

Reflections and Discussions



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About Nicola Savarese

Abstract: This article was first published in Italian in "Teatro e Storia", n. 45/2025, pp. 409-21 as part of a dossier about Nicola Savarese, a scholar whose research was both practical and theoretical. His main publications are listed here, together with his fields of interest that ranged from Asian theatre to ancient Greek and Roman theatre. Nicola was part of ISTA since the first session in Bonn in 1980 and the collaboration with Eugenio Barba has produced two fundamental books for theatre anthropology: The Secret Art of the Performer and The Five Continents of Theatre.

Keywords: Asian theatre, Greek and Roman theatre, Eurasian theatre, Plausible imagination

Epitaphs

'There is something stronger than death and it is the presence of the absent in the memory of the living,' is written on one of the tombs in the small cemetery of Brancion-en-Chalon.¹ For me, and for many others, Nicola Savarese will never die. Like Nando Taviani, his soul brother, will never die. Nicola Savarese had created a website for Nando, *The Nandless*,² to avoid giving up or getting used to the idea of his absence.

Nicola's absence will continue to nourish memory and recollections; his presence will continue through his teaching, studies, writings, and his way of passing on knowledge, evaporated – as described by Franco Ruffini – in heavy, compact, dark grey clouds, capable of raining down 'a God-sent flood' on anyone who dares to pass beneath them.

The introduction to *Minima Orientalia*, the last book Nicola was working on and which he left finished and ready to be published, begins with an image emblematic of his way of working and being in the world, that of a white rhinoceros of the rarest species. Eugenio Barba, his other soul brother, smiling would often call him a rhinoceros, free to traverse



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1. Each chapter of Valérie Perrin's novel, *Cambiare l'acqua ai fiori* (Perrin 2019) features, at its epigraph, an epitaph from the graves in the cemetery where the protagonist works as a caretaker. My citation takes the epigraph from chapter 13 (55). To write her novel, Perrin gathered information, epitaphs and impressions by visiting various cemeteries, from small ones like the one in her hometown in Burgundy – where she also interviewed and collected the stories of the gravedigger who had worked there for thirty years – to the large ones in the metropolises. 'There's always something for those who know how to look; they're much more interesting for the living who frequent them than for the dead; they're elsewhere', as the author put it in an interview with Elena Masuelli (see Masuelli 2019).

2. *Nandless. Dedicated to Ferdinando Taviani*: < <https://nandless.it> > (last viewed: June 30, 2025)

boundless spaces and at the same time capable of exploring them meticulously, millimetre by millimetre. This was his way of conducting research, the essence of his method, which he always understood in the etymological sense of 'a road to reach beyond'.

'In 1515 – Nicola writes – Albrecht Dürer, the greatest German painter of the Renaissance, drew a rhinoceros without ever having seen it.' Nicola pauses to comment further: Dürer drew it 'based on descriptions he had only read or heard. That is, *he took his risk*.'³ Like Nicola himself, embarking on a path to reach beyond, well aware of the risks he was taking and of his implied responsibility.

Nicola began his graduation in 1971 with a thesis whose title should have been *Le tragedie dell'orrore nel Cinquecento italiano* (Horror tragedies in 16th-century Italy). He went beyond the subject, turning it into the centre of a field to be investigated in its entirety with precision. The topic became the nucleus of a cell that developed into two volumes: *Per un catalogo bibliografico e critico delle tragedie italiane nel Cinquecento: dall'Orbecche di G.B. Giraldi (1541) all'Afrodite di A. Valerini (1578)* (For a bibliographical and critical catalogue of Italian tragedies in the 16th Century: from G.B. Giraldi's *Orbecche* to A. Valerini's *Afrodite*). While working on his thesis, Nicola immediately grasped the real handicap for studies on the subject: the lack of an inventory of the 16th-century plays scattered throughout various libraries. To gain a precise understanding of the subject, he believed it was necessary to read the books that contained them, which, in addition to the text of the play, contained a lot more information: 'They presented a wealth of information largely ignored by scholars and literary critics: for example, in the dedicatory letters prefacing the play, and addressed to eminent figures according to the custom of the time, one often found information about the staging, the actors, and the audience's reactions to the performance.'⁴

