, with the crush of bodies retrieving tickets and the somewhat desperate look, one I know well, of those hoping for a return ticket or a miracle. In a conventional European theatre I might then pass through more doors to the orchestra, the balcony, the auditorium, or into the box.

In *Places of Performance*, the gifted itinerant spectator and theorist Marvin Carlson marks not only the context and surroundings of the performance space but the sentient affect caused by the urban or pastoral spaces surrounding performance and the architecture housing it over centuries. Many who engage
in studies in cosmopolitanism have also recounted walking the city, passing in and out of those urban thresholds, as a shared performance. I think of the meandering theoretical feet of de Certeau whose own feet follow in the impressions made by Benjamin's *flâneuring* steps. In the architectural organization of the European city, constructed from an architectural language distinctly of this continent, theatre buildings have played a speaking part in subtle tones, communicating to audiences subliminally, supplying context out of contours for the drama we have entered the space in order to see and hear.

While I can meander by buildings for months, years, without noting much more than the scale of the structure to the street, to my body, a newly constructed edifice announces itself in stages, coming more clearly and sharply into relief in its inception and in the first years of its existence. Later the architectural information and the associations it conjures diminishes with familiarity and habit as the audience ages beyond Ledoux's original intent for the theatre at Besançon or continues, endlessly, to debate Denys Lasdun's design for the National theatre in London. Like all nationally marked projects, theatre buildings import stories often at that level just below conscious thought, or sometimes more audibly in conversation as the spectator experiences how the building works, and how it might have been made as a particular aid to certain kinds of performance. Over time, as with the National Theatre in London, audience and makers can weary of a building, find it burdensome and unworkable, and seek to modify or reinvent it.

I remember vividly the accumulation of affect upon my experience as spectator at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM). Though the United States has never created or funded a
central national theatre, it citizens, encouraged by tourism and by the annual Tony awards, tend to think of the capital of theatre in the US as New York. In New York the official theatre district, today a mix of buildings and giant screens winking ads and news in the aura of a theme park, insists against the evidence of a Hollywood identified culture that theatre (though sometimes itself dependent on the film industry’s model), in this place, in these buildings is the center of vibrant national entertainment. BAM, instead, thrives on the ‘edge’ of the city, outside the midtown hub of mainstream theatre and the downtown vibrancy of alternative performance spaces in Manhattan.

After the border crossing from Manhattan to Brooklyn marked by crossing the river that any Manhattan spectator must make to get to the site, I can attend productions in the Opera House (main building) or the relatively new BAM Majestic. Strange though it might seem to non-New Yorkers, I remember how Brooklyn used to be a bridge and a world and a country away from New York, which is to say Manhattan. For many years the theatre ran a BAM bus door to door in order to transport squeamish theatergoers, who thought of Brooklyn as some wild outpost. Time changes neighborhoods as does the housing market and now Brooklyn has become as expensive to live in as Manhattan, so consequently the Brooklyn wildness has been pushed farther out and the movement across the bridge now has a trendy rather than an adventurous character, and indeed many people now walk to BAM from their neighborhoods surrounding it. The BAM Opera House borrows 19th-century European grandeur, indicating to audiences the formality and protected space of theatre going. The Majestic, on the other hand, offers decaying walls and open ruined spaces as an authentication of a
particular kind of modern, foreign and imported experience of theatre as empty space. Both theatres ‘look’ European to me, but the Majestic’s distressed quality marks it out from the rococo of a large opera house.

A little like returning to an opening musical motif, I find myself remembering how and when I began to consciously wander as a spectator. And the passage of time oddly renders what was an exciting opportunity into a mythic memory of a cultural moment: so with my first step through the weathered doors of the Majestic at its inauguration in 1987 for the production it had been designed to stage, Peter Brook’s importation of *The Mahabharata*. New York had been no stranger to the intriguing and critically controversial imports of Brook’s semi-anthropological explorations such as *The Ik* premiered at La Mama. But the Majestic now spatially echoed the Bouffes du Nords in Paris; strangely even though I had never been to the Parisian theatre, I could sense the echo as if a description of Brook’s cavernous warehouse space in the north of Paris came alive in the affective, mimetic spatial character of the Majestic. The crumbling plaster with its variegated layers of paint left showing from different epochs of the life of this Brooklyn building seemed to purposefully frame this mixed event of the English born director residing in Paris whose company brought a production of the play that chronicles founding myths of Indian society, religion and theatre.

Thinking back about the nine-hour production, I remember how as *Mahabharata* spectators we found ourselves in unfamiliar Brooklyn at the break for dinner. One popular restaurant choice, Juniors, served traditional African-American food that is for me home cooking from my childhood, helpings
of fried chicken, of fried potatoes and greens. Familiar as I am with the deployment of stereotypes that cement half-formed and usually harmful prejudices and assumptions, I cannot deny a form of identity or identification persists in what can so quickly becomes a clichéd symbol of national affiliation: so with food, the enduring sense that how we eat and what we eat does make for a sturdy kinship. My recollection of food’s emblematic power to signal home and foreign, the association this has with theatre because so often I am both watching and eating in a foreign city, comes particularly from times when I have been without food from home for some time and then encounter it among others.

As with the ephemeral ties that bind subtly, a nod of recognition as we sit down next to our neighbor to partake of a meal made communal by what we are eating as much as by the proximity of our chairs, so with the cooler, more etched information carved into buildings and out of the setting that offers interpretive hints and clues about theatre and performance more subtle but perhaps as insistent as a national flag. This became clear to me in my own inaugural year in Rome, 1999, when I absorbed information and discerned differences in Italian theatre and more particularly Roman theatre in the process of attending performances throughout the year at the newly opened Teatro India. Reception of the space where a performance occurs forms a part of the training of the itinerant spectator, calling forth an art of attention before the piece starts, combining active and passive skills, conscious or unconscious choices. To the general consent I give when I agree to be a member of an audience, agree to watch and to hear for a period of anywhere from 45 minutes to nine hours, is added
the work of being a spectator from another country. As with surtitles so with the space that creates the audience around us, the construction of buildings and adjustments in response to the affect created will include hints about identity and culture, an architectural second to the primary influence emanating from the bodies in the room.

Fluid monikers and self-described aspects of identity can work by accretion (and of course by attrition). If notions of one's national culture, or the one you are presently borrowing for a time, proceed as much by hearsay and happenstance as by planned indoctrination, accumulation of what you begin to know you did not know you knew builds over time and by repetition and expectation. When something “new” occurs, then the announcement of its advent entails an adjustment, a transition from what has gone before and a shuffling about of what has been to make room for what is coming. A spectator flâneuring over performance thresholds notes such impressions but does not collect them, letting the silt that shifts in the notion of identity and place float.

Here over the floating I pause to think of Brian Massumi who argues by way of Spinoza that our identity occurs out of transition; we are defined in terms of ‘relations of movement and rest.’ Massumi offers a correction of the too general understanding of Spinoza’s meaning by emphasizing how he did not mean “actual, extensive movement or stases” but instead “a body’s capacity to enter into relations of movement and rest.” This capacity is a “power (or potential) to affect or be affected. ‘Relation between movement and rest’ is another way of saying ‘transition’” and for “Spinoza, the body was one with its transitions. Each transition is accompanied by a variation in
capacity: a change in which powers to affect and be affected are addressable by a next event ...the body coincides with its own transitions” and those transitions often intensify in relation to space, in relation to the unfamiliar and the new (15).

In the summer of 1999, wandering across a new threshold in Rome, new to Romans as well as to me, I was aware of the coincidences of my transitions. Indeed the space seemed to invite me to regard my capacity to enter, and that in entering I entered into relations of motion and rest, made transitions through the potential to be affected. The adventure I thus set off on began when I saw the strategically timed billboards alerting theatergoers to the new theatre season and encouraging us to think ahead about tickets and choices while also announcing news of the soon to be opened Teatro India. Seeing the picture of the new theatre, I realized the “newness” of this edifice had nothing to do with new architecture or modern design.

Instead the pictures appeared to be nostalgically rendered in grainy black and white: in retrospect I wonder if this was a
bid for the authentic and minimal in a conventional theatrical culture comfortable with the super baroque and, in theatrical terms, the overdone. The weeds against the building in the photograph communicated country and, like a sacred sign from an industrial church, the pictures almost always showed the nearby abandoned storage tank for gas, its steel skeleton rising up over the Tiber river, as did all the subsequent flyers for productions to come. The name became part of the curious anticipation: why the name ‘India’ in Rome on the Lungotevere Papareschi, an industrial site with abandoned buildings?

