Liberate Rame! Franca Rame and the Politics of Theatre-Making

Filomena Campus

PhD

Royal Central School of Speech and Drama

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.
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Filomena Campus

Abstract

This multi-modal research analyses the work and legacy of Italian theatre-maker, political activist, and archivist Franca Rame (1929-2013), foregrounding her significance as a radical and innovative figure within feminist and theatrical histories. The thesis articulates Rame's work as and through feminist practice, by examining the entanglement of social, political, and personal relationships in the creative processes she developed with Dario Fo (1926–2016) and their collaborators. It situates her practice within key debates in feminist theatre and performance studies, enabling critiques that acknowledge both the articulation and disavowal of feminism in her work. The study adopts a mixed methods approach, encompassing oral history, archival research, performance analysis, and practice research, to examine Rame's work through a feminist and materialist framework that foregrounds collaboration, contextual dynamics, relationality, and shared authorship.

I trace Rame's artistic development from her childhood in the 1930s to her departure from her family's theatre company in the 1950s. I then examine the post-1968 period when Rame and Fo founded their radical leftist collectives, *Nuova Scena* and *La Comune*, and concludes with an analysis of Rame's work within the re-established *Compagnia Teatrale Fo Rame* from the 1980s to 2013.

The research makes three original contributions: it offers the first English-language account of Rame's theatre-making process; it analyses her work in relation to Italian feminisms; and it provides a critical understanding of her development of scenic writing as radical reworkings of traditional Italian theatre techniques. Collectively, these findings challenge dominant patriarchal narratives that have marginalised Rame's work, by advancing feminist methodologies that highlight the intersection of material, political practices and social reproduction in the process of theatre-making. The thesis offers groundbreaking insights into Rame's significance and legacy and proposes strategies to reactivate her work in current feminist performance contexts.

Acknowledgements

My deepest thanks go to my supervisors, Tom Six and Diana Damian Martin, at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. Their patient, attentive, and unwavering support, guidance, and encouragement have been crucial to the development and shaping of this research. I am extremely grateful to the London Arts and Humanities Partnership (LAHP) and the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama for making this project possible. I also thank Lynne Kendrick and Tony Fisher at Central for encouraging me to embark on this journey, which involved temporarily stepping away from my long-standing role as a lecturer. I could not have done this without you.

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I owe special thanks to Mattea Fo, Jacopo Fo, and the Fondazione Fo Rame for facilitating a meaningful and fruitful collaboration with the Archivio Franca Rame Dario Fo, and for their enduring support throughout my research. I am also grateful for their invitation to participate in the international conference *Franca Rame, Non Solo Attrice*, organised in collaboration with the University of Verona and the Università Cattolica in Milan, where I presented both a paper in Milan and my practice research at Teatro Camploy in Verona. I look forward to the publication of the conference proceedings.

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Thanks to the Riverside Studios Archive for their support and for organising my talk on Rame and Fo at Riverside Studios in June 2024. I am also deeply grateful to the American Association of Italian Studies (AAIS) for inviting me to present a paper at their international conference in June 2024. Many thanks to Alessio Arena for the opportunity to review his excellent book *La Famiglia Rame*, and for his contribution to this research. I am thankful to Bianca Mastrominico and Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, for hosting my paper presentation at their conference on archival practices in June 2023, and to the Oxford Italian Association for organising my talk on Rame's theatre practice at St Hugh's College, Oxford, in February 2024.

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Notes on Language

All translations from Italian are by the author unless otherwise indicated. Italicisation is used for Italian terms.

Glossary of Italian Terms

Affidamento: Entrustment. A feminist relational practice where a woman chooses another woman as a point of reference or guide.

Anni di piombo: Years of Lead. A time of political violence in Italy (late 1960s–1980s), marked by both far-left and far-right terrorism.

ARCI (*Associazione Ricreativa e Culturale Italiana*): Italian Recreational and Cultural Association. It was the cultural wing of the Italian Communist Party.

*Autocosc*ienza: Consciousness-raising. A feminist practice of collective reflection and analysis of lived experience.

*Autunno c*aldo: Hot Autumn. The wave of industrial strikes and protests in 1969, primarily led by factory workers.

Avanguardia Operaia: Workers' Vanguard. An extra-parliamentary radical leftist movement active in Italy during the 1960s–70s.

Brigate Rosse: The Red Brigade, a far-left terrorist organisation active during the *Anni di piombo*.

Canovaccio: A scenario or rough script used as the basis for *commedia dell'arte* performances.

Capocomicato: A leadership structure centred on the *capocomico* (lead actor-manager) in Italian theatre.

Capocomico: Lead actor and director-manager in a *commedia dell'arte* troupe.

Capacòmica: My feminised form of the term *capocomico*.

Casa della Donna or *Casa Internazionale delle Donne**:*** The International Women's House, a historic feminist and cultural centre established in the 1970s in Rome.

Case del Popolo: People's Houses, Italian workers' left-wing circles or clubs.

Casa-laboratorio: Home-laboratory. A hybrid space for living and collaborative creation.

Commedia dell'Arte: Emerged to distinguish professional theatre from amateur aristocratic performance (*arte* referring to the actors' guild that produced these plays). Mostly known as Italian improvised theatre with masked stock characters and comic scenarios.

Compagnia Teatrale Fo Rame (CTFR): The theatre company founded by Dario Fo and Franca Rame.

Compromesso storico: Historic compromise. The 1970s political agreement between the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and the Christian Democrats.

Doppia militanza: Dual militancy or activism. The concept of being politically active in both leftist and feminist struggles.

Famiglia Rame: The Rame family was Franca Rame's original family, a theatre company of traveling actors.

Fondazione Fo Rame: Fo Rame Foundation. Established to preserve and promote the cultural, political, and artistic legacy of Dario Fo and Franca Rame.

Fonografia: Phonography. Lorenzo Camilli's 1852 publication.

Grappa assimilativa: A performance marker indicating a tonal shift, where enclosed lines are to be delivered in a unified voice.

Il partire da sé: Starting from the self. A feminist methodological principle that personal experience is the basis for political analysis.

Improvvisa: An improvisational performance based on a scenario (plot), and a repertoire of memorised dialogues.

La Comune: The collective theatre group created after *Nuova Scena*, continuing Fo-Rame's political theatre work.

La Drammatica: The Italian method of acting techniques and declamation system.

La sforbiciatrice / La regina dei tagli: 'The Trimmer' or 'Queen of edits'. Nicknames for Franca Rame, in her role of editor and dramaturg of the company's scripts.

Libreria delle Donne di Milano: Milan Women's Bookstore Collective.

Lo Stupro: The Rape. A monologue by Franca Rame.

Lotta Continua: Ongoing Struggle. An extra-parliamentary radical leftist movement active in Italy during the 1960s–70s.

Lotta Femminista (LF): Feminist Struggle, a militant feminist group in Italy in the 1970s.

Mani Pulite: Clean Hands. A major judicial investigation into political corruption in the early 1990s in Italy.

Miracolo economico: Economic miracle. Italy's post-WWII economic boom (1950s–60s).

Movimento di Liberazione della Donna (MLD): Women's Liberation Movement, one of the key Italian feminist collectives in the 1970s.

Nuova Scena: A theatre collective/cooperative co-founded by Fo and Rame in 1968.

Palazzina Liberty: A historical theatre space in Milan, used by Fo and Rame's company as their base in the 1970s.

Partitura: A notation system or performance score guiding scenic and vocal delivery.

Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI): The Italian Communist Party.

Potere Operaio: Workers' Power. An extra-parliamentary radical leftist movement active in Italy during the 1960s–70s.

Riflusso: The withdrawal into private life in Italy during the late 1970s and early 1980s, marked by widespread disillusionment and disengagement following an extraordinary period of political activism and social struggle.

Rivolta Femminile: Female Revolt, an early feminist collective, emphasising difference and autonomy from male politics.

Rulli: Scrolling text or surtitles used during performances.

Scrittura d'esperienza: Experiential writing, a feminist practice developed by Lea Melandri.

Scrittura scenica: Scenic writing.

Sesso? Grazie. Tanto per gradire!: 'Sex? Thanks! Don't Mind if I Do!' An autobiographical monologue by Franca Rame, co-authored with Dario Fo and Jacopo Fo.

Sigle interposte: Interposed symbols, symbols inserted between words, used in performance notation.

Sigle sottoposte: Notational signs placed under words to guide delivery.

Soccorso Rosso: Red Aid. An organization founded by Rame to support political prisoners and activists.

Strategia della tensione: Strategy of tension. A period of political instability in Italy (late 1960s–1980s), involving terrorism, state collusion, and repression.

Terzo atto: Third Act. Refers to the post show discussions with the audience, organised by Rame and Fo's theatre collectives.

Tradizione teatrale italiana or *Teatro all'italiana*: Italian theatrical tradition, a rich heritage spanning over three centuries, evolving from the improvisational style of *commedia dell'arte* to more structured forms, with its legacy enduring in the work of the Famiglia Rame.

Trapasso vocale: Vocal transition or change in intonation.

Tutta Casa, Letto e Chiesa: All Home, Bed and Church. A collection of monologues by Rame and Fo.

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Introduction

> *Ecco, vorrei che dolce poesia portasse nel mondo questo messaggio: Arlecchini danzano per la rivoluzione e votano la regina dei clowns ma urlano tra squilli di trombe e rullar di tamburi: 'Sveglia regina! Ridere non basta più'.*[1]
> Franca Rame

> *A woman* is *driving on the motorway in the US with her husband, who has just won the Nobel Prize. They stop at a petrol station and suddenly, the woman jumps out of the car, runs towards the forecourt attendant, hugs him and kisses him. On her return to the car, her husband asks the reason for her excitement. She says: 'Can you believe it? He was my boyfriend before you!'. Her husband replies: 'Well, my darling, you are so lucky you ended up marrying a man who won the Nobel Prize!'. 'No', she replies. 'You are lucky, because if I had married him, he would have won the Nobel prize!'.* [2]
> Dario Fo

Franca Rame (1929-2013) was an Italian theatre practitioner, actress, playwright, producer, political activist, and archivist, most known as partner in life and art of Dario Fo (1926-2016).[3] My friendship with Rame started in

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[1] **'**I would like sweet poetry to bring this message to the world: Harlequins dance for the revolution and vote for the queen of clowns, but they shout amidst trumpet blasts and drum rolls: Wake up, queen! Laughter is no longer enough!' Franca Rame's note on the cover of *Jester of Jazz* Album by the Filomena Campus Quartet.

[2] Jacopo Fo, interview with the author. He said his father told him this story: 'Una donna sta guidando sull'autostrada negli Stati Uniti con suo marito, che ha appena vinto il Premio Nobel. Si fermano a una stazione di servizio e, all'improvviso, la donna salta fuori dall'auto, corre verso il benzinaio, lo abbraccia e lo bacia. Tornata in macchina, il marito le chiede il motivo di tanta emozione. Lei risponde: «Puoi crederci? Era il mio fidanzato prima di te!». Il marito allora dice: «Beh, mia cara, sei proprio fortunata ad aver sposato un uomo che ha vinto il Premio Nobel!». «No», ribatte lei. «Tu sei fortunato, perché se avessi sposato lui, lo avrebbe vinto lui il Premio Nobel!».

[3] J. Guzzetta, (2018). The Lasting Theatre of Dario Fo and Franca Rame. *Theatre History Studies 37*, 257-277. https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/ths.2018.0013.

London in 2005 when she and husband Dario Fo attended the open rehearsals of *Peace Mum*, their monologue about Cindy Sheehan, the mother of a young American soldier who died during the war in Iraq.[4] The event took place in a cold and bare school hall in Pimlico, organised by Stop the War Coalition.[5] Actress Frances de la Tour performed the text, directed by Michael Kustow.[6] By chance, I found myself sitting next to Rame, who remained in the audience while Fo went on stage after the performance for a talk with the actor, the director, and Sheehan. Rame asked me to translate the conversation into Italian for her. Over the years, our friendship led to artistic collaborations. In 2011, she edited the lyrics of a song I wrote about her for my album *Jester of Jazz*, dedicated to both Rame and Fo.[7] In 2012, I directed a selection of her monologues, with Rame offering invaluable guidance and advice throughout the process.[8] Six years after Rame's death, on July 18, 2019, I presented a lecture/performance at the Archive Franca Rame and Dario Fo in Verona, as part of the celebrations of the ninetieth anniversary of Rame's birth. During this event, I discussed the idea for a collaborative research project on Rame's work and legacy with the former director of the archive, Marisa Pizza. The project began with a research proposal at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and was later developed with support from the London Arts and Humanities Partnership (LAHP),[9] and the Fondazione Fo Rame.[10]

Aims and objectives

[4] The original script, *Mamma Pace* (Peace Mum) written in 2005, is available on Franca Rame's online archive https://www.archivio.francarame.it/scheda.aspx?IDScheda=65337&IDOpera=130
[5] https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/dec/12/arts.artsnews
[6] J. Farrell, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame, Theatre, Politics, Life* (London: Methuen, 2019), 392.
[7] Filomena Campus Quartet, *Jester of Jazz,* Egea/Sam, 2011. See Appendix B.
[8] In 2012 I directed a selection of Rame's monologues with a group of third-year BA Physical Theatre students at East 15 Acting School, University of Essex.
[9] https://www.lahp.ac.uk/
[10] https://www.fondazioneforame.org/

Through the development of the first comprehensive English-language account of Franca Rame's theatre-making process, this research offers a detailed analysis of the entanglement of social, political, and personal relationships embedded in the creative practices that Rame developed alongside Dario Fo and their collaborators. It makes the case for understanding Rame's work both through, and as, feminist practice. This perspective underscores the urgency of re-evaluating Rame's contributions and challenging the dominant patriarchal narratives that have marginalised her role. More importantly, the thesis advances an argument for feminist methodologies that continue to illuminate the intersections of material conditions, political structure, and social reproduction in shaping how labour is understood, perceived, and historicised. By repositioning Rame's legacy within a feminist and materialist framework, one that values collaboration, contextual dynamics, relationality, and shared creative authorship, this study seeks to reclaim her significance as a radical and innovative theatre-maker. Ultimately, it offers both a revised understanding of her legacy and new ways to activate it in contemporary feminist performance contexts.

To reposition Rame's legacy and fully capture her significance, the thesis is therefore structured around the following research questions: what were the politics of Rame's theatre-making practice? How did she draw on and respond to the Italian theatre tradition and the feminist movements of 1970s Italy in her work? What are the values and limitations of the collaborative practices and creative environment envisioned by Rame, and how might these be understood as feminist interventions?

Franca Rame's life, work, and context

Franca Rame was born in 1929 into a family of traveling actors, the *Famiglia Rame*.[11] She made her stage debut when she was only eight days old, and grew up immersed in her family's craft, performing a variety of characters

[11] Farrell, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame, Theatre, Politics, Life,* 35.

according to her age,[12] learning techniques belonging to the Italian theatre tradition, a topic explored in the first chapter.[13] In 1950, Rame left her family's company to work with theatre companies in Milan, where she met Dario Fo in 1951. They married in 1954 and in 1957 co-founded the *Compagnia Teatrale Fo Rame* (CTFR). In his book about his parents, Jacopo Fo, the son of Rame and Fo, explains how the couple started their company.

> Dopo la mia nascita Dario chiese un prestito al nonno Felice, i risparmi di una vita, e con quei soldi papà e mamma misero su compagnia insieme. Portarono in scena gli atti unici comici che mia madre recitava con i suoi genitori. Pezzi che avevano le radici nella tradizione più antica del teatro italiano.[14]
>
> After I was born, Dario asked my grandfather Felice for a loan, his life savings, and with that money, my father and mother started their own theatre company. They brought to the stage the comedic one-act plays that my mother had performed with her parents. These pieces were deeply rooted in the oldest traditions of Italian theatre.

Jacopo Fo here explains the origins of his parents' theatre, and how Rame brought to the company the legacy of her theatre family, rooted in ancient traditions such as Commedia dell'Arte.[15] Their personal and professional partnership, spanning more than sixty years, was 'probably unique in theatre history',[16] due to both its longevity and the intimate nature of their collaboration. In 1962, they brought their political and popular style to television as hosts of the television programme *Canzonissima*, but censorship by RAI (Italian national television) and the government led them

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[12] L. Peja, 'Franca Rame: 'L'Aggiramento, Scena Politica e Risata Rivoluzionaria', in L. Peja, *Strategie del Comico, Franca Valeri, Franca Rame, Natalia Ginzburg* (Firenze: Le Lettere, 2009), 79.
[13] See M. Leigh Streifer, 'Women, Body and Politics. Franca Rame's Feminist Monologue', in her dissertation *The Body Politic on Stage: Women Writers and Gender in Twentieth-Century Italian Theater*, Los Angeles: University of California, 2016, 190.
[14] J. Fo, *Com'è essere figlio di Franca Rame e Dario Fo* (Milan: Guanda, 2019), 57.
[15] Farrell, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame, Theatre, Politics, Life, 35.*
[16] Farrell, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame, Theatre, Politics*, *Life*, inside front cover.

to leave the program after a few episodes.[17] However, this experience solidified their commitment to theatre, significantly boosted their popularity in Italy, and helped shape their signature grotesque political satire, which was showcased in a series of successful comedies in the 1960s.[18]

Key socio-economic challenges not only became central themes in the work of Rame and Fo but also led them to drastically change the structure of their theatre company. In the post-war period, Italy underwent what is known as *miracolo economico* (economic miracle), a time marked by mass production and consumption that resulted in rapid economic growth throughout the 1950s and 1960s.[19] This era saw a significant transformation of Italy from a predominantly agricultural society into an industrialised nation.[20] Between 1958 and 1963 Italy's economy achieved an average GDP growth rate of 6.3%, driven by advancements in new technologies, the exploitation of inexpensive labour, high productivity, and a weak union movement.[21] This economic shift prompted large-scale migration from the impoverished rural south to the industrial cities and regions of the north. However, the economic miracle ended abruptly with *Autunno Caldo* (the 'Hot Autumn') of 1969, which was marked by the collapse of economic, social, and political stability, resulting in widespread strikes, workers' protests, and factory occupations in northern Italy.[22] Amidst the social upheaval of 1968, Rame and Fo made a significant political and artistic shift by severing ties with the institutional Italian theatre, transforming their company into the independent theatre collective *Nuova Scena* (New Scene).[23] They abandoned traditional theatre venues to reach audiences typically excluded from mainstream cultural circuits.[24] This exposes how broader political and social upheavals shaped the material, political, and aesthetic practices of Rame and Fo.