The research on the theme had given rise to the need for a catalogue that, for Nicola, resembles more a *forma mentis*, a way of thinking. With a similar procedure, the vast breadth of fragments from the East, collected during his long wanderings through Asian theatres, over the years became *Minima Orientalia. Dizionario illustrato di frammenti esotici* (Illustrated dictionary of exotic fragments), whose entries deal, as the subtitle states, with 'archaeologists, actors, composers, choreographers, costume designers, dancers, diplomats, playwrights, explorers, philosophers, photographers, journalists, linguists, sailors, merchants, missionaries, military personnel, musicians, naturalists, painters, poets, novelists, set designers, writers, scholars, translators, travellers, plus some notions about the East'. The path to follow is always that of going beyond: 'We collect, organise, arrange, tell basic stories alongside marginal episodes, overlooking the fact that even the most extraordinary stories can *be invented* by combining reality and fantasy.'⁵ As Dürer had done, with his never-before-seen rhinoceros. Nicola called it 'plausible fantasy', and it was the very essence of his approach to theatre history: always *imagining* the material side of phenomena, as he

3. Nicola Savarese, *Introduzione*, in Id., *Minima Orientalia. Dizionario illustrato di frammenti esotici*, unpublished at the time of my writing this article. The italics are mine.

4. *Ibidem*.

5. *Ibidem*.

had learned from Nando Tavian, 'whose studies are a true godsend,'⁶ to whom the dictionary is dedicated.

'Plausible fantasy' is not intended to establish analogies between forms [...], but simply to remind the scholar that it is necessary to clearly visualise the scene being reconstructed, and that to do this, one cannot avoid using an imagination that helps him or her glimpse what the document doesn't explicitly state.

[...] Here, then, is a good starting point for a theatre scholar: obviously stick to the fragments and testimonies, but reassemble them, read them, and interpret them in the light of a broader and more adequate experience of theatre in terms of performance techniques and material constraints).⁷

Fundamental, then, is the choice of perspective, the point of view through which to frame (also with a long shot) and focus.⁸ We need to approach the study of a topic by reconstructing and simultaneously imagining the overall context as plausible, based on constants, similarities, and identities that recur, regardless of geographical, temporal, social, and cultural boundaries. Historiography, therefore, is not a memory of what is no longer visible, but a method for shedding light on phenomena otherwise destined to remain obscure; with all the risks that such a view entails. Looking at the ways of operating, rather than the work, and, at the same time, looking at the work through the ways of operating. After all, how many times have Nicola Savarese, Fabrizio Cruciani, Franco Ruffini and Eugenio Barba repeated – and repeat – that theatre is not an art of works, but of 'ways of working?'⁹

Bibelot

Nicola had first approached theatre history as a 'bookworm', as he himself says in a fragment of the film *La città del teatro* (The City of Theatre).¹⁰ Almost immediately, however, following his meeting with Odin Teatret and Eugenio Barba, he was catapulted into another world. His vocation to expand and explore every field of inquiry was

6 *Ibidem*.

7 Venturini 1994, 22-23.

8 Nicola was also a good photographer, as he happened to demonstrate in his exploration of ISTA since the first session in Bonn, in 1980: 'As the days progressed and the work in the School evolved, my task as photographer began to get complicated. – Nicola wrote in the beginning of his photographic diary – Everything was always the same and yet always different. Something was happening that the camera could no longer grasp the way I felt it. I realised that the relationships between the people were changing, between all of us who lived there, each doing their own work. This repeatedly escaped the camera although I took it with me everywhere, quietly accepted by everyone. So, I decided to photograph what for me was the reflection of this new relationship: each of us as the days went by and in the evolution of the work within the School': Savarese 1982, 13-15; then republished in Savarese 2021, 87-97.

9 Cruciani 1991, 3.

10 I am referring to a fragment of an interview with Savarese taken from *Voices from ISTA*, directed by Claudio Coloberti, 2007, a fragment later reproduced in the recently released film, *La città del teatro*, directed by Vito Zagarrò, 2025.

combined, more than ever, with a focus on the relevant material aspects. Like a rare kind of rhinoceros, Nicola entered the materiality of theatre with vigour but also full responsibility, to the point of founding, together with Adriana Molinar, a Panamanian actress and director, the Arcoiris theatre group, of which he was both director and actor, studying and simultaneously performing theatre in squares and villages from 1976 to 1981.