Then the “narrative” of the publication of the first season arrived: whether in an advertisement for a festival or a flyer for a theatre, the choices artistic directors make about a season construct a story about the theatre, and the spectators can become characters in the story when we choose to attend it. I remember hearing the opening phrases of the story of the Teatro India created by Mario Martone its director as a mix of some fragments from Italian theatre culture interspersed with bits from international festival culture. The inaugural spectacle in September 1999, three Shakespeare plays directed by eminent Italian director Carlo Cecchi could be seen separately or, on the weekends, all in one day. I would realize only in retrospect how this choice suited the space and Martone’s intent to offer Romans theatergoing in a new key by commencing with a Brookish marathon. From the outset Martone intended the work of the Teatro India to break the habit of a certain kind of after-dinner theatre—where patrons, dressed to the nines, watch Italian playing broader than the original Commedia—by offering anthropological, challenging, site-specific (in the sense that this was a site one traveled around within productions) theatre.
Over the years I have willingly made the transition from one beautiful, classic theatre in Rome to another to see a wide variety of spectacle and performed prose. In the large Teatro Argentina, the parent theatre of which the Teatro India is the experimental offshoot, the space forms the half circle of the traditional amphitheatre with the main floor of the orchestra surrounded by tiers of boxes going up to the gods. The Teatro della Valle, a smaller theatre built on a similar plan to the Argentina, creates a more intimate setting, though the architecture remains formal with boxes, frescoes and filigree. Several independent theatres, the Teatro Vascello and Sala Uno, break with this architectural standard entirely. However within the habitual spatial context of theatre going in Rome, the design of the Teatro India, or the deliberate non-design, signaled a departure from the customary form of spatial decorum between audience and players. First of all, to most visitors and for that matter most Romans, the words Lungotevere Papareschi left a blank in the map of the mind as the site provided no landmark; I could see where it was on the map, but having found ‘it,’ the mode of actually arriving remained obscure. In the beginning of the India’s season, it was clear spectators needed extra time just to locate the theatre, about fifteen minutes outside the center of town, a fact made conscious by the India’s habit of beginning a generous 20-25 minutes late in starting as compared to the usual 15 minutes of the more traditional Roman theatres.

As I think of the spatial negotiation of arriving at the India and the consequences for the timing of performance, I think again of the odd way information about culture, nation and belonging permeates particular habits. If food marks one kind of kinship, relation to time marks another. For me, habitually
late, the practice of Italian largesse in beginning performances about fifteen minutes after ‘curtain’ time means that I can relax into my natural pace and still not miss the beginning of a show. An itinerant spectator accustomed to seeing theatre in Italy must adjust expectations when she/he travels to other countries. I am always struck by how ‘early’ London theatre seems to me with a starting time often of 7:30 in contrast to the Italian 9:00 in the summer and 8:30 in the winter, a half an hour shift that marks the change in light after the shift to daylight savings time in October. The stricture or largesse with time succeeds in sustaining the easy stereotyping of South by the North in Europe. While in some sense these observations strike me as quaint, anecdotal or even trifling, the containers, architectural and temporal, erected in our minds do have consequences for far more important decisions made about funding works, forming coalitions and fighting wars.

In newspapers such as The Guardian articles with a dateline of Rome without fail open with a dismissive phrase about the ‘la dolce vita’ attitudes, a lament laced with envy, or perfunctory pejorative remarks about Southern disorganization. To be sure the world of journalism applies its tone of slightly world weary, seen it all been everywhere, to a range of countries and political situations, but hidden or half-formed assumptions can prevent us from seeing what is actually happening because we drop it into a readymade container marked ‘to be taken seriously’ or ‘not to be taken seriously.’ The more benign result of such implied information in theatres in Rome means that visiting spectators can often be identified just because they are in their seats from about 8:30, resulting in a wait of at least 45 minutes, and often resulting in a spectatorial attitude less generous than
one might desire if you are the player about to enter. Of course this also means that foreign spectators accustomed to Italian time are just as likely to be the ones waiting outside the door to be let in at the first interval at the Barbican.

Once I found the India, as the new theatre quickly become known, another shift in habit announced itself as I walked toward the place marked upon my map. A dusty unpaved road provided the only access to the theatre—a road lit by the ubiquitous candles in flat, round tin pans that denote festa and party in Italy—thus the spectators could not be dropped off at the door. A contingency grave to those whose footwear either by reach and ambition with heels high enough to cause injury or by brand and price with Ferragamos gleaming and pristine would be altered by the time they reached the threshold of this new space. Subtly but persuasively this plan initiated an egalitarian crossing of a new kind of border to arrive at the theatre; we all walked in the dust, the high-heeled and the flat-heeled, the privately driven and the publicly transported.

Walking down a set of cement steps onto more grassy, dusty land, on that first day when I arrived at the complex of buildings that formed the India, I saw a smallish hut for the ticket booth and the bar—no matter how rustic, food and drink, indeed good food and good drink, accompany any act of social intercourse in Rome. Beyond the hut was an open stage built on what looked like an old loading dock and to the right of that stage several picnic tables. Then, continuing to kick up dust that coated my feet, I moved through a ruined arch towards the main factory building. It was warm; I remember wanting to slip off my sandals. This walk towards the theatre also felt a bit like being at the beach, in the country, the preparation I made not
the formal one of slipping a skirt or jacket under me as I sat in a plush chair, but the tucking of my bare and dusty feet up under my thighs in a crossed-legged attitude of relaxed attention.

In its first year the building for performances was barren of ornament. The initial Shakespeare play of Carlo Cecchi’s three-play marathon, *Hamlet*, began at two in the afternoon on a September Saturday. We spectators on bleacher seats watched a play unfold in the natural, stunningly beautiful autumn light of a Roman day, a transportation of the cold Danish court to warmer conditions. I marvel, thinking of Sebald writing about the particular light on the west coast of England or the particular gloom of the North counties, how we might indeed be able to identify native places and adopted homelands simply by the quality of the light. The change of light during this performance came not from electrical manipulation but from time passing as pigeons cooed in rafters, as the back door, a huge factory door the width of the space, was opened on occasion for actors to pass indoors through the late afternoon sunlight from the outside space at once industrial and semi-rural.

*Measure for Measure* followed after a break for plates of pasta and beans and chunks of bread with wine and water. Out of doors, as with *The Mahabharata* those many years ago at BAM, we spectators saw each other, mingled, slowly becoming that particular entity that occurs in any marathon theatre going, a group joined by the experience of multiple viewing and rests between. I have at times been surprised how even a mediocre or bad marathon performance creates a particular kind of bond; if we are not joined together in the grip of a powerful and unfolding experience of reception, we are nonetheless joined together in the bond of being the strong, those who endure
the hours as a feat in and of itself. I returned to a theatre still lit relatively naturally, even when the lights came on they were single lights clipped to beams, no strips of lighting, no technical paraphernalia of the theatre. The same actors now cast in Vienna, now playing against their director/actor who of course played the Duke. Voices spoke the Italian translation unmiked, projection of the natural voice part of the actorly task. No surtitles, no following along for the spectators who did not know Italian: this absence acknowledged that those watching might receive the play without understanding the words while implying a trust that most spectators who pass through Rome and are not Italian know Shakespeare well enough to get the story.

Rcollecting that first day in the space of the India watching something I thought of as ‘Italian Shakespeare,’ I observe how interpretation in reception can divide across experience, knowledge and willingness among spectators. Until the last two decades with the introduction of surtitles in performances of spoken drama, most European productions of Shakespeare played in the language of the host country. Such practice implies that the stories of the plays and the plays themselves are well known by playgoers in Europe. But this very assumption also complicates the reception depending on the spectator and the question of ‘which’ Shakespeare or ‘whose’ Shakespeare. The plays of Shakespeare reappear so consistently on European stages that the varied interpretations and incarnations of the works from country to country almost always offer comment about the particular cultural, national moment in which they are played. Sometimes it seems as if these early modern conduits of news continue to function as ‘the Rialto,’ not in what news they bring, once that of James I or Elizabeth, but rather in the way the
director and players adapt the scenes to tell about now, about a
now very much marked by national and international events.

It occurs to me that I often find the national characteristics
of a production, in so far as anyone can suggest such shifting
contours, appear more vividly against the background of
canonical works by Shakespeare, though I wonder if this may
be due in part to my own familiarity as a teacher, director and
scholar of works from the period. Considering the complications
of what we receive as national culture and how we receive it,
theatre historian Bruce McConachie articulates how “[though]
some cultural uniqueness does reside in every nation, especially
when national boundaries also encompass the center of a
language group…most of the national cultures of the world are
a mix of many cultures [and] their theatre is a mixed breed…”
(120). Even as I write about ‘Italian theatre, Italian productions’,
McConachie’s caution echoes timely because these words never
signal a settled entity but just such a ‘mixed-breed’ theatre,
and one ever in motion as Massumi suggests unsuited to the
‘positioning’ that words considering something particularly
national tend to fix in print. The word ‘Italian’ can even seem
foreign to natives since many Italians identify themselves most
particularly by region, that living subset of a national culture.