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[17] F. Rame, *Una vita all'Improvvisa* (Parma: Guanda, 2009).
[18] Farrell, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame, Theatre, Politics, Life*, 73-79.
[19] P. Ginsborg, *Storia d'Italia dal dopoguerra ad oggi (1943-1988)* (Torino: Einaudi, 2006).
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Peja, *Strategie del Comico*, 78.
[24] This period also saw the debut of *Mistero Buffo* (1969), which gained the couple significant international recognition. See D. Fo, and F. Rame. *Mistero Buffo: Giullarata Popolare* (Torino: Einaudi, 2003).

Historian Fiamma Lussana identifies the emergence of Italian feminism during the same period, specifically from 1965 to 1980.[25] Over these fifteen years numerous feminist groups emerged across the country, particularly in major cities like Rome and Milan.[26] The movement was in part influenced by the students' protests of '68 and the tumultuous events of 1969, which were followed by a period known as *strategia della tensione* (strategy of tension).[27] This refers to a series of terrorist attacks executed by far-right extremists, including five bombings on December 12th, 1969, in Rome and Milan that claimed seventeen lives and injured eighty-eight people, notably the explosion at the Bank of Agriculture in Milan.[28] In response to escalating violence, Enrico Berlinguer, leader of the *Partito Comunista Italiano* (Italian Communist Party, hereafter PCI), sought to stabilise the situation and prevent a potential far-right coup by promoting the *compromesso storico* (historic compromise), an alliance with the ruling Christian Democratic Party (DC), which was then in power.[29]

Rame was a member of the PCI from 1964 to 1970.[30] Although she held a party membership card, she was not actively involved in internal political activities. Her affiliation signalled a commitment to leftist causes while maintaining an independent and critical stance towards the party's official line. She channelled her activism primarily through her theatre work rather than through formal party structures. At the same time, the influence of feminist movements on her practice was more significant than existing scholarship has generally acknowledged, as this study will show. Rame's critique of the PCI's moderate stance and political compromise, such as the *compromesso storico*, became a central theme in *Nuova Scena'*s plays. This provoked ostracism from left-wing circles, particularly the *Case del Popolo* (Workers' Clubs), who disapproved of Fo and Rame's criticism of the PCI.[31] In response, these groups boycotted their performances, denied them

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[25] F. Lussana, *Il Movimento Femminista in Italia* (Roma: Carocci Editore, 2012).
[26] P. Bono and S. Kemp, *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993).
[27] Farrell, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame,* 105.
[28] P. Ginsborg, *Storia d'Italia dal dopoguerra ad oggi (1943-1988)* (Torino: Einaudi, 2006).
[29] Farrell, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame*, 111.
[30] See photos of Rame's PCI membership card at the archive: https://www.archivio.francarame.it/scheda.aspx?IDScheda=6712&IDOpera=69
[31] Farrell, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame*, 112.

access to venues at the last minute, and caused their promotional materials to disappear.[32] Rame promptly sought out Enrico Berlinguer, the party's secretary, to address these issues. She often recalled being so nervous during their meeting that she smoked all his cigarettes.[33] Despite Berlinguer's genuine support, the ostracism from their comrades persisted, prompting Rame and Fo to change their approach. Rame relinquished her PCI membership card and, together with Fo and their loyal collaborators, began working with student and worker groups associated with left-wing extra-parliamentary movements, who favoured direct mass participation over institutional procedures.[34] In 1970, their commitment to alternative, self-managed theatre structures prompted them to create a different kind of theatre collective*. La Comune* (The Commune) emerged from this broader political milieu, marking a break from the more centralised, party-aligned model of the PCI. While there were clear ambitions concerning the organisation of the collective, my analysis raises critical questions about the underlying politics that informed its structure and practices.

The first production by *La Comune*, titled *Vorrei morire anche stasera se dovessi pensare che non è servito a niente. Resistenza: parla il popolo italiano e palestinese* (I Would Like to Die Tonight if I Had to Think it Was All for Nothing. Resistance: The Italian and Palestinian People Speak) premiered on 27 October 1970 and was dedicated to the Palestinian cause. Rame subsequently travelled to Lebanon to recruit Palestinian participants for the 1971–72 production *Fedayn* (Fedayn: The Palestinian Revolution Through Its Culture and Songs).[35] This piece combined testimonies, traditional Palestinian songs, readings of political documents, sketches, and critical reflections. In presenting the production, Rame described it as both a political document and an act of solidarity with the oppressed Palestinian people.[36] Once again, her initiative shows how she conceived theatre as a

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[32] Ibid.
[33] F. Rame, *Una vita all'improvvisa, 184-188.*
[34] Extra-parliamentary groups included *Avanguardia Operaia* (Workers' Vanguard), *Potere Operaio* (Workers' Power), and *Lotta Continua* (Continuous Struggle). They advocated for workers' rights, anti-capitalism, and revolutionary change. See J. Farrell, 104.
[35] La Comune, 'Fedayn' in Collettivo Teatrale La Comune, *Compagni Senza Censura* (Milano: Mazzotta, 1973).
[36] Peja, *Strategie del comico*, 83.

tool of political resistance and collective solidarity, capable of amplifying marginalised voices and enacting social change. *La Comune'*s politically satirical performances, notably *Morte accidentale di un anarchico* (Accidental Death of an Anarchist), and *Non si paga! Non si paga!* (Can't Pay! Won't Pay!) stirred controversy while earning acclaim from progressive audiences and critics.[37] Theatre and political activism therefore became increasingly intertwined, with Rame playing a leading role. However, both the turbulent political climate and their activism led to internal tensions in the new collective, as well as a series of violent attacks against the couple.[38]

The 1970s emerged as a tumultuous time marked by increasing violence and a wave of terrorist attacks in Italy, referred to as *anni di piombo* (years of lead, so called in reference to the bullets that symbolised the era's political violence).[39] The impact of these violent years on Rame and Fo's work in the 1970s was profound, both on a personal and professional level. Theatre represented their key platform for advancing political and social causes. This manifested not only through the political themes of their performances but also in their organisation and production. For instance, Rame was at the forefront of major political and civil struggles, notably by founding *Soccorso Rosso* (Red Aid),[40] an organisation that supported workers, students, and activists who had been arrested during protests and were facing harsh conditions in prison. The association provided legal assistance, financial support to both detainees and their families, as well as food parcels and other essential aid.[41] This work was financially sustained through the allocation of a portion of the proceeds from *La Comune*'s performances, alongside income from the sale of scripts and recordings. This approach demonstrates the deep entanglement between theatre and activism in Rame's work, revealing how her artistic practice functioned as a vehicle for political engagement and social intervention. Evidence of Rame's sustained engagement with prisoners and their families is found in her

[37] Farrell, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame*, 121-123, 178-180.
[38] Ibid.,139-158.
[39] Ibid. The term *piombo*, 'lead' refers literally to the material of bullets, symbolising the shootings, bombings, and acts of terrorism that defined the era.
[40] Farrell, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame* 132-135.
[41] Ibid.

publication *Non parlarmi degli orchi, parlami delle tue prigioni* (*Don't Talk to Me About Ogres, Talk to Me About Your Jails)*.[42] The text recounts the true story of a young man who, despite the absence of evidence against him, was imprisoned, descended into psychological distress, and ultimately died by suicide.[43] The themes of torture and state violence also informed several of Rame's monologues, including *Io, Ulrike, grido* (*I, Ulrike, Scream), Accadde domani (It Happened Tomorrow)*, and *Una madre* (*A Mother*).[44] Rame's prison solidarity work with *Soccorso Rosso* earned her considerable respect among comrades on the left but also provoked hostility from those in power, ultimately making her a target of far-right extremists.[45] Attempts were made to coerce prisoners into falsely accusing her of being affiliated with terrorist groups, but none complied.[46] Her activism ultimately led to her abduction, with evidence suggesting the involvement of rogue secret services.[47] On 9 March, 1973, she was kidnapped, tortured, and raped by five paramilitary fascists; twenty-five years later, a judge's conclusion vindicated Rame and Fo's claims, demonstrating that it was a 'State rape' orchestrated by high-ranking officials.[48] This dramatic episode highlights the extent to which Rame's entangled theatrical, political, social, and activist work, particularly during the *La Comune* period, was perceived as threatening by authorities and institutions. As public figures who consistently spoke out against injustice, both Rame and Fo *davano fastidio* (literally, 'were a nuisance') to those in power.[49] Although both were targeted for their activism, the repression culminated in the most brutal and gendered form of attack directed specifically at Rame.

In the years that followed, Rame chose to transform her traumatic experience into militant theatre. Her monologue *Lo Stupro* (The Rape)

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[42] F. Rame, *Non parlarmi degli orchi, parlami delle tue Prigioni* (F. R. Edizioni, 1984). Along with her posthumous *In fuga dal Senato* (*Escape from the Senate*), this book is notably one of the only works published solely under her name.
[43] Ibid.
[44] F. Rame and D. Fo, *A Woman Alone' & Other Plays* (London: Modern Plays Paperback, 1991).
[45] J. Fo, *Com'è essere figlio di Franca Rame e Dario Fo* (Milan: Guanda, 2019), 121.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Farrell, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame*, 142.
[49] Marcello Magni, conversation with the author, 2019, personal archive of the author.

became both a powerful denunciation of sexual violence and a signature piece within her broader activist campaigns for women's rights. It has been translated into many languages and continues to be performed globally.[50] Jacopo Fo highlights the significance and ground-breaking impact of this piece:

> La stima verso mia madre crebbe a dismisura, soprattutto tra le donne, quando iniziò a raccontare in teatro la sua vita, con la violenza che aveva subito. Non s'era mai visto che una donna raccontasse il suo stupro nei dettagli, rompendo il muro della vergogna che impediva alle vittime di parlare. Quello spettacolo fu anche una rivoluzione nella storia del teatro. Non era mai successo che una grande attrice mettesse in scena la propria vita come aveva fatto lei, senza filtri. Ma praticamente nessun critico teatrale capì la portata di una simile scelta.[51]
>
> The respect for my mother grew immensely, especially among women, when she began to recount her life on stage, including the violence she had endured. It was unprecedented for a woman to describe her rape in detail, breaking the wall of shame that prevented victims from speaking out. That performance was also a revolution in the history of theatre. Never before had a renowned actress brought her own life to the stage as she did, unfiltered. Yet almost no theatre critic grasped the significance of such a choice.

According to Jacopo Fo, Rame forged a new path in 1970s Italian theatre by bringing her personal experiences to the stage, an aspect examined in this study, as clear evidence of her own authorship.[52]

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[50] F. Rame, 'Lo Stupro', in F. Rame and D. Fo, *Una vita all'improvvisa,* (Parma: Guanda, 2009), 255-260.
Also in F. Rame, D. Fo, *A Woman Alone' & Other Plays* (London: Modern Plays Paperback, 1991).
[51] Fo, *Com'è essere figlio di Franca Rame e Dario Fo*, 151.
[52] J. Fo, interview with the author, May 13, 2022.

In 1974, Rame and Fo led the restoration and occupation of the Palazzina Liberty, a derelict building in a park in central Milan, transforming it into a vibrant hub for Milan's cultural and theatrical activities, despite multiple eviction attempts.[53] With the emergence of the feminist movement in the 1970s, Rame co-wrote with Fo a series of monologues on women's struggles, *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa* (*All Home, Bed, and Church*), which premiered in 1977 at the Palazzina Liberty.[54] The piece was a major success and achieved international recognition as a landmark of feminist theatre.[55] Rame's artistic output during this period was inseparable from her political activism: she actively supported women's rights campaigns, including those for legal abortion and divorce, by participating in demonstrations, organising events, raising funds, and collecting signatures. This entanglement of theatre-making and political engagement demonstrates how Rame's creative practice was embedded in the broader feminist movement of the time.[56]

Many Italian feminist groups of the 1970s, such as *Lotta Femminista* (*Feminist Struggle*), that I examine in this study, rejected the concept of *doppia militanza* (dual militancy/activism), whereby activists could engage in both feminist and political movements. This meant that Rame's engagement with political activism, first with the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and later with extra-parliamentary left-wing groups, would have precluded her participation in certain feminist movements, even though she often shared similar principles and objectives. In any case, she never fully identified as a feminist, maintaining a degree of distance from organised feminist movements to prioritise her political commitment through her work with La Comune:

> I am not a militant feminist, in the sense that the greater part of my time is already absorbed, apart from the theatre, in other activities

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[53] See W. Valeri on Palazzina Liberty: http://www.lamacchinasognante.com/dario-fo-e-franca-rame-alla-palazzina-liberty-walter-valeri/.
[54] D. Fo and F. Rame, *Tutta Casa, Letto e Chiesa* (Verona: Bertani, 1978). The title refers to the Italian expression *tutta casa e chiesa*, a colloquial saying used to describe a woman considered virtuous according to patriarchal ideals: devoted exclusively to the care of the home, understood as family, husband, and children, and to religion, symbolized by churchgoing.
[55] W. Valeri*, Franca Rame*. *Autrice e attrice, in 'Sipario', November 1992, 12-14.*
[56] Ibid.

> such as Red Aid and the thousand and one things needed to 'look after the shop'. But I do follow some initiatives and activities of the feminist movement.[57]

Rame made it clear that her primary commitment lay with theatre and solidarity initiatives such as *Soccorso Rosso* (Red Aid). However, by situating her work within the broader context of Italian feminisms during those years, I will show how her artistic and political practices both resonated with and contributed to the movements of the time.

Towards the end of the 1970s, another significant political and social shift affected both Rame's work with Fo and *La Comune*, as well as the broader landscape of activist movements in Italy. During this period, acts of terrorism were carried out by militant groups. In 1978, the kidnapping and assassination of former Prime Minister Aldo Moro by the far-left *Brigate Rosse* (Red Brigades) had far-reaching consequences. One of the most significant was the decline of extra-parliamentary left-wing movements, which were increasingly undermined by the state's intensified policing and surveillance, as well as a marked shift in public opinion against political radicalism.[58] These issues ultimately led Rame and Fo to gradually re-establish their *Compagnia Teatrale Fo Rame*, distancing themselves from extra-parliamentary affiliations of *La Comune*, to create a more independent theatre company. The 1980s marked therefore a return to performing in major bourgeois theatres, while Rame reappeared on national television with the RAI programme *Buonasera con Franca Rame* (Good Evening With Franca Rame).[59] Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, both Rame and Fo toured extensively in Italy and internationally, also conducting seminars, masterclasses, and workshops.[60] Alongside her monologues from *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa*, Rame also toured *Coppia aperta, quasi spalancata* (*The*

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[57] J. Farrell, *Dario Fo & Franca Rame, Harlequins of the Revolution*, (London: Methuen, 2001),198.
[58] R. Lumley, *States of Emergency: Cultures of Revolt in Italy from 1968 to 1978* (London: Verso, 1990).
[59] The show aired daily before the evening news for the month of January 1980.
[60] See *Dario Fo and Franca Rame, Theatre workshops at Riverside Studios,* London (London: Red Notes, 1983).

Open Couple) with actor Giorgio Biavati.[61] The play explored the crisis within heterosexual married life, likely reflecting personal experience.[62] In 1988, Rame and Fo returned to television with *Trasmissione Forzata* (Forced Broadcast), an eight-episode programme broadcast on RAI. As Laura Peja explains:

> La coppia mescola sketch e attualità su temi come quello della violenza alle donne, invitando il pubblico a partecipare alla campagna per la legge sulla violenza sessuale attraverso l'invio di lettere al Parlamento e alle sedi Rai. [63]
>
> The couple combines sketches and current events on topics such as violence against women, inviting the audience to participate in the campaign for the law on sexual violence by sending letters to Parliament and RAI offices.