Accustomed to travelling the world, curious about its traditions, its theatres, and the related universe of books, his meticulous analysis of documents and his tendency to catalogue were now combined with the study of Asian traditions, his bond with Odin Teatret, and his field experience, honed by that authentic school of seeing that for him, as for many, was ISTA, Eugenio Barba's International School of Theatre Anthropology, in which he participated from the first session (Bonn, October 1-31, 1980). In between practical exercise and theoretical study, it was a period of true apprenticeship and perfectioning in that *art of seeing* that knows how to produce images from his studies to then combine them creatively.

'Plausible imagination' consists of picturing things, reconstructing them visually, starting from the fragments we possess, from verified concrete realities and from possible realities. In English, the very act of imagining something is called *visualising*. I believe every historian should possess this kind of visual imagination, but theatre historians must make a little more effort because theatre is already an object intended for vision. Theatre is not at all ephemeral, as is said; on the contrary, it is an art intended for vision and therefore entrusted by principle to memory.¹¹

At the heart of the land of theatre, Nicola placed the East in its relations with the West. The interest in this field of study arose in 1973, when he began writing on the subject with *Introduzione al teatro classico giapponese* (Introduction to classical Japanese theatre).¹² Almost immediately, it became the terrain through which to give voice to a profound passion 'nourished by knowledge but not exhausted by knowledge,' according to Franco Ruffini. It was precisely the comparison with the ancient Asian theatre traditions that drew Nicola's attention to the original forms of Western theatre. He had the premonition, which later became a certainty, that 'only a living experience of the land of theatre can refocus the vision of lost theatres.'¹³ His research on Asian theatres and their relationships with European and Western theatres culminated in what were from the beginning scholarly monuments on this subject: *Anatomia del teatro. Un dizionario di antropologia teatrale*, 1983,¹⁴ which then became *Anatomie de l'acteur. Un dictionnaire d'anthropologie théâtrale*, written together with Eugenio

11 So says Nicola Savarese in Venturini 1994, 22.

12 See Savarese 1973; written during the Seminar of Prof. Benito Ortolani at the Teatro Ateneo of Rome La Sapienza University.

13 Again see Venturini 1994, p. 22.

14 Barba and Savarese 1983. On the cover, at the top, before the title, we read: 'From the International School of Theatre Anthropology directed by Eugenio Barba,' followed by the title, a photo, and, below, 'A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology edited by Nicola Savarese.' The publisher's name follows.

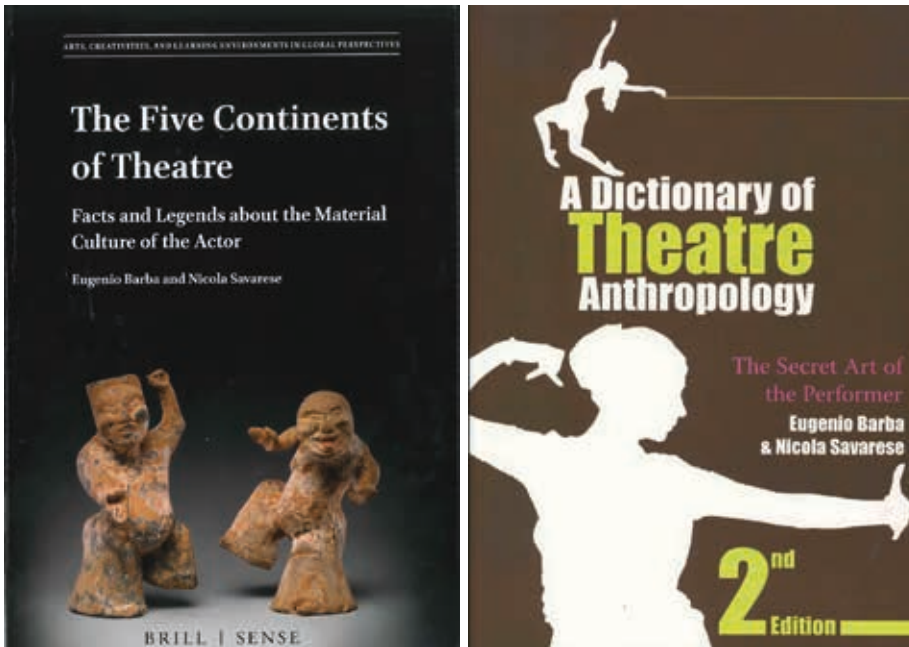
Barba in 1985 and translated into dozens of languages throughout the world;¹⁵ *Teatro e spettacolo fra Oriente e Occidente* (Theatre and performance between East and West) in 1992, also translated into several languages¹⁶ and altered for a minor version, *Il teatro eurasiatico* (The Eurasian theatre) in 2002;¹⁷ and *I cinque continenti del teatro. Fatti e leggende della cultura materiale dell'attore* (The five continents of theatre. Facts and legends of the material culture of the actor), again with Barba, in 2017.¹⁸ After-

