



Franca Rame. Photo: Courtesy of Fondazione Fo Rame

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In the Kitchen

Franca Rame and Her Theatre Technique

*Abstract: Franca Rame belonged to a family with a theatre tradition going back to the 17th century. Franca Rame's words are edited in this article to tell her story and give space to her technical advice, besides presenting the original text of *The Rape* with its English translation.*

Keywords: Franca Rame, Dario Fo, Fondazione Fo Rame, Breath, Voice, Emotions

In 2023 Fondazione Barba Varley and Fondazione Fo Rame collaborated on various projects. This gave me the opportunity to meet Jacopo Fo, Mattea Fo and Stefano Ber-tea. Jacopo is Franca Rame and Dario Fo's son, Mattea their granddaughter and Stefano is Mattea's husband. Mattea's commitment to her grandparents' memory and her battle to recognise the importance of Franca Rame, by for example demanding that all publishers include her name beside Dario Fo as author of their plays, has particularly impressed me.

One story awoke my curiosity: Franca Rame would often rehearse in the kitchen while cooking. She did this both alone and with other actresses. I wondered about her technical knowledge and the reason for her choice, recognising similar procedures in my own work. Much of her theatrical process was confined to her home's private sphere while the results shone on stage.

Franca Rame did not write or speak much about her theatre craft from a technical point of view. She concentrated her discourse on working class and women's rights, on supporting political struggles at a time of turmoil in Italy which saw many imprisonments and assassinations. Historically her political and social commitment has been recognised while her artistic experience is thought of as implicit, embodied and intuitive often dismissed as a consequence of her beauty. But Franca Rame was extremely aware of the craft's needs which led her to record every single performance and listen to the reactions of the spectators afterwards to improve the text and performance. Already in the 1990s, Franca Rame started a digital archive copying documents, programmes, photographs, posters, letters, critics, and gathering paintings, costumes and set designs from her family and from the work with Dario Fo. It was Franca Rame's family tradition that



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guided Dario Fo in many of his artistic choices. Franca Rame also taught young actresses how to speak their texts.

I wondered if I could find theatre anthropology principles in her filmed lessons available on Fondazione Fo Rame's website. Listening to her words, looking at her stage behaviour and noting her suggestions has led me to think of the principles of stage presence in a different way. It is always difficult to separate what in theatre anthropology is called the pre-expressive level of the process from the result in performance because the actors' capacity of modulating, composing and giving form to energy determines the spectators' interpretation.

Like many actresses of the past Franca Rame chose to concentrate her energy on her activity and not to theorise. She produced, organised, directed, acted, she became a senator in the Italian Parliament and wrote a book about this, but, as far as I know, she did not produce articles about her stage experience. Like for many actresses and actors the technical aspect of the theatre craft seemed too prosaic and personal to write about, or too difficult to explain and put into words to make it worthwhile to share. But the technical knowledge was there. Comparing stage techniques of different theatre and dance genres has taught me to look beyond the form to find underlying principles. Franca Rame allows me to see how pre-expressive principles become a life choice.

Franca Rame was born in 1929 within a theatre family whose tradition goes back to the 17th century. She died in 2013. Her apprenticeship happened on stage, learning from her parents, sisters, uncles and cousins, like it still happens in some classical Asian theatre forms, on the base of imitation and reactions. Nothing was explained, just done. Franca Rame never went to a theatre school.

Franca narrates:¹

My mother was the daughter of a man who worked in the municipality, an engineer, or maybe he was just a surveyor. My mother was a teacher in a mountain village. Once, she went to her home village to go to the theatre. There was snow. A puppeteer had set up his theatre stall in the main square. The puppeteer and my mother met, and it was love at first sight. They danced at the Carnival feast from nine until midnight, my father dressed as Prince Charming and my mother wearing a mask. They made the clothes themselves. When he left, they

1. The video *Actor's Minimal Manual* is available on Fondazione Fo Rame's website <https://www.fondazioneforame.org/> through the platform <https://alcatraz.thinkific.com/>. It includes recordings of 71 lessons over eight days with Dario Fo and Franca Rame. The Manual is a synthesis of thousands of hours of unpublished filmed material recorded in between 2004 and 2016 at the Alcatraz Free University in Umbria, Italy. The recordings were collected thanks to the commitment of Jacopo Fo. The video Manual has been available online since 15 December 2022 thanks to a project of Theatre Company Fo Rame in collaboration with Fondazione Fo Rame. The audiovisual project has been curated by Mattea Fo, Stefano Bertea and Gianluca Rame.