This is yet another example that illustrates Rame's sustained commitment to women's rights advocacy through her artistic practice. During these years, Rame and Fo produced several notable works. In the thesis I mention and analyse *Quasi per caso una donna: Elisabetta (Almost by Chance a Woman: Elizabeth,* 1984), *Settimo, ruba un po' meno n. 2* (*Seventh: Steal a Bit Less No. 2*, 1993), and *Sesso? Grazie, tanto per gradire! (Sex? Thanks! Don't Mind If I Do!,* 1994).[64] In 1997 Rame performed alongside actor Giorgio Albertazzi in the play *Il diavolo con le zinne* (The Devil With Boobs). In the same year, Fo was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.[65] The company's work reflected the historical, social, and political events of this period,

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[61] D. Fo, F. Rame, 'Coppia Aperta, Quasi Spalancata', in D. Fo, F. Rame, *Teatro* (Milano: Garzanti, 2020). During Rame's funeral, Fo acknowledged that Rame was the author of the play. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d0ICkK519MI&t=192s
[62] Farrell, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame*, 180-183.
[63] L. Peja, *Strategie del comico*, 87.
[64] *Quasi per caso una donna: Elisabetta* (*Almost by Chance a Woman: Elizabeth*, 1984), *Settimo, ruba un po' meno n. 2* (*Seventh: Steal a Bit Less No. 2*, 1993), and *Sesso? Grazie, tanto per gradire!* (*Sex? Thanks, Don't Mind If I Do!*, 1994).
[65] See Angelucci, M., & Kolsky, S. (2022). Franca Rame Won the Nobel Prize: Approaching the Works of Dario Fo and Franca Rame as Collaboration. *Italian Studies*, *77*(3), 341–353. https://doi.org/10.1080/00751634.2022.2081783

addressing numerous political scandals and new political figures in the 1990s, such as the political rise and influence of right-wing media tycoon and billionaire Silvio Berlusconi (1936–2023).[66] He served as Prime Minister of Italy in four governments,[67] becoming one of the country's most controversial and influential post-war figures due to his media dominance, legal troubles, and populist policies. He became a target of Rame and Fo's theatrical satire. Their 2003 plays *Ubu Bas* (inspired to Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*), and *L'anomalo bicefalo* (The Twin-Headed Anomaly) served as sharp critiques of Berlusconi's government policies.[68] By challenging power through politically engaged performance, the company once again faced censorship and institutional opposition.[69] In this research, I foreground Rame's sustained dissent as a defining aspect of her artistic and political practice, emphasising her agency in mobilising theatre as a site of feminist and political resistance. In Fo and Rame's 1987 theatre manual, *Manuale Minimo dell'Attore* (The Actor's Essential Handbook*,* translated into English as *The Tricks of the Trade*), the couple reaffirmed their commitment to theatre as a tool for challenging hegemony and fostering social change, while remaining attuned to contemporary realities: 'We have to show them what is happening around us. They need to tell their own story. A theatre, literature, or artistic expression that doesn't speak to its time holds no relevance'.[70] In parallel to her theatre work and public activities, from the 1990s Rame played a crucial role in setting up her archive, framing through its documents the legacy of both her and Fo's work. With the help of her collaborators, she meticulously organised and digitised the archive, making it accessible through an online portal.[71]

In the 2000s, Rame faced significant health challenges, including strokes, which prevented her from performing, causing her depression;

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[66] Farrell, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame*, 377.
[67] Silvio Berlusconi held office as Prime Minister in four separate terms: 1994-1995, 2001-2005, 2005-2006, and 2008-2011. See https://www.governo.it/it/i-governi-dal-1943-ad-oggi/legislatura-xii-15-aprile-1994-16-febbraio-1996/governo-berlusconi-i/2961?utm_source=chatgpt.com.
[68] Farrell, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame*, 386-390.
[69] Ibid.
[70] D. Fo *Manuale Minimo dell'attore*, (Milano: Einaudi,1987), 192. In English, Dario Fo, *The Tricks of the Trade* (London: Methuen Drama, 1991).
[71] https://archivio.francarame.it/.

however, she redirected her passion for political activism.[72] She was elected as a Senator of the Italian Republic in 2006 under the broader centre-left coalition government led by Romano Prodi, 'a politician she highly respected'.[73] She represented an anti-corruption party, *Italia dei Valori* (Italy of Values) founded by former magistrate Antonio Di Pietro.[74] However after nineteen months she resigned, in 2008, unable to tolerate the compromises of government politics.[75] Furthermore, Rame donated her entire parliamentary salary of 408,000 euros, earned during her nearly 24 months as a senator, to social solidarity initiatives.[76] Even after her resignation, there was no reduction of her public activities, particularly those involving her struggle against organised crime, violence on women, or racism.[77] In this thesis, I will engage directly with selected works, with Rame's archive, and with the creative environment she cultivated within the company, situated at the intersection of her artistic and political commitments.

Rame suffered a stroke in 2012 and passed away in Milan on 29 May 2013. I could not attend her civil funeral on 31 May in person, but I followed it online, broadcast from outside the Piccolo Teatro Strehler in Milan. In accordance with her wish, thousands of women in red sang the partisan song *Bella Ciao*. Although Rame's death was widely commemorated with respectful obituaries worldwide, some right-wing media attacked her character, often reducing her to merely Fo's wife. The most outrageous critique came from Italian national TV news TG2 RAI's obituary, which described her as 'wife, partner, and friend of Dario Fo, without whom her story cannot be told. […] a beautiful woman, both loved and hated. Some defined her as a talented actress who risked her career for an all-encompassing ideal of political militancy, while others saw her as the red *pasionaria* who exploited her physical beauty to demand attention, until 9

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[72] J. Fo, *Com'è essere figlio di Franca Rame e Dario Fo*, 235.
[73] Farrell, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame*, 397.
[74] Antonio Di Pietro, an Italian magistrate and politician, led the *Mani Pulite* (Clean Hands) anti-corruption investigations in the 1990s, a scandal that inspired several plays by Fo and Rame. In 1998, he founded the Italia dei Valori (IdV) party, which advocated for justice, transparency, and anti-corruption policies. Di Pietro left the party in 2014, after which IdV gradually lost political relevance.
[75] F. Rame, *In Fuga dal Senato* (Milano: Chiarelettere, 2013).
[76] J. Fo, *Come è esser figlio di Dario Fo e Franca Rame*, 237.
[77] Farrell, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame*, 401.

March, 1973, when she was kidnapped and raped'.[78] These highly problematic portrayals of Rame, along with a critical review of Rame and Fo's theatre that often continues to marginalise her to this day, prompted the need to recount Rame's story and legacy, marking the origins of this research project.

Remembering Franca Rame: Between Visibility and Erasure

Very few studies have critically discussed the creative and political input given by Rame as a prolific, innovative author and practitioner. As Juliet Guzzetta points out:

> Troppo spesso nei commenti sia divulgativi che accademici su Fo e Rame, i critici non attribuiscono a Rame la dovuta considerazione, si concentrano invece unicamente su Fo e addirittura ascrivono a lui, come unico autore, opere alla cui ideazione Rame ha contribuito ampiamente. [79]
>
> All too often, in both popular and academic commentary on Fo and Rame, critics fail to give Rame the recognition she deserves, focusing solely on Fo and even attributing to him alone works to which Rame made substantial contributions.

Critical literature on Rame falls into three main categories: works that focus primarily on Dario Fo; studies that acknowledge her as a collaborator but still centre Fo, and a smaller body of scholarship that foregrounds Rame's own contributions as an author and political artist. Most publications on the work

[78] 'moglie, compagna, amica di Dario Fo, senza il quale non può essere raccontata […] una donna bellissima, amata e odiata. Chi la definiva attrice di talento che sapeva mettere in gioco la propria carriera per un ideale di militanza politica totalizzante e chi invece la vedeva come la pasionaria rossa che approfittava della propria bellezza fisica per imporre attenzione; finché il 9 marzo del 1973 fu sequestrata e stuprata.' *TG2* news report on the death of Franca Rame, Rai Radiotelevisione Italiana, May 29, 2013. See YouTube video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7aVLR-ix25I.
[79] J. Guzzetta, *Il Teatro di narrazione. Dalle periferie della storia ai grandi teatri italiani* (Torino: Accademia University Press, 2023), 93.

of Rame and Fo overwhelmingly focus on the theatre of Dario Fo,[80] positioning him as a theatrical innovator whose works have been translated and performed across Europe and beyond.[81] Within this framework, theatre critics and historians often situate Rame within the paradigm of Fo's theatre. She has frequently been referred to as 'the pedestal of the monument' in relation to Fo, a phrase that highlights how her contributions have been overshadowed by his prominence.[82] Although Rame herself occasionally used this metaphor with irony, it nevertheless exposes the persistent tendency to view her primarily as a supportive figure, rather than recognising her as a prolific and innovative artist, author, and practitioner in her own right.

The second category of scholarship focuses on Rame as a collaborator, often including her name in the titles of their joint works.[83]

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[80] See, for example:
T. Behan, *Dario Fo: Revolutionary Theatre* (London: Pluto Press, 2000).
F. Cappa, *Dario Fo a Milano* (Milan: Mazzotta, 2012).
E. De Pasquale, *Il segreto del giullare: La dimensione testuale nel teatro di Dario Fo* (Naples: Liguori, 1999).
M.P. De Paulis-Dalembert, *Il teatro di Dario Fo tra storia, politica e società* (Florence: Cesati Editore, 2014).
L. D'Onghia and E. Marinai, eds., *Ripensare Dario Fo: Teatro, lingua e politica* (Milan: Mimesis, 2020).
J. Farrell and A. Scuderi, eds., *Dario Fo: Stage, Text and Tradition* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000).
G. Manin, *Ho visto un Fo* (Milan: Guanda, 2017).
C. Meldolesi, *Su un comico in rivolta: Fo, il buffone, il bambino* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1978).
M. Miralles, A. Kopusar, F. Quazzolo, and G. Randaccio, eds., *Traduzione aperta, quasi spalancata: Tradurre Dario Fo* (Trieste: Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2016).
T. Mitchell, *File on Dario Fo* (London: Methuen, 1989).
T. Mitchell, *Dario Fo: People's Court Jester* (London: Methuen, 1999).
L. Moccafighe, *Dario Fo: Il nostro piangere fa male al re* (Rome: Arcana, 2017).
G. Monti, *E sempre allegri bisogna stare: Le canzoni del signor Dario Fo* (Florence: Giunti, 2016).
M. Pizza, *Il gesto, la parola, l'azione: Poetica, drammaturgia e storia dei monologhi di Dario Fo* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1996).
P. Puppa, *Il teatro di Dario Fo: Dalla scena alla piazza* (Venice: Marsilio, 1978).
A. Scuderi, *Dario Fo, Framing, Festival, and the Folkloric Imagination* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2013).
A. Scuderi, ed., *Essays on Dario Fo: Remembering the Consummate Playwright/Performer* (Leicester: Troubador Italian Studies, 2014).
C. Valentini, *La storia di Dario Fo* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1997).
[81] R. Yarrow, *European Theatre 1960-1990* (NY: Routledge, 1992).
[82] M. Leigh Streifer*, The Body Politic on Stage: Women Writers and Gender in Twentieth-Century Italian Theater*. Dissertation (Los Angeles: University of California, 2016), 204.
[83] This category includes:
L. Barsotti and E. Marinai, eds., *Dario Fo e Franca Rame: Una vita per l'arte* (Pisa: Titivillus, 2011).
R. Brusegan, ed., *La scienza del teatro: Omaggio a Dario Fo e Franca Rame* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2013).

However, several of these studies continue to prioritise Fo, offering only limited attention to Rame's contributions. The problem lies in the way she is frequently cast in a secondary role, remembered primarily as a performer and interpreter of Fo's texts, or as a manager, administrator, and editor of their work. Such a perspective diminishes her artistic status and legacy. More critically, it overlooks the significance of social relations and the often-invisible forms of labour and care that underpin collaborative artistic practice, rendering Rame's own contributions less visible and undervalued.

Finally, some scholars have examined Rame's contributions, including her role as an author or co-author. Notably, Malcolm Angelucci and Stephen Kolsky's work stands out, recognising Rame's essential role in her creative partnership with Fo.[84] They reassess her contributions for instance highlighting her crucial role in balancing her family heritage with the structure of a theatre collective, and arguing that the Nobel Prize should have been awarded to both.[85] However, in the thesis I will assess how and why this framing risks reinforcing a patriarchal interpretation of her work, confining her role to the context of the theatre family and motherhood, thereby limiting a fuller recognition of her contributions. International perspectives on Rame's work appears in the 2016 volume *Franca Rame. One Life, A Thousand Adventures*, curated by Pizza, Gavrilovich, and Santeramo. It is a collection of articles from academics and former collaborators including Joseph Farrell,

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L. D'Archangeli, *I personaggi femminili nel teatro di Dario Fo e Franca Rame* (Florence: Cesati, 2009).
C. D'Angeli and S. Soriani, *Coppia d'arte: Dario Fo e Franca Rame* (Pisa: Pisa University Press, 2005).
J. Farrell, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame: Harlequins of the Revolution* (London: Methuen, 2001).
J. Farrell, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame: Theatre, Politics, Life* (London: Methuen, 2019).
J. Farrell, *Dario e Franca* (Milan: Ledizioni, 2014).
J. Fo, *Com'è essere figlio di Franca Rame e Dario Fo* (Milan: Guanda, 2019).
D. Hirst, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989).
R. Jenkins, *Dario Fo & Franca Rame: Artful Laughter* (New York: Aperture, 2001).
A. Montgomery, "The Theatre of Dario Fo and Franca Rame," in *Twentieth-Century European Drama* (London: Palgrave, 1994).
M. Pizza, *Al lavoro con Dario Fo e Franca Rame* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2006).
S. Taviano, *Staging Dario Fo and Franca Rame: Anglo-American Approaches to Political Theatre* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

[84] M. Angelucci, & S. Kolsky, (2022). Franca Rame Won the Nobel Prize: Approaching the Works of Dario Fo and Franca Rame as Collaboration. *Italian Studies*, *77*(3), 341–353. https://doi.org/10.1080/00751634.2022.2081783

[85] M. Angelucci, & S. Kolsky, *Franca Rame ha vinto il Nobel! Due vite, una collaborazione* (Milano: Mimesis, 2023).

Serena Anderlini, Lorenzo Mango, Stephan Kolsky, Walter Valeri, and Dario Fo. It provides crucial insights for this study exploring lesser-known aspects of Rame's work through memoirs, documents, essays, and archival materials to illuminate her contributions to theatre-making, her innovative multimedia and archival practices, and her influential role in shaping feminist and politically engaged performance on both national and international stages.[86] Valeri is also the editor of another volume entirely dedicated to Rame, *Franca Rame, A Woman On Stage*.[87] This volume considers her contributions within the context of Italian theatre and highlights how some of her monologues marked a breakthrough moment in the history of women's theatre, a crucial aspect of her work that is part of this study. Finally, the volume *Franca Pensaci Tu. Studi critici su Franca Rame,* (Franca, You Take Care Of It. Critical Studies on Franca Rame), edited by Daniele Cerrato, gathers contributions from a conference dedicated to Franca Rame in Seville in May 2014.[88] The conference was an opportunity to reflect on violence against women, a topic Rame had devoted her life to, denouncing the various forms of violence present in society and culture. The articles examine Rame's role as a co-author with Dario Fo, her contributions to political theatre, and the exploration of gender and power dynamics in her feminist monologues.

This categorisation also includes a series of interviews with Rame, offering valuable insights into her perspective on her career and personal life. For instance, Joseph Farrell, who personally knew Rame and Fo, and is their British biographer and translator, conducted and published his final interview with Rame just a few months before her death in 2013.[89] This interview traces her journey from her early days with the Famiglia Rame to her lifelong

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[86] The publication is a continuation of the discussion that began during the Study Day 'Rome Remembers Franca Rame', held at the Teatro Torlonia in Rome on January 19, 2014, with the participation of Dario Fo.

[87] W. Valeri, ed. *Franca Rame. A Woman on* Stage (West Lafayette: Bordighera Press, 2000).

[88] D. Cerrato, *Franca, pensaci tu. Studi critici su Franca Rame,* (Roma: Aracne, 2016). The title refers to Dario's habit of asking Franca to take care of practical aspects of their work, including editing a text. In Italian 'pensaci tu' means 'you think about it', or 'you take care of it.' In her interview with Farrell, Franca said that on her tomb they should write 'Here lies 'Pensaci tu'.

[89] F. Rame, J. Farrell, *Non è tempo di nostalgia* (Pisa-Cagliari: Della Porta Editori, 2013).

collaboration with Dario Fo. Rame's voice stands out, as she shares her views on politics, theatre, and feminism, while also expressing her thoughts on frequently being reduced to the role of 'Dario Fo's wife'.[90] Rame gave interviews to other academics, such as Luciana D' Arcangeli, Stefania Taviano, and Serena Anderlini, who look at her authorship and how her political activism was deeply related to her artistic creation.[91] Referring to Rame and Fo's collaboration, Anderlini crucially highlights the need for greater recognition of collaborative practices in the humanities, noting that it is often women who are most impacted when such partnerships go unacknowledged. [92] This perspective aligns with my research, as it underscores the importance of re-examining how Rame's work has been understood, and how a broader feminist perspective highlights the entanglement of social, political, and personal aspects withing the creative process. Together with the interviews, Rame's autobiographical books reveal fundamental aspects of her work experience with Famiglia Rame*,* the collaborative collective practices she developed with Fo and their collaborators, and her work as an activist and archivist.[93]

These areas of focus expose the ways engagements with Rame often marginalise her work, contribution, and politics through portrayals that position her in an ancillary role of administrator, manager, editor, or simply as an interpreter of Fo's texts. However, some of the authors of volumes dedicated to Rame have begun to address questions of her authorship, prompting a re-evaluation of her role and contributions. What these works often overlook is an analysis of the methods Rame developed in her work with Fo and their collaborators, the work backstage, in the rehearsal room, at home, the kind of relations she established within the company, the

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[90] Ibid.
[91] S. Taviano, 'Interview with Franca Rame. I am Ready', in *The Open Page 9, Theatre – Women – Struggle,* Odin Teatret, Magdalena Project, Holstebro, 2004; S. Anderlini, 'Franca Rame: Her Life and Work*s'. Theater,* 17 (1985): 32-39; L. D'Arcangeli, 'Conversazione con Franca Rame', in D. Cerrato, *Franca, pensaci tu. Studi critici su Franca Rame,* (Roma: Aracne, 2016),111-139.
[92] S. Anderlini, 'From the Lady is to be disposed of' to 'An open Couple': Franca Rame and Dario Fo's Theatre Partnership', In W. Valeri, ed. *Franca Rame: A Woman on stage* (Bordighera: West Lafayette, 2000).
[93] F. Rame, U*na Vita all'Improvvisa (*Milano: Guanda, 2012); F. Rame, *In Fuga dal Senato* (Milano: Chiarelettere, 2013).

techniques she developed from the traditional practices she learned working with her original family, and how she adapted and reimagined these to forge a distinctive theatre-making process. Building on these critical gaps, this thesis offers an original contribution by providing an in-depth examination of Rame's performative strategies and creative methodologies. It situates them within both their historical context and a broader feminist framework, with the aim of recovering and repositioning Rame as a foundational figure in feminist and political theatre, as well as in feminist performance and theatre studies.

I argue that Rame's work warrants recognition not only within the history of Italian theatre but also within the broader context of political and cultural organising in Italy, as a source of innovative creative strategies grounded in feminist and leftist movements. To address the existing gap in scholarship, I propose adopting a broader and more plural understanding of feminisms and their relevance to Rame's practice. This expanded feminist lens enables the use of diverse methodologies through which the thesis reconsiders her contributions. To fully articulate this re-evaluation of Rame's work, the following section outlines the broader feminist and materialist theoretical framework that underpins the thesis, establishing the conceptual foundations for the analysis that follows.

Theoretical framework

In this thesis, I refer to feminism not as a singular or unified movement, but as a diverse set of political attachments and engagements, often in tension with one another, that reflect distinct historical, geographical, and disciplinary contexts. My own positionality is shaped by these tensions and by engagements with a wide range of theorists, including Silvia Federici, Lea Melandri, Adriana Cavarero, Hannah Arendt, Diana Damian Martin, Rosi Braidotti, Sara Ahmed, Angela Davis, bell hooks, and Michela Murgia.[94]

[94] See for example:
S. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 2014;
S. Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017);
H. Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 1963);

These perspectives help me navigate the intersection of feminist theory and practice, particularly in relation to embodiment, history, labour, and vocality. The contemporary theorists I engage with differ from both Italian feminism of the 1970s and Anglo-American feminist theatre studies. Rather than conflating these traditions, I treat them as analytically distinct.