My memory of Italian productions of Shakespeare makes
me consider now how often the companies perform Shakespeare
plays in a manner closer to the tale than the theatrical five-
act drama where words make and manipulate and remake the
action. The story becomes simplified tale: Duke leaves town,
boy gets arrested, Provost oversteps, and the characters appear
as type, good Duke, bad Provost, womanly Isabella. I cannot
linger detached, I confess, at this threshold. Into a performance
of Shakespeare in another tongue, I carry with me a host of suppositions and facts: scholarly knowledge of the early modern period and moments from many performances past move out of the shadows of my memory and into the interpretive action of the present watching. I am remembering the shock to the novice spectator of the Italian genre of Shakespeare in 1999 when I found myself agitated rather than moved, and astonished by the evidence being acted out before me that from their very first meeting in *Measure for Measure* Isabella flirted with and swooned over the Duke.

What has been considered a “problem” play for scholars and spectators became a fairytale of good paternalism, re-establishment of the family and budding love: each girl got her man, and there seemed not a shade of discomfort that Angelo was a dubious gift or that Isabella might indeed feel pawned off to the overlord. While I can imagine another kind of spectator wandering into this scene and finding it quaint and easygoing in contrast to the more fierce and radical productions of recent years, for me, trained by feminist scholars in early modern studies, this *Measure for Measure* appeared far more than antiquated. If we were guaranteed one thing in contemporary productions of the play over the last thirty years, we were guaranteed that to varying degrees of horror, discomfort, outrage or at least pointed silence, audiences saw the transfer of Isabella from convent to Duke as a manifestation of the lack of choice women had in early modern England and early modern Europe, a lack of choice a young woman can still have today depending on her culture and its practices.

As an inaugural piece of theatre for the India, the choice challenged everyday theatregoing by the manner—the
marathon—in which it was played. But Cecchi like previous master Giorgio Strehler and disciple Luca Ronconi and India director Mario Martone himself reinforced the male lineage of the father/director as instigator in the new space, a lineage firmly rooted in the accepted culturally high status of that male hero of the theatre, Shakespeare. In the case of the onstage romance, the “contextual theatricality” of the production, as Wilmar Sauter names it, further fueled these assumptions as the actor playing Isabella, Iaia Forte, is married to Carlo Cecchi: director, duke, husband, all paternal roles to the female actor, subject, wife. The three-play marathon had been on tour—the night ended with a romp through Midsummer Night’s Dream—playing most recently in the Teatro Massimo in Palermo. Perhaps Martone’s decision to open the India with these plays had as much to do with the splash of marathon, Cecchi and Shakespeare and the availability of a production on tour, as with a critical judgment about the interpretation. It would become clear to me, and to others, later in the season that Martone himself preferred more political and more radical treatments of canonical texts.

After spending an inordinate amount of time over these last years collecting advance notice of performances and festivals, time not only to look but to debate with myself how far to go to see something, to see it again, I realize how in the exchange of theatrical work and styles, and for most of the history of those exchanges happening in Europe, one of the arbitrary influences on what comes to make a season, perhaps even comes to make a statement for the meaning of the season, is what is on tour, what is available for transport. An announcement of the appearance of a Commedia dell’Arte troupe in the court of Burgundy might elicit an invitation to Navarre in the 17th century. When the
Wooster group plays the Festival d’Automne in Paris in 2006, the company’s manager has no doubt secured venues in other countries in Europe to give the work the widest circulation and to recoup on the expense of the travel. Though these festivals do not operate on the commercial scale of a Disney generated musical like *The Lion King* as Susan Bennett describes the phenomenon of theatrical tourism, they do reflect a “strategy that relies on the peripatetic consumer” (411).

The India season did indeed reflect an ongoing participation in the culture of touring as well as specific choices meant to imbue the space with a particular kind of theatrical memory and history. In October, Martone opened the space to the annual RomaEuropa festival whose offerings have formed part of my itinerary every year I have lived in Italy. The name RomaEuropa always strikes me as apt in its ‘city state’ demarcation with Rome standing in for the nation as against the larger entity Europe. In some ways the relatively young nation state of Italy sits precariously atop the ancestral strengths of the antique regional entities, the empire under the modern Europe, and the enduring identities of the protectorates and city states of earlier centuries. So Rome is Italy in a southern key and when joined to Europe erects a border at the city gates very different than that of streamlined Milan. Famous for being chaotic, though as nothing to the alternately joyous and tortured chaos of Naples, the center of Rome might seem more so because its traffic seems wedged into spaces built for horses, and the dusty oldness redoubles the intrusive sound of the internal combustion engines. Thus the India, theatre of Rome and in Rome, married the tug of something pastoral, ancient, quiet offering space to the energy of the mixed media, the contemporary, and the amplified.
The building of the India evolved over the course of the year, at each performance the shape of the rooms, even the number of rooms the building could house seemed to alter, as if the space had a structural costume box and could change its habit at will. Though one building, the structure of the Teatro India as I look at it from the river appears to be split into two long rectangular halves with a central beam running down the roof. The audience usually entered through a door that gave on to a long empty space, not a foyer exactly more of a conduit from outside to in than a place to wait. To the right of the small entrance door was a roughed out section in what immediately became the ‘back’ of the theatre in my mind with a corridor leading to the bathrooms. At the door the personnel dressed in their formal suits appropriate to the Teatro Argentina took our tickets, though their suits suddenly seemed too visible, anachronistic against the rustic theatre. If we entered from this small side door facing the bar area across the yard, then usually we went directly into a main space where the bleachers had been erected for the Cecchi Shakespeare and where individual seats would be placed in graded rows for most of the other productions. Yet the divided spaces also could be employed to affect our entering. For example the night I saw Il Colonnello e le Ali I passed into the door expecting to be shown to a seat only to find the room full of trash, piles of plastic bags, refuse scattered about, a visible and spatial introduction to the social and psychological costs of waste and neglect that play would expose. Or the arresting Hamlet for which I remember stopping, startled in the foyer space because before me stood a circus tent erected in the long corridor ‘outside’ the theatre space. I cannot remember much from the production except that sense
of sitting inside, inside and the brilliant visual trope of Hamlet entering wearing a 19th-century woman's costume of mourning; yes I thought, good for you director, Hamlet's grief does seem sometimes to be a costume from another time adopted precisely because it loudly announces his inconsolable, isolated sadness.

At other times I would enter the India through the doors that faced the river, either a little human-sized door on the corner of the building or the horse drawn-cart-sized double doors at the middle of the structure. Here too the mode of entering affected the mode of reception. With the RomaEuropa production of Peter Sellars' adaptation of Stravinsky's *Story of a Soldier* not only the site of entering but my continuous moving through the space would alter my reception again and again. I remember how unseasonably cold that October night was—maybe 9 Centigrade—as I stood amid other spectators wanting to get into the warm theatre, find my way to my row and seat, take my accustomed place. All the tickets had sold out; there were signs everywhere indicating *esaurito*—exhausted biglietti. So the agitation among us as we waited grew, our suspicion laced with a sense of unfairness—*who* was already in there if not we who had gotten our tickets before they sold out?

Finally the door opened, we had been instructed to wait at the small one on the side facing the river, one of the factors in making the cold night seem even colder since the damp of the Tiber rose against the embankment on that side of the India. The press of bodies forward pushed out into a bare room, not the large open space used for the Shakespeare marathon but rather a room now cut into half that length; in retrospect thinking about the space rather than becoming aware of it by being in it, I realize the management must have begun to use partitions to
create out of the building a changing series of smaller theatres and studios. In this open empty space, the first of three we inhabited as a moving audience that night, we were invited to sit on the floor (the well-heeled and the jeanied). In the front of the room two women stood at two microphones, one began to speak, the librettist for *Story of a Soldier*, Gloria Enedina Alavaraez, read her poetry, a mix of Spanish and English. The woman at the other microphone, unidentified by name, rolling her rrr’s so richly the rest of the word almost disappeared in the wave, spoke the same lines translated into Italian. They alternated between stanzas.