15 *Anatomie de l'acteur. Un dictionnaire d'anthropologie théâtrale*, with Eugenio Barba, Cazilhac-Rome, Buffoneries-Contrastes-Zeami Libri, 1985; *Anatomía del actor. Diccionario de Antropología Teatral*, with Eugenio Barba, Mexico City, Gaceta Editorial, 1988; *El arte secreto del actor. Diccionario de Antropología Teatral*, with Eugenio Barba, Mexico, Gran Festival Ciudad de Mexico-Escenología, 1990; *The Secret Art of the Performer. A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*, with Eugenio Barba, London-New York, A Centre for Performance Research Book-Routledge, 1991; *L'énergie qui danse. L'art secret de l'acteur. Un dictionnaire d'anthropologie théâtrale*, with Eugenio Barba, Lectoure, Bouffonneries, 1995; *Haiyuu no kaibougaku. Engeki jinruigaku jiten nija no bi gei. Engeki jinruigaku no jisbo*, with Eugenio Barba, Tokyo, Parco Co. Ltd., 1995; *A arte secreta do actor. Dicionário de antropologia teatral*, with Eugenio Barba, São Paulo-Campinas, Hucitec, 1995; *Tajna umetnosti glumca. Rečnik pozorišne antropologije*, with Eugenio Barba, Belgrade, Institut za pozoriste, 1996; *L'arte segreta dell'attore. Un dizionario di antropologia teatrale*, with Eugenio Barba, Lecce, Argo, 1996 (2nd ed. reviewed and corrected); *Slovník Divadelní Antropologie. O Skrytém Umení Herců*, with Eugenio Barba, Praha, Nakladatelství Lidové noviny-Divadelní Ústav, 2000; *Oyuncun Gizli Sanatı. Tiyatro Antropolojisi Sözlüğü*, with Eugenio Barba, Istanbul, Yapı Kredi Yayınları, ed. Cem AKAS, 2002; *L'arte segreta dell'attore. Un dizionario di antropologia teatrale*, with Eugenio Barba, Milano, Ubulibri, 2005 (3rd ed. reviewed and integrated on occasion of the 25th anniversary of ISTA) Bari, Edizioni di Pagina, 2011; *Sekretna Sztuka Aktora. Słownik Antropologii Teatru*, with Eugenio Barba, Wrocław, Ośrodek Badań Twórczości Grotowskiego i Poszukiwan Teatralno-Kulturowych, 2005; *El arte secreto del actor. Diccionario de antropología teatral*, with Eugenio Barba, Havana, Ediciones Alarcos, 2007; *Η μυστική τέχνη του ηθοποιού. Αρχές θεατρικής ανθρωπολογίας*, with Eugenio Barba, Athens, Koan, 2008; *El arte secreto del actor. Diccionario de antropología teatral*, with Eugenio Barba, Lima, Editorial San Marcos, 2010; *Словарь Театральной Антропологии. Тайное искусство исполнителя (Slovar `teatral'noi antropologii. Tainoe iskusstvo ispolnitelia)*, with Eugenio Barba, Moscow (Москва), Артист. Режисер. Театр (Artist Rezhisser Teatr), 2010; *مدنکار جا یفخم رنه*, with Eugenio Barba, Kerman, Iran, Sooreh Mehr Press, 2011; *Arte secretă a actorului. Dicționar de antropologie teatrală*, with Eugenio Barba, Bucharest, Humanitas, 2012; *演員者的秘艺*, with Eugenio Barba, Taipei, ARTS/Taipei National University of the Arts, 2012; *A Arte Secreta do Ato. Um Dicionário de Antropologia Teatral*, with Eugenio Barba, São Paulo, Realizações Editora, 2012; *El arte secreto del actor. Diccionario de antropología teatral*, with Eugenio Barba, Bilbao, Editorial Artezblai, 2012; *Oyuncunun Gizli Sanatı. Tiyatro Antropolojisi Sözlüğü*, with Eugenio Barba, Istanbul, Istanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2017; *El arte secreto del actor. Diccionario de Antropología Teatral*, with Eugenio Barba, Buenos Aires, Libros del Balcón, 2019; *Színház titkos művészete. Színházi antropológiai szótár*, with Eugenio Barba, Budapest, Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem - L'Harmattan Kiadó, 2020.