My argument is that, despite Rame's explicit disengagement from formal feminist organising, the creative ways in which she negotiated social relations and questions of social reproduction, within both her artistic work and the political contexts she inhabited, constitute a form of feminist political practice. My conceptualisation of feminism resists a singular, second-wave model centred solely on rights-based discourse. Instead, I engage with feminist debates that foreground complexity, contradiction, and situated knowledge. The feminist thinkers I turn to, particularly those concerned with labour, embodiment, and historical memory, shape the conceptual orientation that enables me to move between archives and orality, alongside creative work. Furthermore, the thesis also explores the intersections of feminism, theatre, and collective practices, analysing how Rame navigated power dynamics within her company and in performance. I focus on participation, care, and creative agency, showing how her work aimed to influence social relations both within and beyond the theatre space.

Methodologically, the thesis develops three interconnected strands. First, I adopt a feminist analytical framework that brings together cultural materialism, social reproduction theory, and strands of Italian feminism. For

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R. Braidotti, *Per una politica affermativa. Itinerari etici* (Milano–Udine: Mimesis, 2017);
R. Braidotti, *Posthuman Feminism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2022);
A. Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. Paul A. Kottman (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005);
A. Davis, *Abolition: Politics, Practices, Promises,* Vol. 1 (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2024);
D. Damian Martin, "Sites of Appearance, Matters of Thought: Hannah Arendt and Performance Philosophy," in *Performance Philosophy*, ed. Diana Damian Martin and Theron Schmidt 5, no. 1 (November 2019);
S. Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2004);
S. Federici, *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin: Rethinking, Remaking, and Reclaiming the Body in Contemporary Capitalism* (Oakland, CA: PM Press/Kairos, 2020);
bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions* (New York: William Morrow, 2000);
M. Murgia, *God Save the Queer: Catechismo Femminista* (Torino: Einaudi, 2022).

example, to frame my analysis of Rame's work, I draw on theoretical approaches that understand theatre as a social and material practice. Following Tom Six's conception of theatre as a social art, I examine performance in relation to its structures of labour, organisation, and production.[95] This perspective, grounded in Marxist thought, underscores the importance of analysing both the economic foundations and the social functions of theatrical labour.[96] Materialism thus provides the framework through which I explore the social relations of production within Rame's original theatre family and the theatre collectives led by Rame and Fo in the 1970s. In the thesis, I define the concept of social relations of production in greater detail, drawing on the work of Tom Six and Ric Knowles.[97] In this context I also engage with social reproduction theory, which examines the unpaid and often invisible labour, such as caregiving, domestic work, recreational activities, and emotional support, that sustains the workforce and enables capitalist production, particularly drawing on the work of Silvia Federici, Susan Ferguson, and Tithi Bhattacharya.[98] These frameworks often diverge in their understandings of feminist labour politics, and I use their differences productively rather than synthesising them into a single perspective. This interplay is central to the broader methodological orientation of the thesis.

Second, I engage with feminist theatre and performance studies to position Rame in relation to existing debates. This involves using tools from scholars such as Elaine Aston and Kim Solga, not to fit Rame neatly into the field, but to explore how her work complicates and challenges dominant paradigms in feminist performance theory.[99] It is crucial to clarify that Anglophone feminist frameworks do not fully account for the specificities of

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[95] T. Six, writing as Tom Cornford, *Theatre Studios, A political history of ensemble theatre-making,* (London: Routledge, 2021), 20.
[96] Blackwell-Pal, Jaswinder, et al. "Marxist Keywords for Performance." *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 36, no. 1 (2021): 25-53. https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/dtc.2021.0037.
[97] R. Knowles, *Reading the Material Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
[98] See T. Bhattacharya, ed., *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentring Oppression*. (London: Pluto Press, 2017); S. Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2004); Susan Ferguson, *Women and Work: Feminism, Labour, and Social Reproduction* (London: Pluto Press, 2020).
[99] E. Aston, *Restaging Feminisms* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020); K. Solga, *Theatre & Feminism*, (London & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

the Italian feminist context of the 1970s, which was characterised by fluid boundaries and a wide range of ideological positions. Rame's alignment with materialist feminism, as identified by Sue-Ellen Case, particularly in relation to her focus on gendered labour and collective justice, both intersects with and diverges from these traditions.[100] My analysis in fact shifts away from a sole focus on textual content and instead centres on Rame's theatre-making practices and the relational structures she established with collaborators and audiences. This approach highlights how her grounding in traditional Italian theatrical models, such as the *capocomico* system, shaped her feminist artistic strategies and her cultivation of a collaborative creative environment. To examine the value and contradictions inherent in this space, however, feminist theatre study offers a useful framework. For example, I draw on Aston's concept of feminist theatre as a 'sphere of disturbance', a site of resistance that disrupts normative gender roles, and Jill Dolan's notion of feminist performance as a 'laboratory for critique and possibility'.[101] Kim Solga further supports this framework, particularly through her argument that feminist theatre is not solely concerned with expressions of female identity, but rather with broader critiques of gendered power structures.[102] Jessica Pabon's assertion that 'feminism is what these women do, not how they identify',[103] is particularly relevant to Rame, who, while distancing herself from feminist militancy, nonetheless enacted a feminist politics through her artistic and collaborative practices.

Third, I analyse the tensions between Rame's work and feminism. While she is frequently celebrated as a feminist figure, her practice also reveals ambivalence and contradiction. I argue that these tensions are not incidental but central to understanding her contribution. Overall, my conceptualisation of feminism recognises the plurality of feminist debates, working with frameworks concerned with embodiment, social reproduction, and historical memory. By engaging these frameworks, I respond to the

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[100] Sue-Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre* (London/New York: Methuen, 1988; rev. ed., 2008).
[101] E. Aston, *Feminist Theatre Practice: A Handbook* (London: Routledge, 1999), 17–18; J. Dolan, "Feminist Performance and Utopia: A Manifesto," in *Staging International Feminisms*, ed. Susan C. Jones et al. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
[102] K. Solga, *Theatre & Feminism* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).
[103] J. Pabon in K. Solga, *Theatre & Feminism,* 14.

limitations of existing approaches in theatre studies that often marginalise or inadequately theorise the contributions of women creatives. I argue that Rame's practices, her negotiations of context, her leadership, her artistic and organisational strategies, require a broader understanding of feminist politics, beyond text analysis or reception theories and towards the material and relational structures of creative labour. In doing so, the thesis contributes a critical feminist methodology that expands the tools available for analysing cultural work and repositions Rame's legacy within feminist and theatre histories.

Methods and methodologies

To answer the research questions, this study contributes through a multi-method approach that includes oral history, archival research, performance analysis, and practice research. Rather than approaching archival research in isolation, I situate it within a broader feminist methodological framework that embraces multiple forms of knowledge-making. Accordingly, I first engage with the existing archive of Franca Rame; second, I expand it through conversations and interviews that form part of an oral history project, accounts often omitted from the institutional record. Performance analysis also plays a central role, as I examine Rame's work to explore the interplay between her artistic strategies and political commitments. Finally, the thesis employs practice research to engage with Rame's archive through vocality and improvisation, approached as relational and embodied modes of knowledge transmission. Rather than treating artistic practice as separate from research, this methodology integrates performance as both a means of inquiry and a site of knowledge production, grounding my archival engagement in a performative rather than purely historical framework.

Rame established the *Archivio Franca Rame Dario Fo* (Franca Rame Dario Fo Archive) in 1993 and it is now part of Verona's State Archive.[104] It is

[104] In 2016, the Archivio Franca Rame Dario Fo was unified and relocated (from the three residences of the Rame/Fo couple, in Milan, Cesenatico, and Santa Cristina di Gubbio), to the State Archive of Verona, where materials are preserved, along with selected paintings by

a unique blend of artistic, familial, and cultural heritage, stemming from Rame's lifelong passion for collecting and preserving original materials related to theatre.[105] The primary aim of my archival research is not to write a biography of Rame or a history of her theatrical productions. Rather, it is to explore her adaptation of practices rooted in the Italian theatre tradition, the ways in which she developed them through collaborative compositional methods with Dario Fo and their company, and the ways these methods have been applied, transmitted, and have the potential to resonate with subsequent generations of actors, performers, and scholars. Consulting a wide range of documents related to Fo and Rame's productions, including the multiple script versions generated for each play, has proven particularly valuable. As I explore later in the thesis, archival research has been crucial in uncovering aspects of Rame's creative process, particularly her development of scenic writing and the use of notation systems in creating original scripts. Through textual and visual analysis of manuscripts and stage scripts, I examine how Rame's creative practice reflects a collaborative approach. This aspect of her work has been largely overlooked and deserves greater critical attention. As Walter Valeri notes, the texts of Rame and Fo's plays, along with video documentation of their performances, are not sufficient to fully grasp their impact on Italian theatre and political history.[106] While archival materials such as videos, documents, and artifacts are invaluable historical sources, they cannot fully capture the embodied experience or social context of the original performances.

As Diana Taylor discusses in her study on archives, the unique, ephemeral, context-bound nature of performance derives its meaning from live enactment and presence, rather than from archival documentation.

Dario Fo. Since 2020, the *Fondazione Fo Rame* has managed the archive, with a project coordinated by the Central Institute for Cataloguing and Documentation. Due to ongoing cataloguing, the archive has introduced limited access, which implies constrained consultations for researchers. There is a project to move the whole archive to the city of Pesaro in 2026. See https://siusa-archivi.cultura.gov.it/cgi-bin/siusa/pagina.pl?TipoPag=comparc&Chiave=522893

[105] A. Balzola, Andrea and M. Pizza, eds**.** *Il teatro a disegni di Dario Fo con Franca Rame* (Milano: Scalpendi, 2016).

[106] W. Valeri, '*Il teatro di Dario Fo e Franca Rame: esempio per una nuova memoria critica',* in Pizza, Gavrilovich, Santeramo*,* eds. *Franca Rame. One life, A Thousand Adventures,* Performing Arts Journal, N.2. 2016*,* 117.

According to Taylor, we must navigate the balance between the meanings and significance established by the archive and the ways in which power is maintained, examining the tension between the archive and the repertoire.[107] Unlike archival memory, the repertoire is framed by Taylor in terms of embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing, in short all those acts usually thought of as constituting ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge.[108] While the repertoire is often excluded from the Western, colonial logic of the archive, which focuses on practises of preservation, domiciliation, documentation and classification, Taylor argues that the archive and the repertoire work in tandem in constructing and transmitting knowledge. In this thesis, I examine how such transmission was also embedded within the collaborative practices and methods of the company. Furthermore, through the study of Rame's original scripts and scores preserved in the archive I demonstrate how these documents exceed the role of archival memory. In fact, they do not simply appear as fixed written documents (multiple variations of the same script can be found in the archive), they also exist as visual and graphic mnemonic aid, as a vibrant prompt to performance.

Filling in gaps in understanding, the method of oral history is crucial for reconstructing an overall picture of Rame's practices and creative contributions within her theatre community. Since 2022 I have conducted interviews with several of Rame's former close collaborators to explore her work and contribution to collective strategies, practices and techniques of theatre-making with Dario Fo and their collaborators, to understand her multiple roles and the importance of her input into the creative process. It has been an immersion into the world of individual sensitivities and standpoints, a journey into the memories of people who were part of Rame's creative community, evoking the atmospheres within which both professional and private relationships intertwined. Moreover, it has facilitated my examination of the collaborative sphere encompassing work, creativity, care, and social reproduction. Building on historians Alessandro Portelli and Laura Mariani,

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[107] D. Taylor, *The Archive and the repertoire* (London and Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).
[108] Ibid, 20.

who underscore oral history as the art of listening, which requires a dialogue where interviewer and interviewee actively engage, perform, and interact, eschewing the idea of objective, detached data collection, I fostered relationships with my interviewees rooted in trust and mutual respect.[109] I draw on Margaretta Jolly's definition of oral histories as an exceptional resource for documenting the personal moments of lives that reflect intimate politics and structures of feeling that society produce.[110] Similarly, Lynn Abrams defines oral histories as both a practice and a research method, an act of recording the speech of people with something interesting to say and then analysing their memories of the past.[111] In addition, Lucia Farinati and Jennifer Thatcher highlight how 'the practical experience of interviewing […] encourages one to reflect critically on the interview process and appreciate the substantial time, labour, and negotiating that go into producing an interview.[112] Therefore I use oral history both as a collective source of evidence and a feminist method, which implies looking at the interactive nature of the interviews, focusing not only on the content, but also on what feminist historians Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai in their analysis of oral history as a tool of feminist scholarship, define as 'the dynamic unfolding of the subject's viewpoint'.[113] I embrace this view together with feminist theorist Sandra Harding's request 'to avoid the objectivity stance that attempts to make the researcher's cultural beliefs and practices invisible', openly sharing with my interviewees the feminist scope of my research and my friendship with Rame. This approach has fostered mutual trust and respect with participants and allowed our dialogue and exchange to extend beyond the interviews. Most importantly, it has facilitated and encouraged the development of personal relations. All participants have generously contributed with their testimonies and in some cases with extra material to

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[109] A. Portelli, "A Dialogical relationship: An Approach to Oral History" Expressions Annual 2005 http://www.swaraj.org/shikshantar/expresssions_portelli.pdf;
L. Cavaglieri, 'Incontro con Laura Mariani', in L. Cavaglieri, D. Orecchia*, Memorie Sotterranee* (Torino: Accademia University Press, 2018), 21-39.
[110] M. Jolly, *Sisterhood and After: An Oral History of the UK Women's Liberation Movement, 1968–Present* (Oxford University Press, 2019).
[111] L. Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (London and New York: Routledge 2016).
[112] L. Farinati, J. Thatcher, Ed., *Theorising the Artist Interview* (London: Routledge, 2024), 1.
[113] S. B.Gluck and D. Patai (Eds.), *Women's words: The feminist practice of oral history* (NY: Routledge, 1991), 23.

support my research, including articles, publications, links, books, videos, and photos, which have been crucial to my investigation and understanding of Rame's practice.[114] I underwent an ethics review process to ensure that participants fully understood the scope and focus of my questions in relation to the research, particularly regarding their recollections of Rame's theatre-making practices, collaborative methods, and the broader implications of creative labour. This process was essential for maintaining transparency, safeguarding participants' rights, and fostering trust, while enabling interviewees to retain control over their contributions. Among my interviewees there are scholars and practitioners who collaborated with Rame in various capacities, including researchers, archivists, and production assistants.[115] Several actors became key collaborators, undertaking responsibilities beyond acting.[116] Analysing these testimonies provides new insights into how Rame established and navigated the multiple artistic environments she created with her collaborators, the practices she implemented, the relationships she fostered, the dynamics of power involved, and the principles she nurtured through her work. Furthermore, the diverse perspectives of international theatre scholars, artists, and practitioners have greatly enhanced my research, providing new frameworks to examine her work.[117] Notable contributors include Odin Teatret's director Eugenio Barba, theatre scholar Joseph Farrell, theatre practitioner and scholar Ron Jenkins, and vocalist and improvisor Maggie Nicols. They have offered invaluable insights into Rame's work and her significance beyond Italy. Italian theatre scholars and historians including Marisa Pizza, Laura Mariani, Anna Sica, Alessio Arena, and Walter Valeri, have crucially contributed positioning Rame in the context of the Italian theatre tradition. Rame's family and friends have provided significant insights into private moments of Rame's life, helping to illuminate lesser-known and personal aspects of her practice.[118] This

[114] See Appendix A for a complete list of interviews.
[115] Marisa Pizza, Walter Valeri, Felice Cappa, Giovanni Viganò, Maria Chiara di Marco.
[116] Mario Pirovano, Marina De Juli, Giorgio Biavati, Caroline van Gastel, Piero Sciotto, Fabrizio De Giovanni.
[117] Joseph Farrell, Laura Mariani, Anna Sica, Rosanna Brusegan, Alessio Arena, Serena Anderlini.
[118] I have conducted interviews with Rame's son, Jacopo Fo; her granddaughter, Mattea Fo, president of the Fondazione Fo Rame; Mattea's husband, Stefano Bertea, director of the Rame Fo Archives; and Rame's niece, Enrica Rame.

interviewing process gradually immersed me in Rame's network of individuals who experienced her work, revealing the kind of relationships she built with her collaborators and the creative environment she cultivated together with them. This information has been crucial to my analysis of Rame's practices and social relations in the company. Most interviews were conducted via Zoom, while others took place in person in London, Rome, Verona, Milan, Gubbio, Holstebro, and New York.

In this thesis, performance analysis provides a framework for examining Rame's theatre not only through archival and textual sources but also as a series of dynamic, situated events. Drawing on Christopher Balme's distinction between *production,* the planned and rehearsed staging, and *performance*, the unique, ephemeral event shaped by audience interaction and live dynamics, this study engages with both aspects.[119] Analysing case studies such as Rame's 1977 monologues about women, I focus on her acting style, vocal delivery, and modes of audience engagement. More significantly, this approach highlights how Rame's embodied practice actively engaged with, and responded to, the principles of 1970s feminist movements through the formal and aesthetic strategies embedded in her theatrical work.

As part of this broader feminist methodological framework, I employ practice research to engage with Rame's archive, developing a performance focusing on vocality, improvisation, and embodied composition. Drawing on Robin Nelson's framing, this approach integrates artistic practice as a primary mode of inquiry, positioning performance as both a research method and a site of knowledge production.[120] This includes a practice-based research approach to documentation, capturing key creative processes, such as vocal improvisation and notation interpretation, through video recording, reflexive writing, and audience feedback. Rather than reducing embodied experience to a fixed record, these materials enhance and support the inquiry, making tacit knowledge explicit and situating the practice within a

[119] C. Balme, *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008),132-146.
[120] R. Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances* (London, Palgrave, 2013).

broader conceptual and historical framework.[121] The research examines vocality as a bridge between Rame's system of notation, rooted in the Italian theatre tradition, and its contemporary resonances, emphasising the compositional and embodied dimensions of live performance. By voicing Rame's work, I highlight the relational and performative nature of her methods, emphasising the dynamic interplay between notation, embodiment, and sonic expression. Specifically, I investigate vocality and improvisation as tools for decoding, interpreting, and expanding her work.