Franca Rame's interventions are concentrated in the 5th and 6th videos of the first day, the 1st video of the fourth day, the 3rd and 5th videos of the fifth day, the 4th and 5th videos of the seventh day, and on the 2nd and 3rd and 4th videos of the eighth day.

For this article, Franca Rame's narration has been edited strongly to make a resumé and adapt the oral lessons for students present at the time to the written form, concentrating on the practical and technical aspects.

exchanged addresses and wrote to each other for a year. He returned to marry my mother, causing a great scandal. My mother had nothing to do with theatre and she married a poor wanderer and puppeteer.

To help her new family, first she worked as a manager, and made the puppets' clothes. With the advent of cinema, the company realised that they could not survive only with puppet and marionette performances. Astutely they decided to stage real people in the performances previously done with puppets. My mother became the main actress as she was so beautiful. I do not know if they were good, but they had what a great painter called the *quid*, which means they were equipped with an extra gear. The audience loved them. Their plays could be performed seven times in a row in the same village.

My real stage debut, with lines to say, was when I was three years old. My mother had said to my father: "It is time that Franca performs, because she is not doing anything. When we perform *The Lord's Passion* for Easter, she can play one of the angels." My elder sister Pia, who was nine years old, was the main angel. My mother sewed a beautiful costume of lace and made wings full of paillettes for me. For the Angel's halo, my father made a crown of lights with cables and a battery hidden in my underpants. I was supposed to follow my sister who accused Judas of betraying Jesus for thirty coins. Judas would hang himself while my sister accused him of being a traitor. She would say: "Repent!" and I was supposed to repeat the same.

I remember my mother preparing a minestrone and peeling potatoes, making me rehearse the scene many, many times. Finally all was ready for the debut, but something happened. Judas was played by my uncle Tommaso, a nice man who treated us children well. He had a hideous black wig. I was shocked to see my uncle like that, and I knew he had no intention of repenting, so I clung to his neck and said: "Why are you doing this? Don't do this. Calm down, Judas." And he replied: "O God, in your greatness, you send this little Angel so that I can repent, but I cannot repent." And I repeated: "No, you must repent, Judas." We improvised a dialogue. Finally, since the performance had to end, he tore me away from his neck and said: "Forgive me, little Angel but I really have to go and hang myself on the highest tree" and left. In shock, my sister also left the stage on tiptoe. I remained there. My mother was waving at me and didn't look very happy. "Come here!" she ordered. Instead, I went front stage, walking on tiptoe like my sister, and told the audience in a very sad voice "He hasn't repented." A loud applause exploded and from that evening, *The Lord's Passion* always ended with the Little Angel saying, "Judas has not repented".

This was our theatre, based on improvisation. Arriving in a town, we would immediately inquire about its past or recent history and stage the story after just a week. People were enthusiastic, recognising themselves or commenting "Yes, that's exactly how it happened..." The Rame family had a bus called La Balorda (The Fool). Rolls of canvas were kept for the scenery on its roof. Costumes were stuffed under the seats. Inside were wonderful people, actors who came and went. Each actor had a task: to take care of the painted scenes, of the costumes,

of placing the audience chairs, or of going around the town with La Balorda to promote the shows.