16 *Teatro e spettacolo fra Oriente e Occidente* (1992) was the winner of the 1994 Pirandello Prize and the Diego Fabbri Prize. The book has been reprinted numerous times and translated into several languages: *Teatro eurasiatico. Danzas y espectáculos entre Oriente y Occidente*, with an editor's note by Edgar Ceballos, Mexico, Col. Escenología, 2001; *Eurasian Theatre. Drama and Performance Between East and West from Classical Antiquity to the Present*, Holstebro-Malta-Wrocław, Icarus Publishing Enterprise, 2010.

17 Savarese 2002.

18 Barba e Savarese 2017. The book has had several reprints and translations: *Celecinci Continente ale Teatrului. Fapte și legende din cultura materială a actorului*, with Eugenio Barba, Sibiu, Nemira-Teatrul Național "Radu Stanca", 2018; *The Five Continents of Theatre, Facts and Legends about the Material Culture of the Actor*, with Eugenio Barba, Leiden-Boston, Brill-Sense, 2019; *Les cinq continents du théâtre. Faits et légendes de la culture matérielle de l'acteur*, with Eugenio Barba, Lacoste, Éditions Deuxième Époque, 2020.



wards Nicola returned to what he called his *bibelot*, that is, the Greek and Roman theatres that had been left dormant during his oriental forays and could now come back to life; a new life.

The Western ancient theatres appeared in a different light, less familiar but richer in perspective, to his increasingly discerning way of seeing. This was already evident in the lecture he gave at the Sorbonne in 1992, *Storie emergenti del teatro eurasiatico: la tragedia greca e l'arte del cantastorie* (Emerging stories of the Eurasian theatre: Greek tragedy and the art of the storyteller),¹⁹ and became even more evident in what can be considered the first port of this other journey into boundless territories, *Teatri Romani. Gli spettacoli nell'antica Roma* (Roman theatres. Performances in ancient Rome), 1996,²⁰ which Taviani defined 'a critical anthology that manages to observe with a new and distant eye a subject that would seem all too well known'.²¹ Nicola will return to this field several times, continuing to broaden it and to take on different perspectives, always fully aware – being neither a Romanist, nor a philologist, nor a scholar specifically oriented towards ancient theatres – of the 'professional' risk that he was taking. And

19 Published in Savarese 1994, 103-119 (lecture held on November 27, 1992, at the Université de la Sorbonne, Salle Louis Liard, for the colloquium 'Penser l'histoire du cinéma: repenser l'histoire du théâtre').

20 Savarese 1996 (editing of the anthology and introduction: *I paradossi dei teatri romani*, pp. IX-LXX-VIII); *Teatri Romani. Gli spettacoli nell'antica Roma* (2nd ed. with the addition of the essay: *L'orazione di Libanio in difesa della pantomima*, pp. 326-353), Imola, Cue Press, 2015.