In the past ten years, reflections on the concepts of performativity and embodiment have emerged in the context of archival conceptualisation within performance studies. As Lucia Farinati discusses in her study on performative archives, alongside Taylor, authors such as Amelia Jones and Rebecca Schneider have explored the role of performative and embodied strategies in redefining the politics of archival practices and documentation.[122] Most of these reflections stem from a critique of the archive which remains anchored to notions of 'fixation, repository, domiciliation, documentation, and indexicality' as opposed to notions of 'disappearance, ephemerality, orality' often associated with oral history, performance, rituals and folklore.[123] Through a re-valuation of embodied and situated knowledge developed by feminist thought these new studies clearly emphasise the role of embodied strategies.[124] These include verbal performances (e.g. songs and speeches) and non-verbal practices (e.g. dance and rituals) in rethinking the role of the archive as a 'force field inside the body'.[125] As Taylor suggests, the potential of performance is to take seriously the repertoire of embodied practice as an important system of knowing and transmitting knowledge, as well as a way of rethinking the

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[121] Ibid.
[122] L. Farinati, 'Performative Affective Archives', in *Audio Arts Archive: From Inventory Space to Imagined Space,* PhD, Kingston University, 2020, 28-36.
See also: R. Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Re-enactment* (New York: Routledge, 2011) 87-110; A. Jones and A. Heathfield (eds.), *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History* (Bristol: Intellect, 2012).
[123] L. Farinati, *Audio Arts Archive: From Inventory Space to Imagined Space,* 30.
[124] D. Haraway, Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective, 1988; S. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2013).
[125] Vidiela translated by Farinati, in L. Farinati, *Audio Arts Archive: From Inventory Space to Imagined Space*, 30.

canon of critical methodology and the dominance of text.[126] Building on Taylor's idea of performance as a 'system of learning, storing and transmitting knowledge', the overall aim of my practice research is to investigate vocality as a form of embodied expression.[127] By adapting Rame's notation on her original scripts for enacting vocal improvisation, I explore how Rame's archive expands from being simply a repository, which separates the source of knowledge from the knower, into a performative embodied archive.

Thesis structure and chapter summary

The structure of this thesis adopts a historiographical approach to trace the development of Franca Rame's artistic and political practice. It begins with her early formation within *Famiglia Rame,* emphasising how this theatrical lineage shaped her foundational understanding of performance. The thesis then examines the various incarnations of her collaborative work with Dario Fo, with particular attention to the dynamics of theatre collectives and the influence of Italian feminisms in the 1970s on her representations of women on stage. Subsequent chapters explore the evolution of her theatre-making practices within the creative and collaborative environments she fostered from the 1980s until her death in 2013. The thesis concludes by reflecting on how Rame's legacy might be critically activated in the present, particularly in relation to contemporary feminist and political performance practices.

In Chapter One I examine how Franca Rame's roots in *Famiglia Rame* and the broader Italian theatre tradition inform the political dimensions of her artistic practice and her shaping of the social relations of production within the collectives *Nuova Scena* and *La Comune*. The chapter explores how collaboration, improvisation, and relationality functioned within these contexts, particularly in relation to the hierarchical legacy of *capocomicato* and the organisational structures of the theatre collectives. Through an

[126] D. Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire,* 26.
[127] Ibid., 6.

analysis of Rame's contributions to collective strategies in her work with Dario Fo and their collaborators, I highlight her multiple roles and underscore the centrality of her input to the creative process.

Chapter Two explores the influence of various strands of Italian feminism in the 1970s on Rame's artistic work, particularly her representation of women's struggles. Using a case study approach and performance analysis, I examine a selection of Rame's monologues from the 1977 collection *Tutta Casa, Letto e Chiesa* (*All Home, Bed, and Church*) and the 1994 play *Sesso? Grazie. Tanto per gradire! (Sex? Thanks, Don't Mind If I Do!),* which represents the culmination of her discourse on the condition of women.[128] These works are analysed in relation to themes addressed by feminist collectives of the time. This methodological approach is essential for uncovering the complex entanglements between feminist theory and Rame's theatre practice, as well as her often ambivalent positioning in relation to the feminist movement.

Chapter Three focuses on the collaborative creative environment Rame cultivated within the *Compagnia Teatrale Fo Rame,* from the 1980s until the end of her career. This environment integrated creative processes, such as auditions, casting, and rehearsals, with practices of mutual care and social reproduction, facilitating both skill development within the company and broader community engagement. Drawing on oral history methods, I analyse nearly thirty interviews I conducted with former collaborators, friends, artists, and scholars to examine how Rame cultivated a system of collective knowledge and transmission that fostered a strong sense of community. The chapter also reflects on her enduring commitment to political activism through voluntary and charitable initiatives. In parallel, collaborative efforts were made to establish both a physical and digital archive of Rame's legacy. This creative environment bridged the private space of Rame's home and the public space of the stage, creating a community that extended to, and included, her audiences.

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[128] D. Fo and F. Rame, *Tutta casa letto e chiesa* (Verona: Bertani, 1978); D. Fo, F. Rame, J. Fo*, 'Sesso? Grazie, tanto per gradire'*, in *Le commedie di Dario Fo* Vol. XIII (Torino: Einaudi, 1998).

Chapter Four explores Franca Rame's practice of *scrittura scenica* (scenic writing) within the *Compagnia Teatrale Fo Rame*. In dialogue with Lorenzo Mango, I distinguish Rame's approach from conventional definitions of scenic writing, which often privilege the director's role in interpreting and staging a pre-existing text. In contrast, Rame developed an alternative compositional method that integrated her multiple roles as author, dramaturg, actor, and director. Drawing on oral testimonies from collaborators and close analysis of her manuscripts and stage scripts housed in her archive in Verona, the chapter illustrates her creative and collaborative methodology in depth. Furthermore, building on David Roesner's application of musical frameworks to theatre and Anna Sica's study of *la Drammatica*, a traditional Italian declamatory system, I examine Rame's unique system of stage notation. My analysis of her promptbooks, particularly the use of signs, symbols, and punctuation, reveals a method deeply rooted in her formative experiences with *Famiglia Rame,* offering new insight into her innovative theatrical contributions and her lasting influence on contemporary performance practice.

Chapter Five investigates the politics of voice through the lens of feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero, examining how her theory informs a series of performances in which I revisit Rame's methodology of *scrittura scenica*. I argue that the amplification of vocal expression and improvisation can be understood as forms of relationality and feminist intervention. Rame's dismantling of conventional punctuation and grammar transforms her system of notation into a dynamic, relational performative score, one that links her feminist practice to the reclamation of the female body and positions vocality as a potent medium of liberation, empowerment, and resistance. This approach reflects how her use of laughter, improvisation, and the subversion of dominant structures, ultimately contributed to the development of a new theatrical language.

The conclusion of this thesis reflects on the significance of Franca Rame's contributions to feminist political theatre, identifying three key areas of impact. First, drawing on contemporary feminist theory, I demonstrate how she fostered an alternative and potentially liberating model of theatre production, one that redefined notions of shared authorship and

collaboration. Second, I highlight the potential of feminist approaches to the creation of collaborative artistic spaces, positioning them as models of cooperative labour which include social reproduction, care, and knowledge transmission. Third, it frames Rame's system of notation and *scrittura scenica* as vital tools for theatrical composition and embodied transmission. Her legacy offers a powerful model for politically engaged feminist performance today and opens new directions for research in feminist theatre studies, collaborative authorship, and the transmission of embodied knowledge.

Chapter 1. Rame the *Capacomica*. The Social Relations of Production in Famiglia Rame and the Theatre Collectives of *Nuova Scena* and *La Comune* (1929-1980)

Collaborating theatre-makers develop and share their work through process and structure, making the social relations of production a crucial foundation of their artistry. In this chapter, I adopt social relations as a theoretical approach to investigate how Franca Rame navigated between two models of work: the one she experienced with her original theatre family, Famiglia Rame, and her involvement with theatre collectives *Nuova Scena* (New Scene) and *La Comune* (The Commune). The chapter therefore spans a long period: from Rame's upbringing until the early 1980s, when Rame re-established with Fo their *Compagnia Teatrale Fo Rame* (Fo Rame Theatre Company). The discussion focuses on the following key questions: What are the social relations of production, and how were they reflected in the practices of Famiglia Rame and the theatre collectives *Nuova Scena* and *La Comune*? How did these experiences shape Rame's evolving approach to the social relations of production across the different incarnations of her theatre company? Why does paying attention to different forms of visible and invisible labour matter for understanding Rame's contribution and politics? I address these questions by taking up Italian studies scholars Malcolm Angelucci and Stephen Kolsky's suggestion 'to explore further the political implications of how Rame and Fo dealt with hierarchy, individualism and authorship, looking at the intersection between Italian family theatre and the horizontal collective and cooperative modes of Italian political theatre'.[1] I adopt a contemporary feminist lens to investigate how these political implications are negotiated in Rame's practice, foregrounding her agency in reshaping the social relations of production.

To clarify the meaning of social relations of production within the context of theatre practice, and to frame my analysis of Rame's work, I draw

[1] M. Angelucci, and S. Kolsky. 2022. 'Franca Rame Won the Nobel Prize: Approaching the Works of Dario Fo and Franca Rame as Collaboration'. Italian Studies 77 (3). https://doi.org/10.1080/00751634.2022.2081783, 352.
See also Malcolm Angelucci and Stephen Kolsky, *Franca Rame ha vinto il Nobel! Due vite, una collaborazione* (Milan: Mimesis Edizioni, 2023).

on theoretical approaches to social relations, including Tom Six's exploration of theatre as a social art, 'a place of work whose practices and relations are produced both by and in tension with the wider cultures from which they emerge'.[2] Performance and theatre studies in fact frequently explore performance through its labour, organisation, management, financial systems, and a Marxist perspective insists these must be understood in relation to both their economic foundations and their social function.[3] In capitalist society, the relentless drive to accumulate capital defines the logic of production, superseding the individual intentions of those who participate in it, including theatre artists.[4] Within this system, class is not merely a matter of income or status, but a structural position defined by one's relation to the means of production and the production process itself. From this perspective, the term social relations of production refers to the ways in which relationships among individuals involved in producing goods and services shape the socio-economic character of a society.[5] This aligns with Ric Knowles' emphasis on the critical importance of contextual production conditions, such as funding, organisational structures, and spatial dynamics, in shaping theatrical meaning.[6] Both Six and Knowles' approaches underline the necessity of examining the political and material frameworks that influence creative processes and collective theatre-making, which are crucial for my analysis in this chapter.

However, Marx's analysis largely omits the unpaid or underrecognized work, such as domestic work, caregiving, and informal economies, that sustains life and, by extension, the work force. Social reproduction theory**,** as articulated by scholars like Tithi Bhattacharya and Silvia Federici, foregrounds this labour as structurally essential to capitalism, even though it

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[2] T. Six, writing as Tom Cornford, *Theatre Studios, A political history of ensemble theatre-making,* (London: Routledge, 2021), 20.
[3] Blackwell-Pal, Jaswinder, et al. "Marxist Keywords for Performance." *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 36, no. 1 (2021): 25-53. https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/dtc.2021.0037.
[4] Ibid.
[5] K. Marx, *Wage Labour and Capital*, in K. Marx and F. Engels *Collected Works,* Vol. 9 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1977),
[6] R. Knowles, *Reading the Material Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

occurs outside waged production.[7] In the context of theatre analysis, this perspective reveals how both the content and conditions of performance are shaped not only by visible market dynamics but also by the invisible reproductive labour that supports cultural production. Thus, theatre work and its representations are embedded within, and reflective of, both productive and reproductive social relations under capitalism.

In his analysis of theatre studios, Six investigates the nature of creative collectives by examining the material and social processes involved in the production of theatre.[8] His work interrogates the political commitments of theatre-makers and the systems that underpin their practices, with particular attention to processes of creation, the relational dynamics among collaborators, and the organisational forms that emerge from these interactions.[9] This focus informs my analysis of Rame's engagement with both her original theatre family and theatre collectives as a means of conceptualising creative collaboration as a complex web of social relations, shaped in part by social reproduction.[10] I further explore the forms of sociality emerging from Rame's multifaceted and collective processes of production, also drawing on Jeremy Gilbert's concept of 'the creative potential of those relations'.[11] I interpret his definition of sociality as a dynamic and unpredictable creative condition, and his view of democracy as the expression of collective creativity, which aligns with Hannah Arendt's concept of public happiness.[12] This refers to the joy found in collective political action and participation in public life, and offers a valuable frame for understanding Rame's work, where performance becomes a site of political engagement.[13] Diana Damian Martin's exploration of Arendt's concept of 'spaces of

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[7] S. Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012); T. Bhattacharya, ed., *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression* (London: Pluto Press, 2017).
[8] Six, *Theatre Studios,* 20.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Rooted in Marxist analysis, social reproduction theory highlights the often-invisible labour, such as domestic work, education, well-being, and caregiving, necessary to sustain and reproduce the workforce under capitalism. See T. Bhattacharya, *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression* (London: Pluto Press, 2017).
[11] J. Gilbert, *Common Ground, Democracy and Collectivity in an Age of Individualism* (London: Pluto Press, 2014), 161.
[12] H. Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 1963), 114–115.
[13] Ibid.

appearance', where politics is understood as a performative act that emerges through speech and action in public spaces, is particularly relevant.[14] Arendt's emphasis on public participation as a means of resisting oppression and exclusion resonates with my analysis of Rame's theatre practice, which fostered collective engagement and political agency beyond institutionalised frameworks.

Focusing on Rame's contributions to the theatre work with Dario Fo and their collaborators, Angelucci and Kolsky view Rame and Fo's authorship as a collaboration, and go so far as to urge fellow scholars to join them in calling on the Nobel Prize Committee to officially recognise Rame, posthumously, as a co-recipient alongside Fo.[15] They explicitly aim at moving away from the reductive idea of Fo as the sole author, actor, and genius and Rame 'as the ancillary manager and editor of his works', and situate Rame's creative contributions in the context of her theatre family of origin, the Famiglia Rame.[16] They therefore interpret Rame and Fo's creative collaboration as 'a continuation of the theatrical tradition of Italian family theatre with all its implications in terms of shared authority, the complexity of roles, and practices of collaboration'.[17] While the continuity between the practice of Famiglia Rame and the multiple incarnations of Fo and Rame's company is undoubtably a key to understanding Rame's work, I argue that to look at it solely in the context of her theatre family or her artistic collaboration with her husband, does not solve the problem of liberating the figure of Rame from patriarchal structures. In effect, this would mean replacing the patriarchal authority of the husband with that of the family structure. For this reason, I turn to contemporary feminist engagements with creative collaboration, care, and social reproduction, that enable us to better understand the complexities surrounding Rame's own work during her lifetime.[18] This means that, rather than advocating for Rame's inclusion in

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[14] D. Damian Martin, (2019) *Sites of Appearance, Matters of Thought: Hannah Arendt and Performance Philosophy.* Performance Philosophy Journal, 5 (1). ISSN 2057-7176.
[15] Angelucci, Malcolm, and Stephen Kolsky. 2022. "Franca Rame Won the Nobel Prize: Approaching the Works of Dario Fo and Franca Rame as Collaboration." *Italian Studies* 77 (3): 341–53. doi:10.1080/00751634.2022.2081783.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., 343.
[18] S. Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012).

patriarchal institutions like the Nobel Prize, contemporary feminism offers a lens to investigate her work at the intersection of class, gender, and artistic labour, and prioritise her contributions, methods, and approaches to work, emphasising the importance of relationships based on affinity rather than familial ties in shaping social relations of production.[19] Furthermore, Sophie Lewis makes the argument, from the position of family abolitionist feminism, that to reify the family, which she sees as 'capitalism's base unit', is to contribute to its function of performing 'free labour for the market […] indispensable for legitimising exclusion and hierarchy in general'.[20] This approach is closely tied to a sense of empowerment derived from the subversive freedom inherent in the creative process, one that incorporates improvisation, laughter, and shared political values. In this light, this chapter investigates Rame's role as a modern and radical *capacomica*, showing how the creative collaborations she fostered functioned as both artistic and political interventions in the social relations of production, challenging hierarchical structures and asserting feminist agency within the broader framework of anti-capitalist struggle. The term *capacomica* is my feminist reworking of *capocomico*, the lead actor and head of the company in Italian theatre tradition. It merges *capa* (head or leader) and *comica* (comic or comedian), both rendered in the feminine form. This intentional choice challenges the longstanding practice of using male-gendered terms for women's roles or professions in Italian, a usage rooted in patriarchal norms. In order to situate and understand the models Rame drew upon, it is crucial to first clarify her position within the context of the Italian theatre tradition.

1.1 Franca Rame and the Italian Theatre Tradition of *Capocomicato*

The emergence of professional theatre performers during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries coincides with the period that Federici, in *Caliban and the Witch*, identifies as the onset of women's social degradation in Western

[19] Ibid.
[20] S. Lewis, *Abolish the Family: A Manifesto for Care and Liberation* (London: Verso, 2022).