The whole company acted. We hung a list of the play's actions back-stage. We arrived in the afternoon, put up and presented the whole play in the evening. The next day we did another play and the next day another one. In thirty days, I could do thirty different shows. It was a crazy way of acting. I did all kinds of characters. I even fell asleep in Juliet's coffin in *Romeo and Juliet*. I didn't like Juliet as a character. My father didn't know how to wake me up. From back-stage he threw a shoe at me. I didn't understand what was happening when I found a shoe in my hand: "Wake up Juliet!" All these performances were a source of energy, as if we had truly done a backflip. I don't know how we could do it. Nowadays Dario and I have a subject we can develop, but the whole company has read the script and knows it by heart. However also today I am free to add parts at any time. I have the backbone of the play, but if something comes to mind, there is an accident, or someone from the audience says something, I can easily deviate, go back and change.

Sex? Thank you, so much for enjoying it is a play I have performed more than three thousand times. The show was staged in 1994 and I am still taking it around Italy and the world now in 2005. It was born by chance, taking the idea from the daring book *Zen and the Art of Fucking* that Jacopo, my son, had written. My son and I were on the sofa in the sitting room, and my husband was in the study. We talked about the book naming things as they are. At a certain point Dario with his eyes bulging out of his head exploded: "Shame on you! Mother and son having this kind of conversation!" "I am going to put it on stage!" "Are you going to stage this text?" "Yes!" And so it happened, except that after a while I had to change the title.

Another day I was busy making minestrone. (I have a good relationship with vegetables and when I am nervous, I make minestrone for a whole week.) Jacopo arrived and asked: "Mummy, how do women masturbate?" I cut my finger. I wasn't prepared for this. Dario and I felt like top-notch parents because we had explained everything delicately, as we all do, starting from butterflies, but it really didn't suit me to talk about masturbation...

When the text has just been written, I should learn it. I wrote it on sheets of paper, and I made my debut without having rehearsed at all, reading from the papers. I commented, then stopped, I thought of something. Then I gradually took away the papers and started cutting the text, to avoid finishing at five in the morning. This show was recorded every evening, because if you don't understand why a laugh came about, you will never get the laugh again. The timing of a joke is precise. Comic theatre is mathematics. You must learn to act with the audience. Dario knows I go by instinct. Sometimes he has tried to prove that a text worked even if I disagreed, but after putting it on stage he has never won the bet. The consequence is that we have to work together, tidying and destroying the text, and then rebuilding it from scratch. While writing, you are so inside

the text that you can't see. I don't know how to define it, but I know I have the capacity of judging the rhythm of a text. But it is difficult to say the result is not good after seeing someone writing day and night. But on stage I have to act, and the text has to have life in it. So, I need to find the right moment to criticise and say: "But here... it seems to me that..." for the changes to occur.

I have a character, I read the script, I mark the laughs. But I do not prepare the tone, it comes by itself. If I have to say I want to kill myself, I can say it in a thousand ways. I can find the most tragic and terrible way without screaming or crying. After a month the original text has to be thrown away because we have transformed it to the point that it has become something else. We listen to the spectators who give us the rhythm, the timing, who make us cut out what is useless, who make us understand what doesn't work and the situations that need to be reversed.

The performance *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa* (All house, bed and church) was born one afternoon in 1977, in the midst of feminism movements. The title comes from a Milanese proverb to which we added the bed as it is an integral part of women's lives. I was feeling very tired. I didn't like visiting occupied factories and getting to know the difficult life of people there and then returning home to a maid who served lunch, so I had dismissed everyone. This meant I had to look after the house, take care of the company's management, and act. I was drowning and I told Dario that I would prefer to just manage the company and go on stage only when it was absolutely necessary. Dario looked at me with a mischievous face but didn't argue. After exactly two hours, he handed me a text asking if I still wanted to be just a housewife and company administrator after reading it. I was stunned: it was basically a piece about my life with my son. It was a play about women. We got to work. We read all the books published on the condition of women. I was very careful, because the problem concerned me closely, and Dario was even more attentive because he had to immerse himself in a society that was not his as a male. We created four characters, four figures of different women. It has become the most performed of our texts abroad. I have taken it everywhere, to France, England, Germany, the United States, Greece and everywhere I have found women's total adherence to its satirical and grotesque themes. We laugh, cry, reflect. The laughter opens our brain, and nails of reason stick in our thoughts. The text moves and makes women aware of situations they live at home, unable to free themselves. Afterwards they come to me, they cry, or ask for an appointment so we can talk.