If you knew who he was, whether through experience or by the pictures in papers and magazines currently covering the festival, you could watch the delight on the face of the director Peter Sellars—a diminutive figure with a brush of hair standing straight up who resembles to my eye nothing so much as a postmodern version of a sprite—as he watched the active interest displayed on the faces of his audience. We were moved again, gently but firmly out of the same door we had come in and then around the corner into a space the length of the India in order to enter a studio-sized room at the back. Here we listened to the Ensemble Avanti! Chamber Orchestra whose names on the program indicated they were from Denmark or Norway, whose fair hair and fair faces certainly confirmed this national designation, but who were at the moment dressed in US Western cowboy outfits playing Klezmer music while we stood or sat, again, on the floor. This method of shifting the audience across the threshold from room to room reminded me of the egalitarian entrance enacted by walking up the dusty road because those who had been first in the impatient line to enter
for the reading of poetry and whose haste procured them a place on a mat on the floor were now at the back of this studio space having been ushered out last from that first space of playing.

How strange now to have the mix of memory that thinks back toward this inaugural year of the India by way of Sellar’s later production *The Children of Heracles* at the Teatro Valle where, as I have noted earlier in this book, nervousness, confusion and, finally, impatience emanated from an audience who were confronted with a work in three parts—polemic, tea, and spectacle—while they remained in their traditional seats. At the India on that October night in the last year of the 20th century, as I sat on the floor, stood at the back, sat in my seat, the general tone of reception around me seemed one of engagement, a willingness even a cheerfulness about being disrupted.

The difference as I reflect now rested in part on what the space created; the India in its whitewashed and open space signaled clearly even to an audience who might the next night attend a Goldoni play at the Teatro Argentina that we were in the territory of experiment, of the imported, of the new. At the Valle, such an invitation must be made despite the surroundings. Only on rare occasions as when two theatre companies, one a young experimental group from Ravenna and one an accomplished troupe from Moscow, reconfigured the relation of audience to stage in the Valle have I witnessed the necessarily passive relation of sunken orchestra seats to raised stage disturbed. At the India as I followed the directions of my usher/guides, shifting places, I understood how the political dimension of an invitation to change, literally, your spectatorial position can by physical shift be an invitation to change your mind through the unaccustomed motion your body must make. As we move
about, we mix together, often surprised by juxtapositions that are not at first clear, juxtapositions received through the senses before anything else as we arrange ourselves in space against each other, toward the action, around the building. Through this mix of motion, languages and musical genres, we were prepared in the first half of the event for the coming performance of Strindberg as political commentary with pathos and power.

After an interval, I was ushered into a third space recognizably one of audience and stage. By this time I had become disorientated and unable to be sure whether I was on the west or the east of the building, to the north or south; the space itself held a full audience in graduated seating that ended close to the ceiling. Sellars created a kind of ritual blessing for this brand new theatre on this night of movement, as we processed through all its rooms. Unlike the Cecchi marathon when the communion came as much from the duration as the space, on that October night the bodies became part of the inauguration and the implicit communal understanding acknowledging the space’s potential to facilitate vital theatre, theatre engaged in the here and now, theatre offering an invitation to cross over several thresholds, structural and metaphorical. While by this ritual the India became ‘sacrilized’ to use Marvin Carlson’s term, I did not so much feel it evoked memories of other theatres—though the echo of Brooksonian spaces of an ex-soap factory certainly did affect my regard—as I had a sense of anticipation, of a rite of harvest where future productions would increase in abundance because the space had been blessed by this particular ritual of purposeful movement. Brian Massumi might name this a virtual moment, the multiplication of potential not captured and/or fixed but evoked and unpredictable and therefore affective.
As I sat on my bleacher seat waiting for the main event of the Stravinsky *Story of a Soldier*, I noted how the colors of the night up until now had been white plaster and exposed beam, the colors of the European south. Here in this space a backdrop transformed the white wall into a vibrant canvas, a mural very like those of Diego Rivera, surrealist graffiti, and the blood red images of ritual; color, I note remembering the mixes that evening, can like light induce subconscious connections to nation, red moving from Pompeian faded rust to Southern European Provencal or bright red that bleeds down into Spain and beyond. A young woman, African-American perhaps, perhaps Latina, dressed in sweat clothes walked to the front of the stage. The opening musical phrases of Stravinsky’s *Histoire du Soldat* began and she spoke: “From the Gulf to Panama, from Kosovo to Iraq…” Thrust immediately into a mixedness we had been prepared for in our moving, the production combined masques from the Mexican tradition, border language from the troubled US border of Mexico and California, and Stravinsky’s 20th-century musical story of the price of greed. Sellars found a modern evocation for the story in the tale of the mercenary soldier, lost and roaming in a world still too ready to give a mercenary work.

Now stationary, I watched the performance enact the condition of roving; the nomadic nature of soldiering allowed Sellars to draw his borders. Those borders in 1999 included the intention to tell a US story, one of border injustice across NAFTA (North American Free Trade Act) territories, Mexico and California, played out across a fundamentally European aural memory, Stravinsky’s music. As if in an echo chamber of associations, the spectator wandering across thresholds
receives architectural whisperings, color and light as affective indicators and then music, not just the notes of the score, but the genre of the composition. I am always amused at how easily, for example, an animated cartoon can provide a national signifier for a character in a way that permeates the receiving consciousness as the sound designer adds a few notes of flamenco or blues or high-pitched, reedy Peking opera in order to evoke an instant recognition. Of course the man who gave us ‘Rite of Spring’ with its distinctive opening notes that broke apart the habits of a Parisian audience could be well known to ears trained by his own avant-garde innovations. But I did not have to know either the notes composed by Stravinsky or that the notes were composed by Stravinsky to hear the productive dissonance of characters before me who look like they will break into Latin hip hop at any moment accompanied by early 20th-century European avant-garde sound.

Hearing those notes played on the strings of their classical instruments by those blond guys still dressed in their odd cowboy suits—for the Klezmer players had wandered with us into the space and become the band for the production—offered a dissonant visual corollary to the aural information. Still, virtuosity played its part, an affective power not acknowledged often enough in our accounts of spectating; perversely the virtuosic produces a kind of quiet in me as spectator, a rest in the knowledge that I will not have to flinch from a badly played note or a sloppy interpretation. Into this quiet of real skill such subtleties as the half submerged recognitions of nation, of type, of story as situated story can even more swiftly enter and reverberate.

Thus “Kosovo” in the opening lines sent me to memories of recent European border conflicts, religious wars and the
duty of intervention. On this cold night in 1999, the mention of Iraq addressed the first Bush and the first Gulf war, remarkably unopposed as a venture except by a few sages, among them the extraordinary cultural critic Michael Ventura writing his frighteningly prescient ‘Burners of Eden,’ a brilliant essay that would come back to haunt me when the invasion of Iraq by the US and the UK began in 2003. As the libretto continued, it acquainted us with that unaffiliated figure, the mercenary for hire, for hire to protect US oil interests, for hire to subdue perceived darknesses, his own, Mexican-American in Sellars’ production, and others, Arabs/Iraqis. In this private story of army life and longing for monetary release from it, the production created an aural map with the signs of European history in the American way plotted through the various human trade routes, Spain to Latin America to the West Coast, Europe to England to the North Coast. Sellars’ juxtapositions, Stravinsky’s music kept us in the spirit of the nomadic even while seated. When the doors opened to signal the end of the pilgrimage through this space and across this time, the Teatro India had become a space I wanted to return to, one that did promise the future fruits of that harvest blessing, and one that had re-formed and released those Roman spectators around me whose excitement filled the stream of parting bodies as we walked back out onto the dusty road.

What can I really know about those bodies and what they were experiencing as they left the space? Could my own excitement, my sense of being at home with Sellars’ work and with his way of making it, reveling in the aesthetics of a furiously political theatre about a country where I vote and whose politics I follow even from abroad, rather than in New York among an audience accustomed to a Peter Sellars’ production, have been
projected entirely on the communal experience? To say ‘no’ in answer to these questions would be folly, but to say ‘yes’ would hide the complexity of sharing the space of seeing and hearing performance. In her work to account for how the space makes the spectators and vice versa, Gay McAuley suggests just such an oscillation in which a spectator may form “part of a subgroup within the whole as well as being part of a collectivity, that of audience for a particular performance at that particular place and time” (McAuley 251). Nick Ridout might dwell more longingly at the physical/psychic entrances and exits, the weathered edges in the solitude of spectating, a solitude aware of the others and yet, like me, cognoscente of the singularity of our affective experience as it becomes memory, as I retrieve it from memory.

In her catalogue of attributes, habits and roles a spectator might bring to a performance, I do not remember McAuley mentioning nation or for that matter the potential of being an ‘outsider’ or foreigner, nor is it her project, in her comprehensive study on space in performance, to do so. Yet I remember the sensation of how theatres not given over to the project of representing a national or regional theatrical tradition, theatres instead participating as points on a map for visiting companies, for international work, place the spectator for a time like a pulsing push pin on a metaphorical map where the coordinates do actually combine into interpretation. Even as she or he might enter into the space as part of a subgroup—tourists, family visiting on vacation, not Italians—through the course of the performance, through the invitation to recognize and participate in crossing borders throughout the work, the spectators might create a larger collective entity without losing
the multiplicity of identification of home, mother tongue or alternative tradition.