Europe and its colonized territories, when women increasingly lost ground in all areas of public life.[21] Paradoxically, the Renaissance, around 1560, saw 'the appearance of professional female performers in drama both spoken and sung', highlighting a moment of increased visibility and artistic agency for women that unfolded against the backdrop of increasing patriarchal control and socio-economic marginalization.[22] *Commedia dell'arte*, which emerged to distinguish professional theatre from amateur aristocratic performance (*arte* referring to the actors' guild that produced these plays),[23] marked a ground-breaking shift, as women began performing female roles and some became professional actresses.[24] Historian Laura Mariani clarifies that, while often reduced to its use of masks and improvisation, *commedia dell'arte*'s true innovation lay in the creation of professional companies that included women.[25] This means that women performers in *commedia dell'arte* could leave their homes, perform on stage, travel, and tour, whilst performing in a variety of comic roles. This represents a rare attempt at some form of emancipation for women in the sixteenth century.[26] One example was Isabella Andreini (1562–1604), of the famous Gelosi family touring company, who became one of the most celebrated actresses of the era.[27] The actor was, in fact, the central element of the Italian theatre tradition,[28] which began in the early Renaissance, exemplified by Angelo Beolco, known as Ruzante (born c.1496-1502, died 1542), an actor, playwright, and director regarded by Rame and Fo as a foundational figure of *commedia dell'arte*.[29] The actor-centred tradition of *capocomicato* developed through the figure of the *capocomico*, whom Joseph Farrell describes as the lead actor and main figure in *commedia dell'arte*, who was also responsible for choosing the work

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[21] S. Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*. *Women, the body and primitive accumulation*. NY: Autonomedia, 2014.
[22] R. Andrews, 'The Renaissance Stage', in J. Farrell and P. Puppa (Ed.), *A History of Italian Theatre* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 31-32.
[23] J. Farrell, 'In search of Italian theatre', in *A History of Italian Theatre*, ed. J. Farrell and P. Puppa, (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 2
[24] Ibid.
[25] L. Mariani, *L'Ottocento delle attrici. Da Carlotta Marchionni a Eleonora Duse* (Roma: Viella, 2024), 22.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Farrell and Puppa (Ed.), *A History of Italian Theatre*, 1-5.
[29] D. Fo and F. Rame, *Ruzzante*, (Milan: Guanda, 2018).

to be staged, casting the actors, staging, directing the piece, and for the financial and legal management of the whole enterprise.[30] We might understand Rame's family history and ways of working by looking at the working practices of *commedia dell'arte*. For example, Kenneth and Laura Richards describe a record from 1545, which shows the legal constitution of a professional acting company in Padua, with a detailed description of what can be compared to a small co-operative, where everybody worked on an equal-share basis.[31] The document also covers issues such as 'troupe-leadership, travel, discipline, division of earnings, provision for sickness and even support services, including the purchase of a horse to transport effects from town to town'.[32] It shows how a group of actors committed to their work provided for themselves and their families. These performers were able to cover many roles, and they were characterised by their improvisation skills, which is another important element of my analysis I will return to.[33] Although this document is from centuries earlier, this tradition persisted over time.[34]

Bringing to light the long-neglected role of women *capocomiche* is essential for situating Rame within this lineage. Drawing on Mariani, I look at how the role of *capocomiche* redefines women's relationship with power in theatre history, demanding a re-assessment of their contributions. In fact, their leadership symbolises an exceptional moment in history where women moved from exclusion to protagonism and, eventually, to positions of power within their field.[35] In the history of Italian theatre, 'the masculine form continues to be used as a universal neutral that includes the feminine'.[36] Yet in fact, women held significant roles, both as performers and leaders of their theatre companies. In *capocomical* companies, the *prima donna* (leading actress) was in fact a central figure, overseeing not just performance, 'but also for matters related to staging, repertoire, company formation, role

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[30] J.Farrell and P. Puppa, eds. *A History of Italian Theatre,* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 2.
[31] K. & L. Richards, 'Commedia dell'Arte', in *A History of Italian Theatre*, eds. J. Farrell and P. Puppa (Cambridge University Press, 2006),105.
[32] Ibid.
[33] J. Farrell, 'In search of Italian theatre', in *A History of Italian Theatre*, eds. J. Farrell and P. Puppa, (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 2
[34] Mariani, *L'Ottocento delle attrici,* 10-11.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Mariani, *L'Ottocento delle attrici.* 7.

distribution, theatre and tour selection'.[37] This reflects for example the role of women in Rame's original theatre family, the Famiglia Rame, as well as Rame's role in the companies with Dario Fo. For this reason, theatre historian Domnica Radulescu situates Rame in the lineage of women *capocomiche* in the Italian theatre tradition, positioning them as precursors of feminist practice.[38] For example, she considers the performers' improvisation skills as one important element of their emancipation, because of the freedom improvisation requires, which, together with the appreciation they received, further amplifies the possibility of subversive freedom these women represented.[39] Likewise, Angelucci and Kolsky define Rame as 'one of the last examples of the centuries-long lineage of *teatro all'italiana*, which Farrell calls *teatro di giro* (touring theatre) as they travelled around Italy.[40] The Italian theatre tradition, throughout the eighteenth century, saw significant developments from the Renaissance, establishing modes of theatrical production, particularly the structure and operation of touring companies, that persisted in various forms over time. This continuity is evident in the enduring legacy of the *capocomico* model and the collaborative, family-based structure of theatre companies, which extended into the twentieth century and shaped the working methods of *Famiglia Rame*.[41] This tradition is marked by a rich history of evolving techniques, from the improvisational roots of *commedia dell'arte* to more structured acting and declamation methods further analysed for example by scholars like Anna Sica and Joseph Farrell.[42] This theatrical model lasted over three centuries, surviving the reforms of Carlo Goldoni (1707–1793), who re-established the authority of

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[37] Ibid., 47
[38] D. Rădulescu, *Women's Comedic Art as Social Revolution: Five Performers and the Lessons of Their Subversive Humor*. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2012).
[39] Ibid.
[40] M. Angelucci & S. Kolsky (2022) 'Franca Rame Won the Nobel Prize: Approaching the Works of Dario Fo and Franca Rame as Collaboration', Italian Studies, 77:3, 341-353, DOI: 10.1080/00751634.2022.2081783; J. Farrell and P. Puppa (Ed.), *A History of Italian Theatre* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).
[41] C. Vicentini, *Storia della recitazione teatrale: Dal mondo antico alla scena digitale* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2023).
[42] Sica for example explores the impact of la *drammatica-metodo italiano* (the Italian method of *la drammatica*) when the formalisation of acting techniques and declamation system began to take shape, especially with the publication of *Dell'arte rappresentativa* by actor-author Luigi Riccoboni (1676-1753) in 1728. This forms part of my analysis in Chapter 4.

the author and of the script, reducing considerably the scope for actors' improvisation.[43]

Theatre companies continued to function throughout the nineteenth century as what Mariani defines as *microsocieta'* (microsocieties), often led by multi-generational artistic families dedicated to their craft and transmitting knowledge orally, living a nomadic life, travelling with their trunks.[44] Mariani identifies that the era of emancipation for Italian actresses, which started with figures like Isabella Andreini in the sixteenth century, culminated in the legacy of actress and *capacomica* Eleonora Duse (1858-1924).[45] Duse's influence extended into the 20th century, overcoming the challenges of World War I, the rise of fascism with its patriarchal view of women's role in society, including moralistic scrutiny and societal pressures to conform to domestic roles, and the shifting power dynamics in theatre, where the traditional authority of the *capocomico* was increasingly undermined by the emergence of the modern director, not to mention increasing competition from cinema and radio.[46] The death of Duse in 1924, according to Mariani, marked therefore the decline of the *capocomico* system in Italy. This shift marginalised traditional acting cultures such as the Italian theatre tradition, reducing them to folkloristic or derided elements and erasing their rich artistic and communal contributions.[47] The Italian theatre tradition was largely dismissed as outdated, with its essential elements, such as the blend of art and life, communal spirit, and independence, overshadowed by reductive or dismissive narratives.[48] Writer, director, critic, and broadcaster Silvio D'amico (1887-1955) contributed to this shift introducing terms such as *regista* (theatre director), the so-called *teatro di regia* (directors' theatre) in the 1930s and 1940s, and *teatro stabile* (permanent theatres), such as Piccolo Teatro in Milan, founded in 1947 and still active.[49] On the other hand, despite these obstacles, Italian touring companies, such as Famiglia Rame, succeeded in

[43] J. Farrell and P. Puppa, eds., *A History of Italian Theatre*, (Cambridge University Press, 2006).
[44] Mariani, *L'Ottocento delle attrici, 33.*
[45] Ibid.,13.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid., 20.
[49] S. D'Amico, ed., *La regia teatrale* (Roma: A. Belardetti, 1947).

keeping this tradition alive well into the twentieth century, continually negotiating their cultural role in society while developing distinct theatrical models and forms of social relations.[50]

1.2 The Famiglia Rame

To better understand Rame's artistic and political trajectory, it is crucial to examine her family of origin, the *Famiglia Rame*. Rame was born in 1929 (five years after Duse's death), into a theatre family of travelling actors which, according to Italian theatre scholar, and Famiglia Rame expert, Alessio Arena, is emblematic of the Italian theatre tradition of *capocomicato.*[51] This context provides a crucial foundation to further investigate whether Rame's role can be understood as the evolution of the women *capocomiche* of this tradition.

The Famiglia Rame was originally a company of puppeteers, founded by Rame's grandfather Pio Rame (1849-1921) in 1876.[52] He was an orphan who began working as an apprentice to the marionettista (puppeteer) Domenico Razzetti (1824-1898), who eventually adopted him. When Razzetti died, he left his company to Pio and his wife Giuseppina Rabozzi (1850-1901). Rabozzi had multiple roles in the company and became what can be compared today to a company's managing director, 'inaugurating the long tradition of women impresarios that characterised the Famiglia Rame'.[53] The Rames belonged to the old tradition of nomadic companies that emerged in Italy in the mid-16th century, as analysed in the previous section. According to Arena, those companies that specialised in *teatro di figura* (puppet theatre)

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[50] A. Arena, "Giuseppina Rabozzi (1850-1901): la prima amministratrice della compagnia Rame", in https://www.artidellospettacolo-performingarts.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/2022_8_Arena.pdf.
[51] A. Arena, *La Famiglia Rame* (Roma: Bulzoni, 2024).
[52] In our interview, Arena explained that Famiglia Rame were *marionettisti*, as in Italian the term *marionette* specifically describes puppets controlled by strings or rods, while *burattini* refer to puppets manipulated directly by a puppeteer's hands.
[53] A. Arena, "Giuseppina Rabozzi (1850-1901): la prima amministratrice della compagnia Rame, in https://www.artidellospettacolo-performingarts.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/2022_8_Arena.pdf 88.

can be considered direct heirs of *commedia dell'arte*, particularly because marionettes reproduced characters and masks from this tradition.[54]

The first phase of Famiglia Rame's theatrical activity from 1876 to 1913 was dedicated to marionette shows, where they used written scripts. With the advent of cinema, in the 1920s, under the direction of Pio's son, the company's *capocomico* Domenico Rame, Franca Rame's father, they moved to *teatro di persona,* becoming actors, improvising, using the text as a *canovaccio* (a plot, not as a script to follow literally), carrying on the tradition of *capocomicato*.[55] Arena explains how all family members, including the children, contributed to the staging according to their abilities: acting, building sets, painting backdrops, sewing costumes, and the young ones moved around with their parents.[56] In her autobiography *Una vita all'improvvisa* (A Life Improvising), Rame recounts that she was already on stage since she was eight days old, in her mother's arms, who was performing *La Genoveffa di Brabante* (Genoveffa of Brabant), the story of a heroine of medieval legend.[57] Since then, Rame performed all sorts of roles and characters according to her age, learning her trade orally from her mother and her family while growing up.[58]

The company was composed of two families: that of Domenico Rame (1885–1948) and Emilia Baldini (1893–1981), Franca Rame's parents, and that of Domenico's brother, Tomaso Rame. In total, the troupe included ten family members, seven women and three men, alongside several hired actors who often needed to perform male roles.[59] Mariani clarifies that Famiglia Rame was a touring company but not like many in Italy who were called *scavalca-montagne* (mountain climbers). These were the ancient touring companies, who took their shows all around Italy, literally climbing the Alps and Apennines to perform in squares and small theatres in remote towns.[60] Mariani explains how Famiglia Rame instead travelled in neighbouring regions in Northern Italy (Lombardy, Piedmont, Veneto) rather

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[54] A. Arena. Interview with the author, 29 July 2022.
[55] F. Rame, J. Farrell, *Non è tempo di Nostalgia* (Cagliari: Della Porta Editori, 2013).
[56] Arena, *La Famiglia Rame,* 61.
[57] F. Rame and J. Farrell, *Non è tempo di nostalgia*, 22-23.
[58] F. Rame and D. Fo, *Una vita all'improvvisa* (Milan: Guanda, 2013), 47.
[59] Ibid., 15.
[60] L. Mariani, Interview with the author, July 18, 2022

than nationally, therefore compromising between touring and being settled in one place, which was an original feature for touring companies. Within these families, individual initiative was subordinated to the hierarchical structure of the group. The primary focus was on performance, and there was strict adherence to disciplinary norms, for example, arriving at the dressing room well before the show and refraining from using costumes and props in private life.[61] Anyone entering a stable relationship with the family members had to embrace their lifestyle. Mariani compares these family contexts to actual 'habitats', while Arena emphasises the ritualistic aspect of these families or clans' communal lifestyles, which formed part of the methodology that Franca Rame later developed within her company.[62]

The processes of making in Famiglia Rame relied on the actors' collaboration, their improvisation skills, and interactions with their audience, as in the *commedia dell'arte* tradition. During Easter or Christmas time, they staged dramas related to religious themes.[63] Most importantly, they adapted texts, for example, Shakespeare, Molière, Chekov, Ibsen, and Aristophanes, novels such as *I Promessi Sposi (The Betrothed)* by Alessandro Manzoni, or adaptations of operas such as Giuseppe Verdi's *La Traviata* or Giacomo Puccini's *Tosca*.[64] Rame, in an interview with Farrell, explained how Famiglia Rame adapted these texts for audiences from small towns and villages. If the actors used standard Italian and formal diction, she noted, there was a risk the audience would lose interest, as this was not the language of their everyday communication. To remain close to the people they rendered their work accessible by communicating in a style that resonated with the Italian provinces, often incorporating dialects and forms of expression more familiar to local communities than standard Italian.[65] At the same time, they took care of all the material aspects of the production. Mariani describes Famiglia Rame as a self-sufficient company, with both families living on their earnings as in the Italian theatre tradition.[66] They designed and built their mobile

[61] Ibid.
[62] Arena, *La Famiglia Rame*, 23
[63] J. Farrell, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame*, *Theatre, Politics, Life* (London: Methuen, 2019).
[64] Rame, *Una vita all'improvvisa* (Parma: Guanda, 2007).
[65] Rame and Farrell, *Non è tempo di Nostalgia*, 21.
[66] L. Mariani, Interview with the author, July 18, 2022.

wooden theatre, which could hold five hundred people, produced their publicity and posters, and travelled from town to town in their motor coach that they nicknamed *La Balorda* (the Foolish), as it frequently broke down.[67] They had their own house in the town of Varese, in Lombardy, together with a warehouse where they kept the sets, costumes, spotlights, and everything needed to put on the shows.[68] In the evening they would leave for one of the neighbouring villages, where they would assemble their stage in places such as cinemas, oratory theatres (small performance spaces attached to churches), or real theatres. They would get in, do the show, get out, and go home.[69]

Mario Carbonoli, former director of the Italian theatre organisation ETI (*Ente Teatrale Italiano*, Italian National Theatre Organization), witnessed Famiglia Rame's shows when he was young.[70] In an interview with theatre scholar Marisa Pizza, he provides further details which help us understand the material aspects of their theatre-making processes.[71] He recalls that people in his small town (Carnago), near Varese, every Thursday and Sunday waited for Famiglia Rame, who represented the only form of entertainment at that time. Local theatre amateurs were not only part of their audience but regularly helped the company to get in and out, building the set, placing chairs for the public, and during the get out had also a chance to discuss or critique the show with the company. Carbonoli describes Famiglia Rame's shows as an artisanal, popular theatre in which they performed all sorts of classical works, which always ended with a beautiful farce.[72] There was no specific theatre training in the company, as they 'drew on inherited skills, on instinct and observation, on an apprenticeship which began at birth'.[73] Each actor had a specific responsibility: set, costumes, chairs, or

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[67] Rame, *Una vita all'improvvisa*, 27-28.
[68] Rame and Farrell, *Non è tempo di Nostalgia*, 21.
[69] Ibid., 21-22.
[70] ETI Ente Teatrale Italiano (Italian national theatre organisation), was a national organisation comparable to the Arts Council for theatre in the UK. It was established in 1942 and dissolved in 2010.
[71] M. Pizza, "Famiglia d'arte tra storia e innovazione: L'archivio Franca Rame Dario Fo", in S. Brunetti, Ed*., Unici, Le Famiglie D'Arte nel Teatro Italiano del Novecento* (Bari: Edizioni di Pagina, 2019), 111.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Farrell, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame*, 36.

driving *La Balorda* around towns to advertise their shows ahead of their performance.[74] The nucleus of the company was the Rame family, but they also welcomed actors from other companies. They used costumes from disbanded companies, but also from operas that had been performed at La Scala in Milan, thanks to a designer they knew who worked there. They created their hand-painted backdrops, framed by two wooden boards, top and bottom, rolled up like a curtain with two ropes at the sides.[75]

Rame later integrated and further developed many of these creative processes in her work with Fo, while also drawing on two core values inherited from her family: charity and socialist principles. Arena, for example, highlights how the Famiglia Rame used part of their earnings to support various initiatives such as the Red Cross, nurseries, committees for sick and disabled children, and musical associations, among others.[76] There was also a strong element of political engagement. In 1919, Domenico Rame, besides being the lead actor and director of the company, founded the *Associazione Marionettisti e Burattinai Italiani* (Italian puppeteers association), a kind of union aimed at uniting and safeguarding workers in the entertainment industry.[77] Rame's early work with *Famiglia Rame* therefore immersed her in a process of making grounded in collaboration, as productions relied on ensemble dynamics typical of family theatre companies; improvisation, inherited from *commedia dell'arte* traditions, which shaped her adaptability and responsiveness on stage; and relationality, through sustained engagement with local audiences and the integration of performance into everyday social and political life. These formative experiences laid the groundwork for the collective, politically engaged, and audience-conscious practices she later developed in her collaborations with Fo with their theatre collectives.