21 Taviani 1997, 282.

which, I would even say proudly, he displayed in forms that were new to the scholarly community, such as the conference-performance *Quo vadis? A teatro con gli antichi romani: mimi, attori, aurighi e gladiatori* (Quo vadis? A theatre with the ancient Romans: mimes, actors, charioteers and gladiators), 1997, presented for the first time at the Teatro Storchi in Modena, in front of around 700 spectators.²² This conference-performance was another highly personal way, innate in him, of uniting practice and theory.²³ Nicola had inaugurated it during his studies on Antonin Artaud, the first of which was, in fact, a lecture-performance prepared for the 50th anniversary of the Colonial Exposition in Paris. It debuted at the Santarcangelo di Romagna Festival with the title *Parigi/Artaud/Bali – nel cinquantenario d'una visione* (Paris/Artaud/Bali – in the 50th anniversary of a vision), 1981. After over a hundred performances in Italy and abroad, it became a 'book' sixteen years later, in 1997.²⁴

Regarding studies on ancient theatres, the major exhibition at the Colosseum was memorable: *In scæna. Il teatro di Roma antica* (In scæna. The theatre of ancient Rome), 2007.²⁵ Its relevant catalogue was hyper-nourished with knowledge, coherent to Nicola's mindset. Other more specific interventions were born from the fragments accumulated by ploughing the fields around the theme of ancient theatres. Fuelled by a profound passion for the theme without identifying or exhausting it totally, Nicola writes *Rappresentazioni teatrali in epoca imperiale* (Theatre representations in the imperial era) in 1999;²⁶ *L'orazione di Libanio in difesa dei pantomimi* (Libanio's speech

22 Modena, Teatro Storchi, April 7, 1997, an ERT Emilia Romagna Teatro production. Repeated in July of the same year at Volterra Teatro 97 Festival, then managed by C.S.R.T. – Centro per la Sperimentazione e la Ricerca Teatrale e Piccolo Teatro di Pontedera.

23 On March 23, 1996, at the Teatro Storchi in Modena, Savarese performed his entire lecture repertoire non-stop from 4:00 p.m. to midnight: *Paris/Artaud/Bali*; *Eisenstein or the Golden Age* (on the film *Que viva Mexico!*); *My Oriental Divan is Mishima* (on the writer's suicide); *Salome's Dance* (on the principles of theatre anthropology); and *Orson's Last Hoax*. Tavianì wrote: 'Savarese certainly didn't invent the genre of lecture-performances. He reinvented it. He shifted the emphasis from the art of the lecturer to that of the spectator; from the outline to dribbling; from montage as rhetorical and didactic effectiveness to the montage-mixture that creates a sort of independent chemical reaction in the mind of the spectator. His cultural polemic is not against ignorance, but against the lesson. He does all that work to tear apart the lessons. Not to make them *say* something valuable, but to *push* the minds of those who assist to look at something beyond. Eisenstein repeated to his film students that teaching is impossible, one can only learn. By going astray. The rest is well known'. (Ferdinando Tavianì, *Il conferenziere imperturbato*, cit., pp. 289-290)

24 The lecture-performance premiered at the Santarcangelo di Romagna Festival on July 10, 1981, and, after over a hundred performances in Italy and abroad, it became a 'book' sixteen years later, in 1997, *Paris/Artaud/Bali. Antonin Artaud vede il teatro balinese all'Esposizione Coloniale di Parigi del 1931*. The study began to take shape with the essay *Artaud vede il teatro balinese all'Esposizione Coloniale Internazionale di Parigi del 1931*, published in Savarese 1996, 35-84; it continued his 'journey' passing through *Bali: un'ossessione in chiave anti occidentale*, published in "Prima Fila," no. 27, 1997, pp. 16-18, and later became a book, *Paris/Artaud/Bali. Antonin Artaud vede il teatro balinese all'Esposizione Coloniale di Parigi del 1931*, L'Aquila, Textus, 1997 (new edition CUE Press, 2021).