We understood that the theatre done in a bourgeois environment was dead and no longer had value, so we invented an alternative theatre. We played everywhere, in all the impossible places, from deconsecrated churches, sports halls, tennis courts, occupied factories, in places where workers used to go. In 1968 we left the traditional circuit and created an alternative one.

Il Risveglio (The Awakening) is a simple, comic piece, while *The Rape* is dramatic. For a while I did *Il Risveglio* with scenography and props: a sink, a table, a

basin. One day I found myself at the gates of the Fiat factory in Turin and they put me on two tables without anything. I had to mime. From then on, I eliminated everything in the monologue even in theatre venues. It became less heavy to carry around. The stage is empty, I just have a microphone around my neck.

Speaking a text, attention should be on the diaphragm, so as not to talk from the throat and keep everything in the head. I have some exercises and I advise to mark accents. Learn the text, read the newspaper in the morning out loud and set your voice there. Breathe deeply and let out all your breath. Little by little you get it. Suddenly you speak with your voice: you have all the tones, the high pitch, the low pitch. Then you speak a little louder. If you had to do a two-hour show, always speaking from your throat and head, you would lose your voice. You must learn to use your diaphragm. Don't act. If you are addressing a child, you cannot shout at him in a way that gives him worms. First speak lying down, then standing up. You don't have to say it all, you can mime. A glass of water... You mention it and take it, all without changing your tone. And you listen to the recordings after because the tones stay in your ear.

The Rape is a piece that demands a triple back somersault, because from a comic theatre we move on to a very serious, heavy and dramatic topic. *The Rape* is about violence suffered by a woman. The numbers of raped women and murdered women are increasing. My own kidnapping and rape were organised by the *carabinieri*, one of the Italian State official police forces. Some witnesses were present when it was ordered. The names of the kidnappers were known, there are papers concerning this, but nothing happened afterwards.

The piece was written in 1975 but presented later because I didn't have the courage to do it. I went on stage with it by chance. There was a chair, I had to do *The Awakening* and instead I performed *The Rape*. And I hadn't told anyone that I was going to do it. I did the piece without even notifying Dario. It went very well. Then I have done it again and again. I performed it thousands of times in support of the law against sexual violence.

Sometimes girls in the audience who hadn't told anyone about what had happened to them fainted. This kind of experience can never be erased. I decided that among the very first parliamentary battles I wanted to lead was for the recognition of sexual violence as a crime against the person and not against public morality. At that time the subjectivity of the crime committed against a person was not recognised.

I have performed *The Rape* all over the world. This piece is very important because it helps girls who have suffered violence. The topic that is part of a woman's life. It is a difficult piece to perform. I have to be cold without showing emotion. Unfortunately, some actresses start crying while speaking the text. It is difficult to keep a distance, especially when working with girls who are victims of trafficking or prostitution and for whom the engagement is higher. The words really need to be weighed rarely changing the tone, without dropping the voice or interpreting. In comedies you can change tones many times. Here everything

should be flat. You have to know the text by heart, because then everything seems normal and runs smoothly.

When I go on stage, I need to know exactly who I have in front of me to get the audience; how much I can risk, if I should be relaxed and think about other things or if I have to be careful and tighten up. I should never over-charge. I should keep the repertory toneless, breathing deeply with distance. Never scream or cry on yourself. It needs to be pure epic theatre. If tears come, bite your lips. You should tell this story as if we saw it from a window, as if it was something that had nothing to do with you.

This is the text:

*C'è una radio che suona, ma solo dopo un po' la sento.
Solo dopo un po' mi rendo conto che c'è qualcuno che canta.
Sì, è una radio. Musica leggera. Cielo, stelle, cuore, amore, amore.*

There's a radio playing. But I only notice it after a while.
It takes me a while to realise it's someone singing.
Yes, it's a radio. Romantic music: love... heart... moon... June... croon...
love...