Through the analysis of relational dynamics and the organisational forms that emerge from collaboration,[78] the relationships within *Famiglia Rame* reveal that their theatre-making process was, at its core, a collective

[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Arena, *La Famiglia Rame*, 131.
[77] Ibid. 135-136.
[78] Six, *Theatre Studios*, 20.

endeavour. Rehearsals were represented by a meeting led by the *capocomico* Domenico Rame, who explained the plot to the rest of the group.[79] The story, as already mentioned, could be an adaptation from a book, usually curated by Tomaso Rame, or a play, or stories they gathered from the people of the towns in which they were performing.[80] According to Rame, actors would flesh out these plots by relying on their *codice delle situazioni,* a code of situations, which means that each one of them had at their disposal a repertoire of dozens of different dialogues they had learned by heart.[81] Dialogue would be selected depending on the situation they were going to perform, for example, a love dialogue, or a dispute between a heretic and a holy man, or a deceiver and a clueless merchant, a priest confessor and an unfaithful woman, and so on.[82] I interpret this practice, in which actors drew from a broad repertoire of learned dialogues to improvise around a scenario (plot) according to their character and the situation, as resonating with the ways in which jazz musicians improvise within a defined structure, adapting phrasing or quotations from their repertoire of song forms and jazz standards.

Jazz improvisation offers therefore a useful analogy for understanding *Famiglia Rame*'*s* methods. Like jazz musicians who take turns improvising around a shared melody and chord progression, grounded in well-known structures yet open to invention, the *Famiglia Rame* built performances through collective variation, citation, rhythmic play, and the creative reinterpretation of established material.[83] Improvisation involved performing around a clear structure, specifically, the story introduced by the *capocomico*. The actors then improvised by drawing on memorised dialogues, paraphrasing or quoting them, and incorporating new inventions and references, all while maintaining a dynamic interaction with the audience. In his analysis of musicality in theatre, David Roesner emphasises the role of the ensemble, which is not in tension with the soloist. This helps

[79] Farrell, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame*, 37.
[80] Arena, *La Famiglia Rame*, 109-116.
[81] Rame, *Una vita all'improvvisa*,19.
[82] Ibid.
[83] D. Roesner, *Musicality in Theatre. Music as Model, Method and Metaphor in Theatre-Making* (London: Routledge, 2014).

understanding the dynamic of improvisation in Famiglia Rame. Even when a clear distinction exists between a soloist and their accompaniment, since each one improvises, the improvisational nature of jazz renders it a collective endeavour, which implies 'an ethics that questions individual authorship that strives for emergence in collective creativity'.[84] A collective endeavour thus entails a peculiar form of relationality between the group and the individual's creativity, involving what in jazz terms is called 'interplay', a form of reciprocal support, attention, shared responsibility, cooperation, and listening, between and among the performers on stage.[85] I will return to this comparison with jazz practice and improvisation later in the thesis, when examining Rame's practices and her approach to scenic writing with her companies. The working method and internal dynamics among the group of performers are in fact crucial aspects that Rame later developed further with her collaborators.[86] Drawing a comparison between theatre and jazz improvisation provides a deeper insight into the dynamics of social relations within collective creativity on stage. It reveals that individual expression emerges through responsiveness to others and within a shared structure, rather than through isolated authorship. These dynamics are shaped by a fluid negotiation of presence and timing, where improvisation becomes a relational act, co-authored, interdependent, and grounded in an ethics of collaboration.

At the same time, the social relations of production in Famiglia Rame were structured by a hierarchical and gendered division of roles. Rame for example recalls in her autobiography how her mother, who was the leading actress, oversaw the company's administration, household chores, and her children's education, being a former primary school teacher.[87] This means that social reproduction was left to women, who also oversaw costumes and props, and organised accommodation while on tour. Rame's mother also trained her children for the show, teaching them the parts orally, *bocca a*

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[84] Ibid.
[85] P. Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
[86] See Chapters 3 and 4.
[87] Rame*, Una Vita all'improvvisa*, 41.

bocca (mouth to mouth).[88] In *Famiglia Rame* this form of education was left to women, while men in the company 'chose the texts, dealt with the authorities in each town where they planned to perform, promoted their shows, pasted posters on the walls, loaded the car, drove, set up the scenes, lighting and everything else needed for the staging'.[89] These tasks combined both manual and executive labour, and were carried out within homosocial networks that reinforced male authority and control over the production process. The tradition of *capocomicato* included one or more people leading the group, in this case, Rame's father, while at the same time, an equal distribution of their income and their multiple roles allowed for collective participation in the creative as well as in all other tasks necessary to keep the organisation going. However, there are interesting tensions to consider in the context of family relations in the company. I refer to Arena's definition of women's central role in the Famiglia Rame, which appears contradictory considering the gendered division of labour described above. [90]

In her autobiography, Rame refers to the role of her mother in the company as *regiora*, explaining that it is a Lombard dialect term meaning *colei che regge la comunita* (she who rules the community).[91] She explains that 'when it came to making important decisions, for example the choice of the programme for their tour, she always had the last word'.[92] This contradicts the claim that only the *capocomico*, Domenico Rame, decided the texts for the tour programme. This fact compels us to reconsider the assumption of a rigidly gendered division of labour along strict lines of power and authority, suggesting instead a more nuanced and less rigid form of collaboration between Rame's parents. However, looking at multiple definitions of this northern Italian dialect term, *regiora* (also spelled as 'reggitora' or 'reggiora' or 'redzora' according to different regional dialects) denotes the home administrator, or housekeeper.[93] To better understand how problematic the role of *regiora* can be in the context of the theatre family,

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[88] Ibid., 47. This is an important aspect that I further analyse in Chapter Four.
[89] Ibid.,12.
[90] A. Arena. Interview with the author, July 29, 2022.
[91] F. Rame, *Una Vita all'improvvisa*, 14.
[92] Ibid.
[93] https://www.gadda.ed.ac.uk/Pages/journal/suppn+1/articles/cavallmilan.php

how family structures can lock things in rather than always enable them, and how much it later affected Rame's role in her work with Fo and her collaborators, I refer to the role of Rame's grandmother, the first *regiora* in Famiglia Rame, Giuseppina Rabozzi.[94] According to Franca Rame's sister Pia, Rabozzi always worked, took care of the house, her husband, their four children, and their marionettes.[95] Regardless of the amount of domestic and company labour, she felt accountable for her husband's failure to achieve success in big cities.[96] At the age of fifty-one, Rabozzi tried to drown herself. She was rescued but never recovered. She died of pulmonary complications, possibly caused by prolonged exposure to water and having ingested a large amount of it.[97] However, Arena suggests that she probably died as a result of a deepening depression. [98] Although the term *regiora* implies a form of leadership and control within the theatrical family context, I argue that it is a problematic one, as it perpetuates patriarchal dynamics surrounding women's roles in the theatre family, particularly in relation to their responsibilities in social reproduction.[99] At the same time, contemporary representations of Franca Rame as a 'reggitora', emphasising her organizational and administrative skills inherited from her mother and grandmother, coupled with her extensive labour and juggling numerous roles simultaneously, have contributed to framing her as playing a minor or ancillary role compared to Fo. While the roles of *reggitora* and *capocomico* within the social relations of production in Famiglia Rame illuminate the skills, authority, and theatrical expertise and professional knowledge Rame gained from her upbringing in this theatre-making environment, it is equally important to consider the structural constraints these roles imposed. A clearer understanding is needed of whether, and how, Rame was able to

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[94] A. Arena, "Giuseppina Rabozzi (1850–1901): la prima amministratrice della compagnia Rame," *Arti dello Spettacolo / Performing Arts*, no. 8 (2022): 89–96, https://www.artidellospettacolo-performingarts.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/2022_8_Arena.pdf.
[95] P. Rame, *La Regina di Medo'* (Milano: Mondadori, 1979), 74-75.
[96] Ibid., 78.
[97] Ibid., 79.
[98] Arena, *La Famiglia Rame*, 65.
[99] The term 'reggiora' also appears in Rame and Fo's 1997 comedy *Il Diavolo con le Zinne* (The devil with boobs) to define the role of the protagonist Pizzocca, performed by Rame, who is a male judge's housekeeper.

emancipate herself from these limitations, rather than merely reproducing them, in her later collaborations with Dario Fo and other members of their companies.

1.3 From Famiglia Rame to Compagnia Teatrale Fo Rame

In 1950, Franca Rame left her family and moved to Milan, where her sister Pia had already been living for three years, to work in established theatres.[100] She immediately realised that she represented an anomaly in the *teatro di regia* (directors' theatre), and that her improvising popular acting style was too far from the more conventional acting style of 1950s Italian actresses.[101] Furthermore, she was at first hired in *teatro di varieta*' (vaudeville, variety theatre) because of her beauty, and was hardly given any lines.[102] She nevertheless became popular when she refused a proposal for a movie by Italian film director Luchino Visconti,[103] while she acted in several Italian movies in the 50s, where her voice was dubbed by other actresses.[104] Mariani explains that Rame took voice classes in Milan with Italian actress Isabella Riva (1890-1985), to get rid of her western Lombard accent and learn theatrical Italian diction.[105] When Rame met Fo, while working with the company Sorelle Nava and Franco Parenti in Milan in 1951, she found the artistic companion with whom she could re-evaluate her embodied theatre knowledge, instead of denying it or trying to fit in a style that was too far from her own.[106] Rame and Fo started working together in official theatre circuits, cinema, radio, and television. They got married in 1954, and in 1957 they co-

[100] Arena. *La Famiglia Rame,* 140.
[101] L. Mariani. Interview with the author, July 18, 2022.
[102] D. Fo, F. Rame, *Il Teatro Politico di Dario Fo* (Milano: Mazzotta, 1977), 141.
[103] Rame and Farrell, *Non è tempo di Nostalgia*, 36-37. Rame recalls that the role was ultimately given to actress Marcella Mariani, who tragically died in a plane crash en route to the Cannes Film Festival.
[104] J. Fo. Interview with the author, May 13, 2022.
[105] L. Mariani, "Io non volo mai, sono una che cammina, Ricordo di Franca Rame a cinquantasei anni, ATeatro, 2013. http://www.ateatro.org/mostranotizie2bis.asp?num=144&ord=35.
[106] L. Mariani. Interview with the author, July 18, 2022.

founded Compagnia Teatrale Fo Rame (Theatre Company Fo Rame).[107] Their son Jacopo Fo explains how his mother in those years taught Dario Fo how to improvise and introduced him to the codes and theatrical mechanisms of her family theatre tradition, a language that related to popular culture, and which required her knowledge and experience to be deciphered and then translated on stage.[108] Rame, therefore, brought to the Compagnia Teatrale Fo Rame her embodied knowledge and roots in the Italian theatre tradition, which she further developed and refined with Fo by incorporating strong political content, delivered through comedy, laughter, and, most notably, the technique of improvisation, a quality that led theatre historian Luciana D'Arcangeli to describe her as a modern *giullaressa* (female jester/clown).[109] This resonates with Serena Anderlini's observation of Rame's agency and ability to infuse intellectual and political themes with profound, immediate emotions that connected with audiences, which explains the company's significant popularity.[110] Jacopo Fo stresses the importance of legacies and generational transmission in his mother's role: 'My parents' big success came when my father adopted the theatrical style that came from my mother's family'.[111] This aligns with Farrell's view that Rame and Fo resumed the kind of touring theatre that had been practiced by Famiglia Rame for a couple of generations. However, there is a more complex reality, which involves Rame's agency and input in shaping different forms of social relations of production and her ability in reaching and engaging wider popular audiences.

In 1962 Rame and Fo brought their political and popular style to the television as hosts of the Saturday night RAI TV show C*anzonissima*, which was watched by millions and catapulted them to nationwide fame in Italy. This widespread attention was further amplified by the controversy surrounding their censorship by RAI, which ultimately led to their departure

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[107] L. D'Arcangeli, *I personaggi Femminili nel Teatro di Dario Fo e Franca Rame* (Firenze: Franco Casati Editore, 2009), 317.
[108] J. Fo. Interview with the author, May 13, 2022. Also see Chapter Four.
[109] L. D'Arcangeli, 'Franca Rame "giullaressa", in W. Valeri, Franca Rame. *A Woman on Stage* (West Lafayette: Bordighera Press, 2000).
[110] S. Anderlini. Interview with the author, June 9, 2022.
[111] J. Fo. Interview with the author, May 13, 2022.

from the show.[112] In the 1960s the company produced many plays.[113] For example, in 1963 they premiered their play *Isabella, tre caravelle e un cacciaballe* (Isabella, Three Sailing Ships and a Conman), a critique of the colonization of the Americas.[114] In 1964, Rame took on her first leading role in *Settimo, ruba un po' meno* (Seventh, Steal a Bit Less).[115] This was followed by the musical play *Ci ragiono e canto* (I Reason, and I Sing), a collection of popular folk songs, in 1966.[116] The following year, they premiered *La signora è da buttare* (The Lady is to Be Disposed or Dump the Lady), a musical grotesque satire set in a circus, complete with an onstage orchestra and a troupe of clowns.[117] The play, which functioned as a critique of capitalism and war in America, symbolically performed by Rame, marked the final work by *Compagnia Teatrale Fo Rame*. In 1968, at the peak of their success, Rame and Fo made the significant political decision to break away from the conventional theatre circuit and venture into a new approach to theatre-making.[118] Rame explained the reasons for their revolutionary choice of dismantling their company:

> Facevamo sempre sconti agli studenti e agli operai, però il nostro pubblico restava borghese e non capiva la satira, non si accorgeva di essere preso in giro. Il Teatro Manzoni fu l'ultimo teatro dove recitammo, qui a Milano. C'era tanta gente, c'era tutto quello che ci doveva essere, ma noi eravamo insoddisfatti. Un giorno d'estate mio marito disse: 'Perché non veniamo via dal teatro normale?' Mi proponeva quello che avevo sempre fatto con la mia famiglia, per cui mi andava benissimo. Era il 1968.[119]

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[112] J. Farrell, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame*, *Theatre, Politics, Life* (London: Methuen, 2019).
[113] See https://www.geocities.ws/dariofoarchive/playography for a comprehensive analytical listing of the plays of Dario Fo and Franca Rame.
[114] D. Fo, F. Rame*, Le commedie. Vol. 2: Isabella, tre caravelle e un cacciaballe; Settimo: ruba un po' meno; La colpa è sempre del diavolo* (Parma: Guanda, 2010).
[115] D. Fo, *Settimo, ruba un po' meno* (Sipario, 1964).
[116] D. Fo, *Ci Ragiono e Canto* (Nuovo Canzoniere Italiano, Bertoni Editore, 1966).
[117] D. Fo, *La Signora* è *da buttare* (Torino: Einaudi, 1976).
See also Archive Rame Fo, http://www.archivio.francarame.it/francaedario.aspx;
Although the lady in the title represents a metaphor for the US, Anderlini argues that it also carries a problematic double meaning implying a patriarchal disposal or dismissal of a woman. S. Anderlini. Interview with the author, June 9, 2022.
[118] Eugenio Barba. Interview with the author, June 5, 2022.
[119] Rame and Farrell, *Non* è *tempo di nostalgia,* 47.

> We always offered discounts to students and workers, but our audience remained bourgeois and didn't understand the satire, they didn't realise they were being made fun of. The Teatro Manzoni was the last theatre where we performed here in Milan. There were lots of people, everything that was supposed to be there was there, but we were dissatisfied. One summer day, my husband said, 'Why don't we leave the official theatre?' He was suggesting what I had always done with my family, so it suited me perfectly. It was 1968.

Rame explained the reasons behind their revolutionary decision to dismantle their company and transition to a mode of theatrical work that echoed the collaborative, itinerant structure of the *Famiglia Rame*. This shift was not merely stylistic but deeply political: it allowed them to break away from institutional theatre spaces and bourgeois audiences, bringing their performances directly to workers, students, and activists. In what follows, I investigate this and other aspects of Rame's work within the context of the collective experiments she undertook with Fo from 1968 till the end of the 1970s, before reforming their company. This analysis sheds light on how she navigated the social relations of production within theatre collectives and integrated elements of her family structure into these contexts.

1.4 The Collective/Co-operative Experience with *Nuova Scena*

Amid the changing cultural and political landscape of that time, as articulated in the introduction, Rame and Fo, as other artists in Italy, were seeking new creative directions and pathways. Notably, in 1967, a national 'conference for a new theatre' was convened in Ivrea, near Turin, bringing together theatre practitioners, critics, musicians, intellectuals, and artists to discuss and envision a fresh direction for Italian theatre.[120] Dario Fo participated in the

[120] Convegno di Ivrea, 10-12 June, 1967. Among the participants were theatre artist Carmelo Bene, Leo de Berardinis, Luca Ronconi, Carlo Quartucci, Eugenio Barba, and musician and

event, although he did not sign the manifesto, while Franca Rame most likely did not attend it.[121] Fo said that the conference was the starting point towards a new theatre, where theatre artists discussed avant-garde theatre.[122] In the conference manifesto, the participants clarified that the term 'new theatre' rejected old prevailing artifices in both structures and techniques, the will to tackle dramaturgical commitment without subjecting to pre-established patterns, with a recovery of techniques and a proposal of other techniques: 'A theatre that must go as far as absolute and total contestation'.[123] The name of the association *Nuova Scena* (New Scene), founded by Rame and Fo in 1968, echoed this search for a new theatre called for at the Ivrea conference. The aesthetic or techniques of avant-garde theatre in those years were inspired for example by practitioners such as Polish director Jerzy Grotowski, Italian director Eugenio Barba, founder and director of Odin Teatret, based in Denmark, and the American collective The Living Theatre, led by Judith Malina and Julian Beck. However, although Fo and Rame embraced the idea of total protest and breaking with old patterns, they chose a different political path. As explained in the introduction, following the students' protests and workers' strikes, in Italy a mass movement developed, including workers, students, and left-wing revolutionary groups. Rame and Fo chose to join them to make theatre for an essentially working-class audience, attempting to form a creative collective which I read as a site for political and social struggle and liberation.

Nuova Scena was an independent theatre collective made up of two theatre groups, one directed by Fo and Rame, and another experimental theatre company from Milan, *Teatro D'Ottobre* (October's Theatre), run by Nuccio Ambrosino and Vittorio Franceschi.[124] Musicians such as Paolo

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vocalist Cathy Berberian. See I. Caleo, P. Di Matteo, A. Sacchi, Eds., *In fiamme. La performance nello spazio delle lotte (1967-1979)*, (Venezia: Bruno, 2021).

[121] C. Augias. Interview with the author, February 26, 2025.

[122] D. Fo, Interview by Lorenzo Mango and Alfredo Tradardi with Dario Fo on 20/7/1986, on the occasion of the preparation of the 1987 Ivrea conference "Memories and Utopias", unpublished and confidential documentation, courtesy of the ITACA association.