I confess freely how my recollection here has become alchemically mixed up with the weathered nostalgia of loss; the India and I were both new to Rome that year. Years on now as I write I remember the intensity of getting my Roman bearings, how the productions Martone scheduled for the India rearranged the architectural space again and again, how I learned my way around the city. At the India, the malleability of the performing space reinvented created a sense of potential by being many things at once, and while one might say this is true of most empty stages, the license with which to change an audience's entire perception of what room they are in, of where they are marks a particular kind of theatre making, a piece with the history of theatre as an aesthetic creation that can make of its space a political and ethical force. While I acknowledge with Rancière skepticism about the utopian notion of theatre as communal because live and crowded with bodies, my own experience of this building, this place did teach me spatially a form of the active spectating I have been recalling. Such wandering made me part of the refiguring, with choices offered by the space as well as time and content.

In May of 2000, into this space now rich with the silt of the accumulated productions of the year, a master of theatrical ceremonies arrived with his company Odin Teatret. Here I experienced a collision of memory and of the reassessment of those memories. As soon as I entered the performances offered by Odin, I realized in an instant that I had been seeing Eugenio Barba's influence on theatremaking not only at the India but in other venues in Europe over several years. Martone designed
the culmination of the season as a one-month residency for Odin Teatret. The company arrived for a set of workshops, lectures and performances given at the India and at the Teatro Argentina. Then, I only knew Barba’s work from the illustrated Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology, and I had somehow vaguely categorized him as a performance ethnographer and director from the far North, a denomination partly gleaned from the name of the troupe, Odin, and from the descriptions of his residencies at Hostelbro in Denmark. What I had to learn backwards, not unlike the manner of my running back mentally to find the clue to the translation I had missed in a sentence, was that of course Eugenio Barba is an Italian name, and indeed I had been seeing his influence in performances in Italy for years, but did not have the experience to make the attribution. This too marks the development in the skills of an itinerant spectator: I have learned to leave room in my reception for what I don’t know, for what might be at work that I have yet to link to its origins or influences. Work can be appreciated with or without such knowledge; memory can be adjusted or not. A performance world in love only with what appears new can cause a spectator to enter onto the dangerously barren land of disappointment where what appeared to be wholly inventive may instead be revealed as something very like someone else’s work from years before. In general in my wandering I find Massumi’s encouragement for us to ‘augment’ rather than dissect apt for the life of a spectator as much as for the life of a critic: even when the inventive is revealed to have been derived from other sources, I can choose to explore nuances rather than shut the experience up in the fixed category of the ‘derivative.’
At the India, the Odin mini-season felt carnivalesque. Traveling players had arrived with their caravan; the opening performances moved from outside to inside, with a day of clowning for children. Barba gave lectures at the vast Teatro Argentina and some members of Odin gave demonstration/lectures as well. While audience numbers and global recognition for Odin cannot be said to be a mass phenomenon like that of Cirque du Soleil, they do tour within a certain community of theatergoers and theatre makers with a fame Bennett might find a miniature of the excitement produced by the blockbuster Canadian troupe: productions sell out quickly and a line always forms of the desperate and the hopeful looking for returns on the night of the performance.

The experience of seeing what is now an aging group of legendary performers did mark for me as a spectator a transnational exchange and a sense of an unique opportunity to immerse my spectator self in a particular company’s work. Never before had I lived anywhere where I could either see or afford nine different performances, solo and group, by Odin in one month. One of the essential components of being a spectator in Rome, and particularly that year at the India, was the cost of tickets. In 1999 we were still in the final days of the lira, and the choice of ‘abbonamenti’ or subscriptions meant that most of the shows, from the big Sellars’ spectacle to the small three-person drama cost about 10,000 lira or at the time 6 US dollars, by the following year it translated to 8 euros.

A kind of giddy license then attended my buying. I could experiment because I could afford to experiment. This monetary reality creates a willingness to explore as surely as any critically driven dramaturgical argument. I remember often leaving truly
bad performances with no sense of financial ire; whereas I can as well remember the feeling of being cheated in New York when I saw something rickety, made in bad faith or just plain bad that I had paid a great deal of money to leave. If, as I have commented elsewhere in my work, the exchange in the theatre space can at times replicate a gift economy, the closer the transaction comes to hyper-marketed consumer exchange, the more the spectator becomes the assessor of his or her stocks. ‘Is this spectacle performing well enough’ that my investment in the share of a ticket is worth it? I consider other relations equally damaged by placing them in the realm of market rather than service or gift: for example, the change in relation between professor and student in many a strapped University foolishly running on a business model. The expectations of the student or spectator when the fees rise to a height comparable to buying a ‘big ticket’ item not surprisingly change to those of a speculator who calculates worth rather than a collaborator whose participation will form part of the experience, whose return gift will enrich the production.

For me now I see how impossible it would be to imagine that Odin festival/residency at any other theatre space in Rome than the India. In the summer-like weather of May in Rome, I and my companion spectators moved inside and outside the theatre easily, lingering on after performances to sit at tables with the Odin actors who came out to eat and drink. Rather than the customary disappearance of the makers of a performance from audience view, at the India the area surrounding the building offered a space where all the participants could reassemble in the evening, extending our interaction with each other. Front and back stage allows spectators generally to participate in
the fiction that nothing happens until the performers appear before us.

Odin circumvented the theatrical contract of actors hidden offstage, unapproachable, and the space of the India facilitated casual meetings as well as structured ones. I note however that these potential meetings also depend for an itinerant spectator on ease with the language and courage. Many of my friends who work in the theatre speak often of having talked to the director or actors after the show in the bar. I, on the other hand, haunt the edges of those spaces of meeting, divided between wanting to talk and wanting to watch and remain anonymous. Though my fear may have its origin in a childhood of constant moving and readjusting to being new, I also recognize some of this reluctance comes from the gradual creation of a mode of spectatorship, modes we fashion unbeknownst to ourselves even as they become part of a habit of spectatorship. Mine includes a desire to preserve something Rancière writes of as distance and the freedom found in anonymity; sometimes for me it is simply the freedom of time to think, of needing to dwell in the experience of having seen without the demand of trying to articulate what I have to seen to someone who has just made it.

As the cost of the tickets permitted a theatrical splurge, so the number of performances playing simultaneously in several rooms in the old soap factory continued this sense of abundance. I recall how on the 16th of May, I could have chosen to see Julia Varley in *le farfalle di dona musica* or Roberta Carreri in *Judith*. On the 19th, either Iben Nagel Rasmussen, Jan Ferslev and Kai Bredholt in *Itsi Bitsi* or Julia Varley in *Il Castello di Holstebro II*. Many of us attending the performances went from one room one night to the other the next, peregrinating from one piece to
another, seeing what Odin creation and research had produced, gathering experience as their interlocutors/spectators.

The large-scale piece *Mythos* had introduced me, the uninitiated Odin spectator, into the full effect of the method at the heart of their creation of performance: a choreographed configuration of revelation as measured as a sonata. The word sonata leaves me unsatisfied; I would like to have a set of terms like fugue, sonata, minuet, symphony, chaconne to use for performance, a way to hint at the combined work of measure, of harmonics, of duration as much a part of a piece without music. Then I might be naming what the actors did that night differently as I describe how during the time of performance, the actors introduce each object, each voice, each movement simply, in one dimension so that in the duration of the performance object, voice and movement can be built upon until what had appeared as a thing in itself is transformed into something else entirely, by a change of position, by change of an object's employment, by an accompanying sound and by reinvented gesture. The names of the two main performance pieces reflected the ritual nature of the work: *In the skeleton of the whale, Mythos*. In *Mythos*, I watched as the initially innocuous sand covering the playing surface of the floor became a marker of time, passed through the hands, through objects. What had been sand, had been time sifting through imaginary hourglasses, then changed character to become time done, a grave, a cradle where suddenly there were bones to be plucked by the actor and employed as instruments of lament and warning.

The actors began by speaking softly, I strained forward to hear the way one does, and then found myself pushed back aurally by their sounds; no longer speaking not exactly singing,
a kind of keening instructing the audience in a language not recognizable as words and yet intelligible as units of meaning strung along a cord and a chord of sound. Where the sound combined a communication of mystery and comprehension, the movement of the actors’ bodies constructed the stages of the revelation. The space of the main theatre of the India created for Odin’s visit was not large—as I know it could have been quite large indeed I assume Barba arranged the space so that it held players and audience in close proximity. The eight actors filled the rectangular room where we were seated on bleachers on either side slightly above the long playing space. The action moved out from a long, formal dinner table, a prop that Odin also transformed throughout the play by dismantling and reconstructing the top and legs. The audience perched above the playing space, like a quorum of deities that caused me to remember, perhaps prompted by the myth taking form in front of me, those fleshy watching giants Guilio Romano painted on the ceiling of the Sala dei Giganti in the Palazzo del Te in Mantua, a wonderfully topsy turvy position from which to witness something called Mythos. A relatively small group if a large number for a jury of gods, we 100 or so spectators watched in intimate proximity to each other and the stage.