*Ho un ginocchio, uno solo, piantato nella schiena come se chi mi sta dietro tenesse
l'altro appoggiato per terra. Con le mani tiene le mie, forte, girandomele
all'incontrario. La sinistra in particolare.*

There's a knee, one knee, rammed into my spine... the person behind me
must be kneeling on the other one...
Someone's gripping my hands with theirs. Strong hands... Pulling my
arms in opposite directions... Twisting my left arm hardest...

Non so perché mi ritrovo a pensare che forse è mancino.

I don't know why, I find myself wondering if he's lefthanded.

*Non capendo niente di quello che mi sta capitando.
Ho lo sgomento addosso di chi sta per perdere il cervello, la voce, la parola.
Prendo coscienza delle cose con incredibile lentezza.*

I don't understand anything that's happening to me.
I'm terrified... scared witless... can't make a sound... can't utter a word.
Everything filters into my brain slowly... incredibly slowly...

*Dio, che confusione...
Come sono salita su questo camioncino? Ho alzato le gambe io una dopo l'altra,
dietro la loro spinta? O mi hanno caricata loro, sollevandomi di peso?*

Jesus... this is Bedlam... everything's so mixed up ...
How did I get into the back of this van? Did they give me a shove and
then watch me clamber in, or did they lift me... pick me up bodily...

*Non lo so, è il cuore che mi batte così forte contro le costole a impedirmi di
ragionare.
È il male alla mano sinistra che sta diventando davvero insopportabile,
perché me la storcono tanto?*

I don't know. It's my heart knocking against my ribs, that's what's
stopping me thinking straight... that and the pain in my left hand ...
it's getting really unbearable now.
Why are they wrenching it so hard?

*Io non tento nessun movimento. Sono come congelata.
Ora quello che mi sta dietro non tiene più il suo ginocchio contro la mia schiena.
S'è seduto comodo e mi tiene tra le sue gambe fortemente dal didietro,
come si faceva anni fa, quando si toglievano le tonsille ai bambini.*

I'm not moving a muscle. An iceberg.
Now the one behind me has taken his knee out of my back... he's found a
more comfortable position ... he's got
himself sat down and he's holding me between his legs ... that's the way
they used to hold kids when they took their tonsils out in the old days.

*L'immagine che mi viene in mente è quella.
Perché mi stringono tanto? Io non mi muovo, non urlo, sono senza voce.*

That's the picture that floats into my brain.
Why are they squeezing me so hard? I'm not moving...
I'm not screaming... I can't scream. I've lost my voice...

*Non capisco cosa mi stia capitando.
La radio canta, nemmeno tanto forte.
Perché la musica? Perché la abbassano?
Forse è perché non grido.
Oltre a quello che mi tiene ce ne sono altri tre.*

I don't understand what's happening to me at all.
They're still singing on the radio but it's not so loud.
What's the music for? Why have they turned it down now?
Maybe because I'm not screaming.
There are three others... besides the one who's holding me.

*Li guardo, non c'è molta luce né gran spazio.
Forse è per questo che mi tengono semi distesa.
Li sento calmi, sicuri, che fanno? Si stanno accendendo una sigaretta,
fumano adesso perché mi tengono così e fumano?*

I look at them... there isn't much light... not much room either...
Maybe that's why they haven't stretched me out flat...
I have the feeling they're very calm. Very sure of themselves.
What are they doing? Lighting a cigarette. What the hell is going on?
They're smoking? At a time like this? Why are they holding me
like this and smoking at the same time?

*Sta per succedere qualche cosa lo sento. Respiro a fondo. Due, tre volte.
Non mi snebbio. Io ho solo paura.*

Something's going to happen. I can feel it... I take a deep breath... two...
three... No, it doesn't help. Doesn't clear my mind.
I don't understand ... I'm simply terrified ...

Ora uno mi si avvicina, un altro si accuccia alla mia destra, l'altro a sinistra.

Now one of them is coming closer... another one sits down on my right
and one more on my left.