25 Savarese 2007.

26 Savarese 1999.

in defence of the mimes) in 2003;²⁷ *Il costume teatrale* (The theatre costume) in 2004;²⁸ *A teatro con gli antichi romani* (To theatre with the ancient Romans) in 2008²⁹; *Guida alla memoria* (Memory guide) in 2019,³⁰ and then the two volumes almost ready to be printed: *Fasti dei teatri romani. Memorie di illustri spettatori. Antologia in latino con testo a fronte* (The glories of Roman theatres. Memoirs of illustrious spectators. An anthology in Latin with facing text), with Vincenzo Blasi³¹ and *Paradossi dei teatri romani. Novissima storia del teatro latino* (Paradoxes of Roman theatres. Recent history of Latin theatre).³²

To do away with the East

Along with a myriad of books, Savarese's library also contained the collection of material for his research. Starting with those for his dissertation, organised and catalogued in drawers overflowing with index cards linked to notes or volumes. This material was catalogued, not abandoned but left to rest, as if to preserve other vital future possibilities. In our meetings over the last few years, he often told me, in ever greater detail, about the many open worktables in his home in Carpignano. He continued to write, ask and search for material, photographs, documents, and thoughts to share. One of his latest publishers, Mattia Visani of Cue Press, has layout templates created by Nicola himself, material and nearly finished texts in such quantities as to cover a decade's work. This is in the 'editorial programme' that continues to occupy a prominent place on his computer desktop and which, not coincidentally, he titled *Napoleone. Editoriale programme*, the tables (11 in total) are meticulously catalogued, including the progress of the work. All have passed the first phase ('Material complete. Book is set up'), some are in the next phase ('Materials arranged with Contents'), others are ready for print ('Finished book in need of retouching').³³

The subjects of these book projects testify the rhinoceros-like dimension and the passionate strategy that was at their origin. It is no coincidence that the publication dates

27 Savarese 2003, 425-60.

28 Savarese 2004, 53-68.

29 Savarese 2008, 5-32.

30 Preface to Blasi 2019, 8-9.

31 Volume in preparation, as results from point 6 of the file *Napoleone. Programma editoriale*: '6) *Fasti dei teatri romani. Memorie di illustri spettatori. Antologia in latino con testo a fronte* (con Vincenzo Blasi) – Materiali al completo – Libro impostato'.

32 Volume in preparation, as results from point 8 of the file *Napoleone. Programma editoriale*: 8) *Paradossi dei teatri romani. Novissima storia del teatro latino*. Progetto che nell'elenco risulta alla fase 2: *Materiali sistemati con Indice*.

33 Two works, in Savarese's editorial programme, are at the 'finished book in need of retouching' stage: the *Vocabolario teatrale in cinque lingue. Repertorio tecnico del linguaggio teatrale*, currently in progress at Cue Press, which Nicola had sent to Mattia Visani, editorial director, with this specification: 'Nicola Savarese, *Lessico teatrale in 5 lingue* (Theatre lexicon in 5 languages, Italian, French, English, German, Spanish): 'Over 900 terms; the work is finished. It's up to you how to publish it'; and the second edition of his *Insolita storia di Prospero Ferretti pittore*. In fact *Minima Orientalia*, which Nicola entrusted to me, was also in Phase 3 and was practically ready for print. It was just a matter of 'finishing touches'.

of his books and essays never indicate simply the time when, with publication, the study ends, but rather the time when it begins to live. The work on his studies never finished. Nicola has never stopped returning to them, rethinking them, expanding or modifying their boundaries, as if they were parts of an overall picture he has continued to draw on throughout his career.

In his Napoleonic plans for the future, there were also points of arrival which I doubt would have remained such. One of these is the project *Per farla finita con Oriente e Occidente. Leggende, viaggi e studi sul teatro eurasiatico* (To do away with East and West. Legends, travels and studies on Eurasian theatre). The East again, with which to finally settle accounts, after having reckoned with it for so long. Of the work, which was to be published in three volumes (*Legends, Travels, Studies*), Nicola wrote to the publisher: 'a compendium of all my little thoughts,' an unfinished work 'that will grow until I use up everything I have in my drawers.' Those drawers were also the ones from when, as a child, he watched his grandfather, Angelo Ferretti Torricelli, intent on compiling the index of Alessandro Volta's *Works* (the thirteen volumes of his writings), or helped him collect, analyse, and classify the herbs in the mountain meadows around the house where his mother's father lived. From his grandfather, Nicola had also learned 'the fundamentals of research: rigour and passion.'³⁴ And I would add also the 'ability to look at the world with the clear eye of a child was well accompanied by the tenacious diligence he knew how to put into all his activities, and the activities were many and varied and alternated daily without it ever being possible to distinguish which were *work* and which were *leisure*: the secret of an intellectually fruitful and happy life!'³⁵