Later allowing the memory of the performance to linger for a bit I read Eugenio Barba’s description of the piece printed in the program where he distinguishes myth from history, though the borders of both categories were invoked by a shared set of characters from the Western tradition of Greek myth, Odysseus, Cassandra, Oedipus, Medea. Barba suggests that the characters from myth cannot be understood simply by their own stories, instead less tangible than narrative and yet more
effective, they are, he says, “action and energy.” A way of thinking about myth that makes the theatre of the telling more alive and more apt for the actor’s embodiment. Yet Odin did set the piece historically; we see first the soldier Barbosa who marches across Brasil in 1925 fighting for the “dignity of his true country,” a place that was, as seems to be the case more often than not, in “the hands of a corrupt government.” I began to understand Barba’s intent of mixing nation, character and myth as I watched the transformation of this character’s uniform of a soldier, one I could recognize as antiquated but not one I could identify with a particular country, into outrageous and wild feathered costumes of the mythic characters. Thus Odin transformed my watching as if I were one of the objects poised for revelation, bringing me through something like my time or my time past and then moving me out into mythic time. Barba’s questions at the end of his program notes manifested themselves in the playing: “What is myth for us? An archetype? A sacred story without holiness? Hope without faith? Where is it hidden today myth? Why has it died? How has it been buried? When will it rise again?”

Throughout the month of May, the presence of Odin in the India, the lectures and demonstrations given by Barba and the actors in the Teatro Argentina turned those who attended this theatre event into a temporary community, and here I do not forget Rancière or fall into Odin worship but mean quite precisely the kind of community that happens because we keep company together engaged in a similar project. Over the days I began to see people I recognized, we would nod to each other outside the theatre, we would smile in shared pleasure if we saw something moving and found ourselves exiting the space in joined reverie. I heard several languages spoken around the
tables outside, in the foyer, on the stage. The space vibrated with life and the audiences were younger than I had seen in any other Roman theatre save the experimental Vascello. As we crossed the borders of different rooms in the old factory with its stucco and white walls, it seemed to me that each room, in a reverse process of the sand on the floor in *Mythos* where bones and beads were retrieved from under the smooth surface, received relics, words, sounds as they sank into the space, became part of the memory in the walls absorbed from the different configurations of Odin productions constructed there. Here was the harvest promised throughout the opening months of the Teatro India season; the space by now did more than allow, it seemed to be part of the conversation I had when I entered it to see a work, when I exited to see another, when I sat at a wooden table to drink wine and think.
Such a rich offering of varied playing and exploration of theatre in the space of a brand new theatre required a finale. Mario Martone had not created something that felt like a ritual, a project, a journey without considering how to design an ending. If I am remembering correctly, I almost did not go on that final night. I was tired, the marathon had been intense, the event was free and therefore no ticket bound me to use it. The evening honored an Odin tradition of barter, a tradition the Company keeps wherever in the world they play in which the local community offers performances of their own to the members of Odin now made audience. Though my ambivalence that night lingered, I recall walking around the back of the space to enter, where outbuildings and a garage mark the unused quadrant of the factory once used for receiving deliveries of goods. As I turned the corner and walked into the yard I saw in the distance a platform stage constructed in between the bar and the entrance to the theatre on the open ground to the left of the theatre doors. The consequences of my ambivalence became clear: the ground around the platform was full, and I sought to find a patch of dust to call my own way in the back. Even the natural world seemed to participate in the protocols of ritual because, as darkness fell, into the empty skeleton of the gas storage tank across the river rose an almost full moon.

The coupling of folk and nation have a long and a tortured history. The spectre of volk haunts with its aural echo behind the activities probably most common to us all in the binding of place to our notion of home and of nation, folktales, folk dances, folk songs. Clearly the delicate nature of belonging tips one way or the other, now into a warm gathering of memories of being a group, now into a collectivity created to define the
outsider, from there into the violence of maintaining such fictive boundaries. Martone’s goal for this night of barter appeared to be the reproduction of a kind of Roman folk culture, the daily joys of dance, song and speaking in Rome displayed for the visiting guests. Different members of Odin reciprocated with dance and the playing of instruments, keeping the circulation of exchange alive.

The offerings from the Roman contingent ranged from the skilled to the cheesy, from the touching to the embarrassing. A group of dancers from a center for seniors adjacent to the India performed with a seriousness matching Odin’s own professional creations; a group of teenagers under-rehearsed and awkward offered a stilted hip-hop indulged by their elders. I thought of the term motley and how patchwork is the nature of national identity with its bits of traditional clothing, identifiable instruments, and traditional songs and how those bits fall into place in juxtaposition to age, to sex, and to the eternally heterosexual analogies to the family that nations employ to portray themselves. The performance of Roman, even to me the newly arrived expat, that night of barter gave rise to an almost familial feeling, though not one that includes a definition of family as father, mother and children. Affection and embarrassment, indulgence and impatience, an intimacy created, thinking back now, partly by space, partly by the ground on which we sat in the strange country-like space around the India where Rome could be urban and rural with its rushes, weeds and dirt.

Happily rid of my initial ambivalence, even in the most embarrassing moments of bad performances, I did not regret my last-minute decision to come. I inhabited the space of someone who had made the Odin pilgrimage with others; we
had visited and profited from various forms of performance and story, now here we were saying goodbye and thank you principally to Odin but also in acknowledgement of that shared journey. Of course on the night of that free event there would have been those who had not seen any of the Odin pieces as well as those who had seen all of them. The potential for gift exchange in performance generally remains acknowledged only at the realm of metaphor when used to describe the experience of having received. Barba’s creation of a tradition of barter, the exchange of gifts among a community, materializes the relation of gift giving and performing. For the audience, it is rare that we as spectators have a chance to express gratitude beyond the moments of applause. That night I was surprised and pleased to see an offering that in its scale tried to express the extraordinary aesthetic, communal, inspirational gift Odin had bestowed: on the top of the riverbank behind the stage, the flame of what at first seemed simple fireworks, those transnational markers of finale, became instead wheels of flame that spelled out “Grazie Odin”; they turned and turned as people embraced and applauded, as the members of Odin received our thanks. Such a display relied upon the rural and open nature of the space around the theatre; the fireworks might have as easily spelled out Grazie Teatro India for the contribution this new performance space made to the creations its buildings and land could host, could encourage.

After two years of tolerating his direction of the Teatro Argentina and the Teatro India, the right-wing regional government of Lazio, in which Rome is a province, dismissed Mario Martone. Immediately the tenor of the program for the theatres in 2001-2002 changed, offering mainly large set pieces for Italian actors and translations of Pinter, Shakespeare
and Bernhard by directors known in the traditional Italian theatres. In retrospect I see how this change surprised me by demonstrating how dependent I am as a spectator on the invention and commitment of artistic directors to create seasons that offer me the opportunity for discovery, that challenge and demand of their audiences our engagement in participatory spectating. In 2002-2003, a new artistic director, bombastic actor and director Giorgio Albertazzi, not only programmed the traditional shows by established Italian theatres but several of his own annual productions, such as an adaptation of Marguerite Duras’ *Memoirs of Hadrian* with himself in the title, imperial role.

Meanwhile, from time to time the India, as if the building reverberating with the dust of past hopes rebelled at being used in unimaginative ways, changed shape in inventive productions. But more and more this invention was relegated out of doors and around the building as the directors of the theatre chose to transform the inside of the India into any ubiquitous studio/theatre space by painting the rooms black and by introducing standard lighting, sound boards and theatre tech.

Around the theatre, the space remained ungroomed, retaining that odd juxtaposition of rural to ex-industrial. When in July 2003 I went to see *Ta’ziye*, I remember being curious both about what an Iranian passion play might be and about this first theatrical effort by the famous Iranian film director Abbas Kiarostami. My heart lifted to realize I would be outside rather than in the Teatro India where the spirit of the theatre seemed to have been subdued by all that black paint and plasterboard dividers. That evening, outside against the wall of the theatre five rows of platforms with chairs divided into six
sections surrounded the ring of a stage. Into this structure built around the ring of seats were fitted six white screens. I entered into this built circular playing space at the India as if I were taking my seat at a kind of circus, but now the circus like a rock concert had a host of screens bringing a strange modernity to a spectator’s assumption about the ancientness of passion-play theatre practice.