*Vedo il rosso delle sigarette. Stanno aspirando profondamente. Sono vicinissimi.
Sì, sta per succedere qualche cosa, lo sento.*

I can see the red tips of their cigarettes. They're breathing heavily...
they're very close. Yes... something's going to happen... I can sense it...

*Quello che mi tiene dietro tende tutti i muscoli. Li sento intorno al mio corpo.
Non ha aumentato la stretta, ha solo teso i muscoli, come a essere pronto
a tenermi più ferma.*

The one behind me tenses his muscles... I can feel them... round my body.
He's not holding me any tighter, he's just tensed his muscles... like
he wants to be ready to hold me tighter.

Il primo che si era mosso mi si mette tra le gambe in ginocchio, divaricandomele.

The one who moved first gets himself between my legs... he's on his
knees... he pushes my legs apart.

*È un movimento preciso, che pare concordato con quello che mi tiene da dietro.
Perché subito i suoi piedi si mettono sopra i miei a bloccarmi.*

It's a very precise movement and he seems to be working in tandem with the one behind me because *he* immediately clamps his feet over my parted legs, to keep them spread wide open ...

*Io ho su i pantaloni. Perché mi aprono le gambe con su i pantaloni?
Mi sento peggio che se fossi nuda.*

I've got trousers on. Why are they spreading my legs when I've still got my trousers on? This is worse than if I was stark naked!

*Da questa sensazione mi distrae un qualche cosa che subito non individuo: un calore prima tenue e poi più forte, fino a diventare insopportabile sul seno sinistro.
Una punta di bruciore.
Le sigarette. Le sigarette sopra al golf fino ad arrivare alla pelle.*

I'm distracted from thinking about this by a sensation I can't quite identify... a sensation of heat on my left breast... it's slight at first... then more intense... till it's unbearable...

A burn.

The cigarettes... through the sweater, right through to the skin.

*Mi scopro a pensare cosa dovrebbe fare una persona in queste condizioni.
Io non riesco a fare niente, né a parlare né a piangere.*

I find myself wondering what you're supposed to do in this situation.
I can't do anything at all... can't speak... can't cry...

Mi sento come proiettata fuori, affacciata a una finestra costretta a guardare qualcosa di orribile.

It's as if I'm outside myself... I'm outside a window being forced to watch something appalling happening on the other side of the glass.

*Quello accucciato alla mia destra accende le sigarette, fa due tiri
e poi le passa quello che mi sta tra le gambe.
Si consumano presto. Il puzzo della lana bruciata deve disturbare i quattro.*

The one squatting on my right lights the cigarettes, takes a couple of drags and then passes them to the one between my legs.
They smoke them fast. The stink of the scorching wool must have unsettled them...

Con una lametta mi tagliano il golf davanti per il lungo, mi tagliano anche il reggiseno, mi tagliano anche la pelle in superficie. Nella perizia medica misureranno 21 centimetri.

They slit the front of my sweater open with a razor blade. They cut through my bra as well... and there's a shallow gash in my skin... later, expert medical opinion will measure the slash at eight and a half inches ...

Quello che mi sta tra le gambe in ginocchio mi prende i seni a piene mani, le sento gelide sopra le bruciature.

The one kneeling between my legs grabs my breasts in his open hands... they feel icy under the burns...

Ora mi aprono la cerniera dei pantaloni e tutti si danno da fare per spogliarmi. Una scarpa sola, una gamba sola. Quello che mi tiene da dietro si sta eccitando, sento che si struscia contro la mia schiena.

Now they're undoing the zip of my trousers ... and they all start undressing me; but they only take off one shoe, one trouser leg. The one holding me on the right is getting excited... I can feel his erection as he rubs himself against me.

Ora quello che mi sta tra le gambe mi entra dentro. Mi vien da vomitare. Devo stare calma, calma.

Now the one between my legs is inside me.
I think I'm going to be sick. I must stay calm. Must stay calm.