To honour his memory, Nicola will edit and work hard to publish the second edition (712 densely packed pages) of the novel that his grandfather had published in 1963 and that he had read, at seventeen, during the summer holidays when the text was still in instalments (*I buoni Marcheschi*, 2020³⁶); and, in 2022, he will publish, in a novel, the story of his grandfather's father: *Insolita storia di Prospero Ferretti pittore*,³⁷ on which, moreover, he had not stopped working; on his computer, ready for print, is the second edition of the novel, which in his Napoleonic publishing programme appears as a 'finished book, to be retouched'. A short circuit that uncovers and sheds a different light on his highly personal and fruitful relationship with the East: his great-grandfather, Prospero Ferretti, a Garibaldian and painter, was the first in the family clan to be fascinated by Asian culture. *Ex Oriente lux*, the Latin motto used by scholars of Semitic studies and ancient Asian archaeology, served Nicola, and even before him, his ancestors, not only in the sense of the medieval formula that, with a play on words, seeks to extol the fruitfulness of Eastern civilizations (*ex Oriente lux, ex Occidente lex*). It served also – and I believe mostly – as a reference to the star of the Magi that rose in the East and, more profoundly, to the expression '*sol ex Oriente*', which dates back to the

34 This is what he writes in the *Notanda* of the volume he edited of his maternal grandfather's novel (Ferretti Torricelli 2020).

35 Ferretti Torricelli 2020, 11 (text that Laura Ferretti Torricelli, Angelo's daughter, published for the first time ten years after her father's death in the *Annuario della Specola Cidnea per l'anno 1991*, 14-17).

36 Ferretti Torricelli 2020.

37 Savarese 2022.

pontificate of Pope Leone Magno (440-461), and which highlights the role of the East as a source of light and truth.

Along with childhood memories, Nicola had exhumed those drawers – renaming them *cassettini* in a diminutive of affection – at the beginning of his career as a self-employed researcher, to catalogue and organise the material for his dissertation thesis. These would become one of the secrets of his work method and, at the same time, the material form of his thought, the possibility of organising his ideas and giving them a concrete form. They would grow in number, beyond measure, arranged by topic and then by project, filled with references to books and studies by others, personal notes, translations, photographs of all kinds (that he called *figurine*), newspaper clippings, drawings, sketches, and material that who knows how much and how would still ‘speak’. A small archive that over time came to contain several tens of thousands of images; little drawers that he considered his ‘trusted friends’, because he found them ready for every request for help, ready, every time, to ‘step forward and help him find the path to the things he wanted to do, the books and lectures.’³⁸ Everyone, when they reach the top of the hill, must invent their own battle cry. I believe Savarese found it in the practice of the material culture of theatre, both in studying it and in practising it:

Watching the actors, making a montage, remembering the stories, cutting them, assembling the texts... was extremely enjoyable. Much more fun than doing research in the library, because I was a bookworm who suddenly discovered he was a wood squirrel. There was a difference, and I also found it in academic work, that is, in enjoying research through the conditions I had as when I was an actor, director, and literary advisor in a theatre group.³⁹

The meaning of my notes reverberates on those drawers, on Nicola’s eyes as a child, in which his grandfather and his *modus operandi* are reflected, and on those of Nicola as a scholar, whose way of seeing is a blend of passion, meticulousness, leisure, and work. To dwell on another of the epitaphs in the Brancion-en-Chalon cemetery: ‘Men have stars that are not the same. For some, those who travel, the stars are guides. For others, they are merely small lights.’⁴⁰

The stars that guided Nicola continue to guide our paths and will continue to guide the paths of many.

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38 Savarese 2021, 206.

39 Savarese 2021, 211.

40 Perrin 2019, 397.

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