Unavoidable and imposing, the video projections complicated my sense of myself as a spectator at a live performance. Each screen, about six-feet high, extended the width of each section, filling the steel scaffolding. Walking toward the space from the arch between box office and main theatre, I saw an enclosed structure, the screens blocking the usual open space of an amphitheatre. Even before I reached the entrance I could see the faces and bodies that filled the screens. Thus the ‘play’ had begun or at least the event of the performance was underway before any bodies entered the playing space. Dazzled for a bit by the screens, I slowly noticed that the sound was live, coming from a band of four men in white. Suspended on a small platform above one of the four entrances for the circular space, they played flute, trumpet, drums and tambourine. The center stage, a raised platform, held shields and swords; encircling the stage at the level of the ground was a ring of sand.

Advertisement for the evening made much of the fact that Kiarostami was an acclaimed film director trying his hand at live performance. So the truly beautiful videos being shown above the space did not exactly surprise me. I picked up the visual code quickly: two different videos were showing; the screens alternated in an imitation of the purdah of traditional
Islamic society with the audiences separated between women and girls and men and boys. Thinking back on that night now I recognize how a spectator, like a flâneur, can go looking and wandering and watching without being open to change. Like teaching, attending a performance can, to the open minded watcher, expose my own prejudices, ones I may very well have buried far enough down to deny. Thus do Rancière's lessons of the emancipated spectator emanate from his theories of knowledge and the ignorant schoolmaster. The moment of challenge in theatre space or pedagogical space comes in the flash of uncomfortable recognition: what will I do with this unsavory bit of internal news? I can scatter some rationalizing dust over the top, and let the queasy sensation settle without change. I can as well welcome the news, taking the invitation to risk discomfort that spectating and teaching in another key offer.

My choices on the ground outside the India were clear: I could mutter and shake my head in disgust at the video intrusion on my live experience, ignoring righteously what I don't prefer. Or I could seek to let go of my first reaction to screens, one that comes from the private joys I take in being a spectator for live performance with the freedom to look at what I want to. I can become really interested in the talent for quiet that a minor performer exudes and simply watch her for the whole night. I can ignore the main event. But with screens, unless the filmmaker by inventive camera work allows more largesse to the watcher than usual, I suffer the physical constraint of being in the same position as the camera, moved about, panning, sweeping, but seeing solely from that one perspective.
Still that night I admonished myself not to be a boar, to try and relax into the performance Kiarostami created, experiment with seeing what the interaction between these screens and the bodies entering would offer. From the point of view merely of the space I inhabited, it felt odd to try and decide where to look, and that was interesting. Inevitably my eye moved toward these large screens where I watched another audience; an audience who also watched something I was, in the course of the performance, led to assume moved in the same time as the performance of the play unfolding before me. As the night went on I found myself intrigued and disturbed by these visions of watching Iranians (or whoever they might be since we were left to make our assumptions based on the dress, the faces and the fact that the play was from Iran and its director, Iranian).

A disembodied voice narrated the gist of the story in Italian. Perhaps in the history of the West, of the Ottoman Empire, Christianity and Islam have rarely enjoyed a period of accord and respect. But on that night in 2003 in the first year of the occupation of Iraq, Italians, like many in the UK, Spain, and the US, had not been able to stop their government from supporting the US/UK coalition forces, and the word ‘Islamic’ inevitably called up its consort, ‘terrorist.’ Thus I suspect many audience members from Europe curious about this play that follows the martyrdom of Hossein sought in its story an understanding of the origins to those words repeated endlessly in the media reporting the war, the “split between the Sunni and Shiite Sects.”

The break in tradition made by the insertion of the videos did not transform any of the other traditional modes of performing the passion play. All the parts were played by men. The boys playing the children and women entered in
multi-colored veils very unlike the black-veiled women on the screens. Their voices singing and speaking their parts made no attempt to imitate one gender or another; no effort was made to hide the facial hair of the young man playing Hossein's wife. The cast sang with voices arresting and affecting, sometimes in trance-producing chants, sometimes in suffering wailing, beautifully pitched in the minor keys of traditional Iranian song.

As with surtitles, so with these videos, I alternated looking up and down: up to see the response of the filmed audience, down to the action on the stage and down further to the entrances of the characters made onto the circus sand. It comes back to me now how at some points in the play I forgot to look at those other projected watchers, particularly when the three protagonists, our hero Hossein and the evil Yazid and his generals flew around the ring on horses, riding so fast, halting with such presumption and speaking daggers to one another. Then it was as if the screens melted because what was here, now in front of me demanded all my attention. Against the modern of screen, I thought of the incongruous element of a passion play or a re-enactment of faith and its mysteries, of history and its injustices, where the representation allows for unashamedly high stakes, the urgency not at all forced. The split between Sunni and Shiite that will cause violence to happen again and again can be mourned anew as if it had just begun its eternal work.

At the points of greatest pathos—when Hossein accepts his path to martyrdom, when the children are killed—my ambivalence about the projected audience increased. While a large part of the audience in Rome could be assumed to be from a
Western Judeo-Christian tradition, the story of Hossein’s sorrow at his six-month old son’s dying from thirst, a thirst engineered by the withholding of water by the emperor’s chief Yazid, needed no common set of beliefs to communicate the pain. In fact, who could not think of the children in ‘post-war’ Iraq very possibly suffering the same fate while awaiting the restoration of water and the electricity that might purify that water? Who could not have the chill of the future brought into the present moment as we were reminded that wars will be fought over resources and that in the coming years one of the most valuable will be water? Yet the pictures above our heads seemed calculated to show us the difference in response between those watching something that has for them an intimacy of pain not unlike the “way of the cross” for devout Christians and the audience on the grounds of the Teatro India for a night of theatre. I thought then of my friend Roya, how she would talk of her own ambivalence about the culture of mourning she inherited from growing up in Iran and the cost of that culture for women who must be the keepers of loss, frozen in it, even while men who mourn visibly also have the freedom to move away from that mourning towards action.

I must confess part of my unhappy relation to large screens comes from my inability to remember that what I am seeing is not in fact actually happening in that moment. While this engagement can have the character of pure bliss when what comes to life before me does so in the figures of Katherine Hepburn and Cary Grant, the same response means I cannot watch any violence and cruelty being projected without feeling I should put my hand through the screen to intervene. So involuntarily I found myself shying away from looking at the faces on the screen with tears streaming down them; not out
of discomfort at open mourning, I had left my own country in part because I had tired of a culture afraid of the expression of emotion, but because even as I knew those bodies were being reproduced technologically, I felt uncomfortable breaking the privacy of their grief.

Paradoxical as it may seem such grief shared does supply a kind of privacy of response, a sense of at once in communion and yet truly alone, but Kiarostami insisted the theatre audience watch from a position almost of clinical interest, anthropologists of emotion. And it split my spectating as surely as those screens split women and men. I understand the contract of spectator to performance in most settings includes me watching not watched. No that is not right, of course in certain performance contracts I am watched, but that night the audience I saw seemed to have been surveyed in order to be shown to others, to me. Generally I am anonymous as spectator, as Rancière encourages us to be, and the anonymity provides space to receive, interpret, re-adjust. Of course some theatre performances openly confront the audience or include our seeing each others’ responses as part of the playing, but I enter into that contract by way of theatrical cues or descriptions of the method of playing provided before hand.

At the same time when I did look up because the decorous moment of leaving grief to the griever had passed, I also found myself mesmerized to see those faces on the screen, the sheer aesthetic beauty of a well-made video. The screens could not be separated from the experience of watching; the spatial configuration would not allow it. Again though I ‘knew’ I could not violate people who were by now only projections, who had been those spectators some time in the recent past, I still felt the
voyeur as I watched someone who did not know I was watching them. It broke the threads John Webster in the 17th century suggested bind the ears of the audience at the theatre to the body of the actor by inserting between us and the players those other watchers and their reactions. I have in my wanderings as a spectator profited from many a Brechtian break or interruption, but here the break seemed only to serve a hyperconsciousness of fictive narration about a community of spectators whose culture, whose world remains projected before me while I sit invited to make naïve assumptions.

At the end of the play, I heard audience members around me commenting on how while the play and the performance were not very interesting, the videos were beautiful. I have heard this comment more than once from others who saw Ta’ziye—the performances were consistently sold out—and I wonder how an audience might have responded had there been no screens, no faces, no cues, no place to distract attention from the performance of story to the watchers on film. That night
and even now I cannot rid myself in memory of the odd sense of having witnessed a private act confounded by the watching eye of the camera. No doubt the persistence of this memory came in part by what struck me as a creepy if apt finale. During the ovation, Kiarostami joined the cast in front of us. As he walked from section to section of the seats, his took pictures with a handheld camera. The flash of light in the dark came as a reminder of the static nature of pictures taken and the man’s face obscured by the camera a reminder of the distance between who has power in the seen and the shown. Master of the lens more than the stage, Kiarostami perhaps perceived us as one more audience ready to be recorded, documented, reproduced, our responses circulated to other venues in other cities in other countries. Or perhaps he simply wanted to make sure we perceived ourselves in relation to those watchers projected above the stage.