*'Muoviti puttana, fammi godere'.
Io mi concentro sulle parole delle canzoni. Il cuore mi si sta spaccando.
Non voglio uscire dalla confusione che ho. Non voglio capire.
Non capisco nessuna parola. Non conosco nessuna lingua.*

'Move your hips, whore... show me a good time.'
I concentrate hard on the words of the songs... my heart is going to explode... I want to drown in the chaos inside my head... I don't want to understand what's going on...
I don't understand words... I don't understand any language.

*Altra sigaretta 'Muoviti, puttana, fammi godere'.
Sono di pietra.
Ora è il turno del secondo. I suoi colpi sono ancora più decisi. Sento un gran male.
'Muoviti, puttana, fammi godere'*

Another cigarette. 'Move your hips, whore.'
I've turned to stone.
Now another one's inside me. He's thrusting harder than

the first one. It hurts like hell.
'Move your hips, whore!'

*La lametta che è servita per tagliarmi il golf mi passa più volte sulla faccia.
Non sento se mi taglia o no.
'Muoviti puttana, fammi godere'.
Il sangue mi cola dalle guance alle orecchie.
È di turno, il terzo.*

The blade they used to slit my sweater open is waved in front of my face
a couple of times. I can't tell whether they've slashed me or not...
'Move your hips... whore... you're supposed to be showing me
a good time!'
Blood's trickling down my cheeks into my ears.
Now it's the third one.

*È orribile sentirti godere dentro delle bestie schifose.
'Sto morendo', riesco a dire... 'sono malata di cuore'.
Ci credono, non ci credono, si litigano, 'Facciamola scendere'.
No, sì. Vola un ceffone tra di loro.*

It's disgusting to feel a man inside you like this... enjoying himself
like a grunting wild beast...
'I'm dying... ' I manage to stammer out... 'I'm having a heart attack.'
They believe me... they don't believe me... They quarrel.
'Let's get her out'. No! ... Yes! ... Someone hits someone...

*Mi schiacciano una sigaretta sul collo. Qui, tanto da spegnerla.
Ecco, lì credo di essere finalmente svenuta.
Poi sento che mi muovono. Quello che mi teneva da dietro
mi riveste con movimenti precisi. Mi riveste lui. Io servo a poco.
Si lamenta come un bambino
perché è l'unico che non abbia fatto l'amore. Pardon, l'unico
che non si sia aperto i pantaloni ma sento la sua fretta, la sua paura.
Non sa come metterla col golf tagliato, mi infila i due lembi nei pantaloni.*

They stub a cigarette out on my neck ... here.
It was at this point I think I finally passed out.
I can feel they're moving me... the one that was holding my shoulders
puts my clothes back on. He moves neatly.
I offer no resistance. He dresses me. I hardly move... he was
the only one that didn't take his clothes off... I mean
he didn't undo his flies... He's nervous and upset because
he didn't get a 'fuck'... he's blubbing like a disappointed child,

but I can sense his haste... his fear.
He doesn't know what to do about the ripped sweater... he tucks
the two strips into my trousers.

*Il camioncino si ferma per il tempo di farmi scendere e se ne va.
Tengo con la mano destra la giacca chiusa sui seni scoperti.
È quasi scuro.
Dove sono? Al parco.*

The van stops long enough for them to throw me out... and
then drives off.
I'm outside. I'm clutching at my jacket with my right hand
to cover my bare breasts.
It's nearly dark.
Where am I? Plants... green... grass... I'm in the park.

*Mi sento, mi sento svenire, non solo per il dolore fisico in tutto il corpo,
ma per lo schifo, per l'umiliazione, per le mille sputate che ho ricevuto
nel cervello. Per lo sperma che mi sento uscire.*

I feel ill. I mean I feel as if I'm going to pass out... it's not just
the physical pain... it's the degradation... the humiliation... it's their
spit on my face... the sperm trickling out of me.

*Appoggio la testa a un albero, mi fanno male anche i capelli.
Me li tiravano per tenermi ferma la testa.
Mi passo la mano sulla faccia. È sporca di sangue, alzo il collo della giacca.
Cammino, cammino. Non so per quanto tempo.*

I lean my head against a tree... even my hair hurts...
Yes, they were yanking my hair to keep my head still.
I wipe my face with my hand... covered with blood.
I turn up my jacket collar.
I walk in no particular direction... I just walk ...

*Senza accorgermi mi trovo davanti alla questura...
Appoggiata al muro del palazzo di fronte la sto a guardare per un bel pezzo.
Penso a quello che dovrei affrontare se entrassi ora.
Sento le loro domande, vedo le loro facce, i loro mezzi sorrisi.
Penso, penso e ci ripenso.
Poi mi decido.
Torno a casa.
Li denuncerò domani.*

I find myself in front of the police station.
I lean against the front wall of the building, looking at it for a long time.
I think about what I'd have to cope with if I went in...
I can hear the questions. I can see their faces... the smirks...
I think about it.
I think about it some more.
And then I make my mind up...
I'll go home.
I'll report it in the morning.

Translated from Italian to English by Gillian Hanna

I have seen this piece being performed and read the text again many times while working on this article and on editing Franca Rame's narration. For anyone it is difficult not to react emotionally reading or listening to the words of *The Rape*. Disgust and rage at the injustice suffered by so many women do not allow me to keep cold and distant, making the discovery of technique, or the pre-expressive level, harder to isolate from the artistic result. But the distance and technique is exactly what Franca Rame insists on is necessary to achieve the result. She repeats incessantly: "Listen to me, be careful and never feel sorry for yourself. Never! Be cold and detached."

In her stories Franca Rame often mentions minestrone and cooking. The heart of the family and of the craft revolves around the kitchen. She needs to be concrete and practical, not to search for motivation and feelings. Housework and stage-work becomes cleaning and preparing, repeating and improvising, creating and giving. An Italian minestrone is characterised by the mixing of different vegetables cut into pieces of different sizes: beans, onions, carrots, celery, potatoes and tomatoes. Its preparation involves sautéing onion and carrots to which the chosen vegetables are then added, cut into more or less fine pieces and to which water or broth is finally added. A dramaturgical recipe...

In the fourth lesson of the project "Learning to see - Ten lessons on Theatre Anthropology" and in *Theatre Anthropology First Hypothesis*, Eugenio Barba says that "actors and dancers do not think according to abstract principles. They follow models, apply rules, use their imagination, above all they copy knowingly or unknowingly, and modify. They are inspired by other artistic forms whose principles enhance presence and transform everyday behaviour into an extra-daily one. [...] For actors and dancers it is essential to achieve the effectiveness of a behaviour that has a sensorially persuasive power and that transports the spectators into the reality of stage fiction. [...] The first is the law of alteration of equilibrium. [...] It is exactly the position assumed when ready to jump or spring in any possible direction. [...] This brings us to the second 'law', the law of opposition. [...] The principle of opposition is the base on which the actor constructs



Franca Rame. Photo: Courtesy of Fondazione Fo Rame

and develops his action. [...] The third 'law' could be defined as the law of 'coherent incoherence'."²

Listening to Franca Rame's stories and suggestions I think continuously of the three principles of theatre anthropology, in particular of that of opposition: the more a piece awakens feelings more it should be performed coldly; laughter is used to evoke reason; the space of alternative theatre is created in antagonism to bourgeois circuits; to find the life in acting the written text should be destroyed to start again from scratch...

Fiction turns into real life and life into a story to be told. Rehearsals happen in the kitchen, improvisation on stage. Even the translation, giving the distance of another language to the words appears like a principle of opposition.

Is this where theatre anthropology that just deals with presence meets anthropological theatre which aims at defining identity? When do stage presence principles become part of life, passing from 'how' to 'why' and 'where' in our theatre practice?

Thank you, Franca, for all you have done and passed on - for the craft and humanity.

2. Eugenio Barba, *First Hypothesis*, JTA n 1, Mimesis 2021, Italy. Transcription of a lecture by Eugenio Barba in Warsaw in May 1980, originally published in Polish in the journal "Dialog" (26, 1, 94-100)