I recall strangely how the staging of Ta‘ziye caused the space of the Teatro India to recede, as if outdoor movies had disrupted the scale of building to production. But in truth as I recognize now, between 2003 and 2005 the India already stood like an awkward theatrical relic, neither one thing nor the other, alternately used as a theatre space and as a space available for private rental for weddings and parties. In 2005 Mario Martone returned to the India to stage his sequel to Oedipus Rex, Oedipus at Colonus. His first production in the cycle, Oedipus Rex (1999) shocked my spatial expectations not simply by undoing relation of audience to orchestra seats in the huge Teatro Argentina in Rome, but instead vividly and decisively rendering the staid and seemingly unchangeable red, plush orchestra section a space of destruction. I remember clearly entering as usual the formal
and well-maintained setting, walking up the beautiful circular stairway, up and up to my seat in a box. Stepping through the door of the box section, I moved forward, sat down and looked out on ruin: most of the seats had been removed from the main floor, some of the plush velvet chairs lay about the emptied orchestra section turned upside down, burned, blackened and discarded. The actors moved between the stage and the ruined floor while I sat in a box above them. As if an extension of our bodies leaning out over the railing of the box, outsized wooden hands hung off the bottom section of the boxes arrayed in such a way that they seemed to stretch towards the wrecked city in the middle of the floor.

Three years after his dismissal as artistic director, Mario Martone’s Teatro India production of *Oedipus at Colonus* brought to me, in mourning for the space’s original vibrant energy, the return not just of its guiding spirit Martone himself but something of the original purpose of the India as well. This time instead of hands, Martone covered the outside long wall of the India with clay feet. Up and down the side of the theatre one could see the body of a foot and its heel, as if climbers had left their corporeal marks, or as if heroes had left the sign of their imperfection behind them in feet of clay. Strangely and perhaps as a testament to the confusion about the spirit of the space, those feet remain on the outside of the building even today. Walking by the footed façade on my way to *Colonus*, I entered the courtyard and saw a huge hole in the ground with a rock set in the midst of it. I took my place nearby, standing with others attracted by the sight and felt relief since no matter what happened in the performance, I would again be participating in the peregrinations that had first animated the space of the India in its opening months.
Even while caught up in my own memories that evening, I found myself wondering how many of those in the audience for *Oedipus* at the India knew the theatre from its first incarnation through its transformations and how many were those seeing a performance at the India for the first time. Nothing about the experience would signal loss if a spectator encountered the movement through the India during the performance and assumed this to be a habitual use of the space. But for those returning, the memory of the flat and predominantly unimaginative productions seen between 2002 and now were swept aside in the power of Martone’s directorial choices.

Grief and desperation came howling out of the hole in the ground; the actors in threadbare and worn costumes provided visual cues about the incessant wandering of our protagonists, Antigone, Ismene and Oedipus. Myth collapsed into the everyday as the three appeared as characters outside the state, without documents and home, standing in for the bodies of immigrants newly ashore, asylum seekers in political limbo, and economic refugees from the ‘former east’ appearing on Europe’s metaphorical doorstep, the threshold and the border. Oedipus and his daughters resembled just such refugees, dusty, tattered and in need of care. When the scene moved inside to the main room of the India, the actors playing the citizens of Colonus ushered the spectators in—we too were to be the jury for Oedipus’ plea.

As with Sellar’s *Story of a Soldier*, Martone used a promenade style of production to powerful effect. Often in promenade theatre, at the transition of moving from one space to another I have found myself directed by the ushers into a new space, a continuation of the relation of theatre patron to
those whose job it is to show me to my seat. Instead that evening outside the India when the actors moved us with urgency, speaking hotly whispered Italian, into the building and into the first room, we were invited not to step back over the border of playing into intermission or break but instead to accompany the citizens towards the colloquy about to take place concerning Oedipus’ fate. I remember how the audience neither talked to one another nor surreptitiously checked their cellphones for the time or for messages. Instead we took our cue from the seriousness, the in-characterness of the players and remained inside the fictional world.

I took my seat on the bleachers to hear the arguments for and against accepting the plea from Oedipus to be buried outside Thebes. As the arguments were laid before us, each of the actors speaking their piece, a sudden breathtaking coup de theatre interrupted the judicious speaking of those for and against. Those big wide double doors so prominent in the first year of productions at the India, the spatial border between enclosed theatre space and the out of doors, flew open. I heard the startling noise of a car. I then saw the equally startling sight of it hurtling into the room. I remember clearly breaking the habit of silence to exclaim; I think I might have said ‘bravo’ in acknowledgement of the theatricality of the shock, but it is equally possible I let out a much more vulgar, ‘fuck me’ as an admiring acknowledgement of the theatrical power of the intrusion of the street onto the theatre floor.

The breaks screeched, the car doors were flung open by armed men, bodyguards for the smoothly dressed Creon. Swiftly the modern national symbols piled up one upon the other. The car was dark blue with tinted windows, the kind of
car I know well from living in Rome since it tends to travel in a convoy of motorcycles or police cars escorting the blue sedans to and from the Parliament or the Prime Minister’s house. The guns appeared to be the same as those brandished at Fiumicino airport, a sight familiar even before the increased security after 11 September as Rome and Italy had been the site of attacks and bombs during the earlier anni di piombo (years of lead). The technology and the costume created a dramatic contrast to the tattered Oedipus and the simply adorned citizens as Creon stepped out of the car in a symbol of Italian male power, the ubiquitous dark blue suit, a sartorial mark that in 2005, and again now, could not help but be associated with the corruption and callousness of Berlusconi’s government. Creon’s silky menace also reminded spectators of the current government, and his bitter exit promised the continuation of the tragic cycle to come for the children of Oedipus, a perhaps no less tragic cycle the production implied continues here with the remarkably eternal return of the corrupt and the corrupted.

Finally, having been witness both to the pleas of the children, the arguments of the citizenry and the bullying of both by those in power, we were led, again by the actors, to a long rectangular space adjoining the first one where we set on benches that lined the walls of the room. In this space too, the back double doors remained open, the rushes moved in the wind and the actors created a ritual sense of community as the story drew to its close. I witnessed the representation of war and the wreckage of war, arms and the harm caused by them and the threat of war between brothers, between the city states of Athens and Thebes played before me. While Oedipus does find a kind of shelter with Theseus’ pledge of assistance, the players hinted
at those not yet incorporated in borders, not yet welcomed nor protected. Creon’s crass cruelty threatened still; the memory of the sudden power of technological intervention, by weapon or by vehicle, echoing vibrantly through the temporary pastoral.

And then there was my own sadness, a species of sadness far less grave than that of loss of family or home, the mourning triggered by the return to the India of a manner of performance made only intermittently during the years of the more banal productions in the space. By ‘doing the theatre in different voices,’ to maul a phrase of T.S. Eliot’s, the India could not be said to be unique in Europe or even in Italy, though perhaps at one time it was indeed unique in Rome. Martone coaxed a narrative from the structure, though it would be folly to say he was the only engineer of such power as many different directors and performers seemed to take inventive inspiration from the space, the building of the theatre offering aesthetic, ethical and moral invitations to a nomadic citizenry, as well as a more pointed invitation to the local theatergoers to ‘hear’ the building as a structure of malleable possibility. Part of the power came from motion and flux, a quasi-literal challenge to the generally moribund institutions of the teatro stabile, or stable theatre that is the name used for the major theatres in cities in Italy. Motion, I am always surprised to remember, demands that the work and those who make it risk imperfection, since perfection has historically been proven through the condition of the still and unchanging.

Dust had in its perfect imperfection moved us towards the original India, always in flux between our clothes, our shoes, in the air as we moved and the particles we disturbed with our feet. Paved roads tame the contamination and the motes in the
light creating a clean carapace over the unruly, as it did in 2006 when the City administration paved the dusty road leading to the Teatro India in oily, black asphalt. Suddenly those blue cars, no longer an unique Oedipal *deus ex machina*, appeared ubiquitously, dropping off the privileged and well heeled. Other cars having nothing to do with the space of playing passed through on their way, profiting from this new shortcut. Indeed, they had paved paradise, and my feet could no longer raise the sign of equable surrender to the elements, the moving and clinging sign of worn shoes and old stories retold among dusty wanderers; the threshold had become a parking lot.