[123] Manifesto "Per il nuovo teatro" (Manifesto for a new theatre) per il Convegno sul Nuovo Teatro, ATeatro, webzine di cultura teatrale. https://www.ateatro.it/webzine/2007/04/26/dossier-ivrea-1967-come-e-nato-il-manifesto-per-un-nuovo-teatro/.

[124] Farrell, *Dario Fo Franca Rame. Theatre, Politics, Life*, 96.

Ciarchi, who was part of the popular music group *Il Nuovo Canzoniere,* and cultural organisers such as Nanni Ricordi, who was a militant member of the Communist Party and head of the Milan section of ARCI, *Associazione Ricreativa Culturale Italiana* (Italian Recreational and Cultural Association), were part of *Nuova Scena*.[125] ARCI was the cultural wing of the Italian communist party (PCI) which organized the logistics and touring of *Nuova Scena* through their workers' left-wing circles or clubs, called *Case del Popolo* (People's Houses), where low ticket prices ensured accessibility for working-class audiences.[126] Italian journalist and writer Chiara Valentini explains how Rame, who had joined the Communist Party in 1967, had played a big part in the decision to disband their company and leave the bourgeois theatre.[127] From then on, most importantly, she carved out a distinctive role for herself, dedicating herself to theatrical, activist, and political work.[128] This is significant because it demonstrates how Rame actively redefined the legacy of her theatrical heritage, incorporating elements from the *Famiglia Rame* into a new, politically radical form of theatre, as Farrell highlights:

> If the decision to establish a co-operative was in keeping with the spirit of 1968, the choice of touring theatre was a return to the roots of Italian theatre, the theatre from which Franca had emerged.[129]

By drawing on the collaborative, itinerant, and popular roots of her family tradition, she was able to contribute meaningfully to the revolutionary goals of *Nuova Scena.* This move not only marked a key milestone in her artistic emancipation from mainstream and institutional theatre, but I argue that it represented also the beginning of a transformation from the historical *capacomica* figure into a radical one that fuses tradition and innovation, developing a different approach to social relations of production, which emphasises collaboration and a shared political commitment. Drawing on

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[125] C. Valentini, *La Storia di Dario Fo*, (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1997), 105-118.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Farrell, *Dario Fo Franca Rame, Theatre, Politics, Life,* 99.

Tom Six, I examine her contributions within this left-wing political theatre collective through an analysis of their creative processes, the relationships among collaborating artists, and their organizational structures.

Italian studies scholars Graziella Pulce and Domenico Scarpa, in their essay *La Rivoluzione in Tournee: Dario Fo and Franca Rame (1968-1972),* clarify that the two companies belonging to *Nuova Scena*, toured Italy with different productions at the same time, presenting plays for a working-class audience.[130] The collective had a clear vision regarding the political content and organization of their work, including for example the choice of spaces to perform, the ticket sales system, and their audience. They performed in *Case del Popolo* as well as in factories, squares, schools, gyms, which had no sound or lighting systems. Consequently, Rame and Fo, drawing on the Famiglia Rame's self-sufficient itinerant system, worked with their collaborators to build a two-storey mobile stage with turrets for spotlights, a design crafted by Fo, who had a background as an architect and painter.[131] They travelled with two trucks, while the ARCI local clubs managed logistics, ensuring there were always volunteers willing to assist with setting up and dismantling the stage, reminiscent of the local theatre amateurs who supported Famiglia Rame. Rame explained how they had won local people's sympathy by 'showing that we too could work and sweat' when they saw her and Fo, working together with the other members of the collective building the scaffolding for their show.[132] Rame and Fo contributed to *Nuova Scena* by providing all the equipment they had accumulated over nearly twenty years of work with their company, including costumes, lighting, and sound materials. Everyone in the collective, regardless of their part, received equal alphabetical billing in all the shows, and were paid an equal salary, which corresponded to the trade union minimum wage.[133] They were bound together by a shared political, revolutionary vision and anti-capitalist commitment. They aimed at creating a political theatre with the power to educate, inspire, provoke, and engage new audiences, using their

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[130] G. Pulce & D. Scarpa, "La Rivoluzione in Tournee: Dario Fo e Franca Rame (1968-1972)" in *Atlante della Letteratura Italiana*, Einaudi, Vol III, 912-18.
[131] https://www.archivio.francarame.it/scheda.aspx?IDScheda=62609&IDImmagine=1&IDOpera=118
[132] T. Behan, *Dario Fo. Revolutionary Theatre* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), 25.
[133] Behan, *Dario Fo. Revolutionary Theatre*, 31.

performances to analyse the political and social issues of their time. In the first volume of their two-part publication, *Compagni senza censura* (Comrades without censorship), the collective penned their political manifesto, outlining the aims and objectives of their theatre-making.[134] These insights are valuable for understanding the social relations within the collective. *Nuova Scena* defined themselves as a 'collective of militants who put themselves at the service of revolutionary forces […] to encourage the growth of real revolutionary forces which effectively brings the working class to power'.[135] This represented a form of vanguardism in their approach, where they were prefiguring revolution, serving it, rather than leading it. The statute of *Nuova Scena* explicitly articulated how theatre for the collective served as a tool for social liberation, aiming to critique the capitalist cultural industry and consumer society.[136] The social relations of production within the collective were crucially shaped by the abolishing of traditional hierarchical theatre roles (such as *capocomico*, first actor, stage manager, etc.) and promoting equal sharing of tasks and responsibilities.[137] This egalitarian approach extended beyond general and organizational decision-making to encompass performance itself, with responsibilities and stage roles distributed equally among the members. This genuine intention to create a horizontal structure, however, sometimes proved to be an unrealistic task. For example, in October 1968 *Nuova Scena* premiered their play *Grande pantomima con bandiere e pupazzi medi e piccoli* (Big pantomime with flags and small and middle-sized puppets) at *Casa del Popolo* in Cesena, where actors used masks and puppets in a satire against the risk of fascism looming on the Italian cultural and political scene.[138] Although Rame and Fo gave themselves minor roles, a challenge inherent in the equal distribution of stage roles was that the other actors often lacked the same level of talent, skill, or experience as the couple, and they struggled to keep the audience's attention, or even be heard. [139] Fo for example recounted how

[134] Teatro politico della Associazione Nuova Scena, *Compagni senza Censura,* Vol.1 (Mazzotta, 1970).
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Valentini, *La Storia di Dario Fo,* 106.
[138] Ibid., 106-107.
[139] Ibid.

he and Rame had to intervene with jokes and improvisations, so that, by the end of the season, through their constant changes in the tour, the couple eventually had the most important roles, which created discontent in the collective: 'When the show was over, we had the most important roles. Some protested, accused us of overpowering them'.[140] This tension was never fully resolved; however, it was mitigated by shared political values and, crucially, by *Nuova Scena*'s invention of the *terzo atto*, 'the third act', an open debate held with the cast and audience at the end of each performance. More than just a discussion, the *terzo atto* became a vital space for political engagement and collective reflection, often unfolding into the early hours of the morning. These encounters, particularly within the ARCI circuit, at times lasted longer than the performances themselves and played a central role in shaping the group's social and artistic dynamics, as both *Nuova Scena* members and audience members actively participated in the creative process.[141] Given that they were performing for the working class and individuals who likely had no prior theatre experience as spectators, the collective was keen on gathering their perspectives on the content and form of their shows, the selection of topics, and their political approach. They valued creative input from audience members, drawing inspiration from their stories or concerns. After developing a script based on the participants' suggestions, it underwent discussion and approval by the entire collective. Subsequently, local ARCI associations assisted in organising and promoting the shows, facilitating their tours across Italy.[142] Although political theatre was not an original idea in those years, *Nuova Scena* developed a programme which conceived theatre at the service of class and social struggle not just ideologically, but concretely as part of their daily practice, both in the attempt to develop an equal organisation of the group and in 'the development of their performances through a dialectic relationship with their audience, who, from a passive role is therefore transformed into an active one, participating to the collective's political choices'.[143] In this way, the audience became

[140] Ibid.
[141] Valentini, *La Storia di Dario Fo,*108.
[142] Behan, *Dario Fo. Revolutionary Theatre*, 30.
[143] Teatro politico della Associazione Nuova Scena, *Compagni senza Censura* (Milano: Mazzotta, 1970), Vol. 1, 9.

integrated into the creative process of the work, not merely as ticket holders but as active participants. Some of the debates were recorded and transcribed and are included in the collective's publication *Compagni Senza Censura*. This is an example of an intervention from a person in the audience:

> I would like to say something very simple, that is, the positive aspect of these theatrical events lies in the relationship that they create, I mean something happens in the performance and then this is discussed, as I think about what was said by Dario Fo and another comrade, this discussion is the most important moment of the performance and I think it is also the objective of the comrades of Nuova Scena. Why? Because it allows people to express themselves, to reason, to speak in front of others, perhaps for the first time. I believe this moment represents a significant leap in consciousness for the individual who speaks, a very important one.[144]

This excerpt illustrates that the scope of the debates extended beyond merely discussing the topics proposed in the shows. It represented a profound democratic experience, a tangible moment of collective political action and reflection, evident in the social relations it fostered, allowing people to express themselves and to blend local realities with broader political and ideological concerns. I further argue that Rame's creative political practices in her work with her theatre collectives with Fo, and especially in the collective discussions in the third act, sought to raise individual awareness within the community, echoing Arendt's notion of public happiness, the joy derived from collective political participation. As anticipated in the introduction to this chapter, Damian Martin's exploration of Arendt's concept of 'spaces of appearance', which 'come into being whenever [people] are together in the manner of speech and action', is especially significant in this context.[145] Arendt's idea in fact resonates with

[144] Teatro politico della Associazione Nuova Scena, *Compagni senza Censura*, 381.
[145] D. Damian Martin, (2019) *Sites of Appearance, Matters of Thought: Hannah Arendt and Performance Philosophy.* Performance Philosophy Journal, 5 (1). ISSN 2057-7176.

the embodied, dialogic practices of the collectives. In this framework, happiness is not conceived as an individual pursuit but as something that emerges from collective engagement: through dialogue, reflection, deliberation, confrontation, and the mutual enjoyment of being in each other's company. Through this lens, the creative collectives functioned as such a space, resisting exclusion and fostering political agency beyond institutional frameworks. By emphasising the interplay between political engagement and theatrical expression, this perspective underscores how *Nuova Scena*'s approach cultivated collective visibility and interaction in public spaces, ultimately fostering a democratic and empowering environment. The collective attracted a predominantly working-class audience, particularly as they performed in small towns, where attending a theatre production was often a new experience for many.[146] This practice also echoes the way Rame's original family engaged with local communities in the Italian provinces. Participating in this kind of theatrical experience had the potential to raise awareness among audience members about the forms of exploitation and oppression they faced, issues that were introduced and examined during the third act. For example, the performance might highlight the dual workload experienced by women who manage both household responsibilities and factory or office work, or it could shed light on the health challenges faced by factory workers as a result arising of repetitive tasks on assembly lines.[147] Looking at this approach from a feminist lens, unveils another crucial aspect. For example, Federici's emphasis on how collective creativity can foster a profound shift in consciousness strongly resonates with the 'leap of consciousness' as underscored in the anonymous intervention, and provide valuable frameworks which inform my interpretation of *Nuova Scena's* work:

[146] Rame and Farrell, *Non è tempo di Nostalgia*, 50-52.
[147] Teatro politico della Associazione Nuova Scena, *Compagni senza Censura,* Vol.1 (Milano: Mazzotta, 1970).

> At its best, one of the most creative activities is being involved in a struggle with other people, breaking our isolation, seeing our relations with others change, discovering new dimensions in our lives.[148]

Attending *Nuova Scena*'s third act provided audience members with a valuable opportunity to actively engage, speak up, express their views, discuss ideas and problems, analyse performances, and propose new topics to the collective. This form of active participation represented a chance for individuals to be involved, raise awareness about their oppressions, and share their struggles with others. Federici's insights into collective creativity provide therefore a further lens for interpreting the social relations of production within the collective and transformative potential of such collaborative endeavours. Furthermore, I read the way Rame and her collaborators listened to and understood where their audience came from, as an element that resonates with the practices Rame learned and developed from her original family, particularly from their relationality and connection with people and territory. However, Rame now had to balance and mediate between this democratic, horizontal vision of the collective social relations, and the reality of the growing tensions within *Nuova Scena*.

In the collective everyone had multiple roles, an organisation that again recalls Rame's family theatre, where each actor had also other specific tasks, for example building the set, driving the company's van, and so on. However, while in Famiglia Rame roles were determined according to the hierarchical structure of *capocomicato*, with *Nuova Scena* Rame and Fo attempted to create a horizontal, equal structure based on collective labour. Pulce and Scarpa recall how Fo tried to turn *Nuova Scena* into one collective instead of being made of two companies, but first, its members, who feared his overbearing personality, preferred to continue the division of the work into more than one group working at the same time.[149] Secondly, ARCI demanded they run at least three shows in their second year of life, for the

[148] S. Federici, 'Putting Feminism Back on Its Feet, in Social Text, Spring - Summer, 1984, No. 9/10, The 60's without Apology (Duke University Press, 1984), pp. 338-346. https://www.jstor.org/stable/466587.
[149] Pulce and Scarpa, "La rivoluzione in tournée," 913.

1969/70 season. The shows, in the end, would be five, two created by the other company, and three new theatre pieces signed by Fo as author: *Mistero Buffo*, *Legami pure che tanto spacco tutto lo stesso* (Tie me up and I'll still smash everything), and *L'operaio conosce 300 parole, il padrone 1000: per questo lui e' il padrone* (The worker knows 300 words, the boss knows 1000: that's why he's the boss).[150] Rame was part of the last two, while Fo was on stage with the premiere of his one-man play *Mistero Buffo* (1969). The logistical division between the couple allowed the development of several separate tours at the same time, with Rame in charge of the shows she was touring without Fo.[151] In a way, this represented a different kind of hierarchical organisation, regardless of their genuine intentions. Nuova Scena, as a private association, used its ticketing policy to prevent police access to its premises. At the same time, the group began experiencing repeated clashes with the authorities, who sought to censor or halt their work due to its critical stance toward the political and religious establishment. The collective, however, had now to face even bigger troubles with the Italian Communist Party (PCI), because the content of their performances began to appear too divergent from the party line. It was above all the show *L'operaio conosce 300 parole, il padrone 1000: per questo lui e' il padrone* (The worker knows 300 words, the boss knows 1000: that's why he's the boss), led by Rame, that caused the conflict. The reason for the dispute in that play, was an open criticism of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and its increasingly moderate political stance. As outlined in the introduction, both Rame and Fo in fact opposed the PCI's endorsement of the *compromesso storico*, a political compromise with the Christian Democrats (DC). In a later interview with Swiss radio, Rame elaborated on her position:

> Ci siamo messi al servizio della classe a cui sentiamo di appartenere, il proletariato. […] Quello che ci sembrava necessario era fornire alla base del PCI gli elementi necessari per riprendere a lottare in un certo

[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.

> modo. Il PCI ha perso il suo vigore, la sua direzione; ha smarrito la strada, e da anni non si parla più di rivoluzione. È una parola proibita.[152]
>
> We have put ourselves at the service of the class to which we feel we belong, the proletariat. […] What we felt was necessary, was to provide the base of the PCI with the necessary elements to resume fighting in a certain way. The PCI has lost its vigour, its destination; it has lost its way, and there has been no talk of revolution for years. It's a forbidden word.

Rame openly positioned their theatre in service of the proletariat, aiming to reenergise the PCI's base by reintroducing revolutionary discourse that the party had increasingly abandoned. This also clarifies that, for her, theatre was not merely a form of artistic expression but a crucial vehicle for political engagement and activism. Since the *Case del Popolo* were affiliated with the PCI, they began to boycott *Nuova Scena*'s work, not only because it failed to align with the party's stance, but because it openly criticised it. Furthermore, Rame described the decline of *Case del Popolo*, which were supposed to be spaces for workers to meet, discuss, and study and were instead slowly reduced to 'the dispensing of alcoholic drinks, dance halls, and billiard rooms'.[153] The continuous and growing tensions with both the police and with the Communist party, who, from January 1970 began to deny their premises for their shows, and therefore with the people who organised their tours through ARCI circles, added to the internal tensions and conflicts in the collective and brought a necessary change. *Nuova Scena* could not find any spaces in which to perform in Milan as the Communist party decided to stop supporting their work.[154] Rame returned her party membership card, and from then on, the party reserved its attacks on them both politically and logistically. The collective finally split into two factions, the name *Nuova*

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[152] Rame's radio interview to RSI (Swiss Radio and Television), transcribed and translated by the author. Archivi RSI, 28.11.1973, https://www.rsi.ch/cultura/arte/Franca-Rame--1818537.html
[153] Ibid.
[154] Pulce and Scarpa, 'La rivoluzione in tournée', 914.

Scena was kept by the other company led by Franceschi, who kept working with ARCI, while the group working with Rame and Fo, including Ciarchi and Ricordi, decided to leave the collective in September 1970 to create a new one. Rame, at this point, realised that the idea of an equal, horizontal collective was impractical and unrealistic.[155] I read this crisis with *Nuova Scena* as a first step in Rame's re-adjustment of the collaborative theatre-making process she developed with Fo, which had still to go through some more serious turbulence. It is not possible to read her work and the social relations of production in these collectives as detached from the Italian historical and political context of those years. Those relations are 'produced both by and in tension with the wider cultures from which they emerge'.[156] These wider cultures are part of my analysis in the following section.

1.5 *La Comune*

The newly formed collective was different from *Nuova Scena* as it was in fact an organisation with a very large group of associates, workers, students, and intellectuals outside of the formal institutions of the radical left who contributed to the creative and organizational input. Instead of focusing only on the touring system, this time they looked for a space in Milan to work as a collective, with a more organised structure. They rented an old disused factory in the suburbs of the city, which for a while became the group's headquarters, called Il Capannone di Via Colletta (The Colletta Road Warehouse).[157] They worked for weeks to transform the old building into a makeshift theatre space with a capacity of eight hundred seats. As Rame recalls: 'We got blisters on our hands through working with saws and hammers for a month'.[158] Here she shows how the new collective kept a collaborative approach as *Nuova Scena*, where everyone contributed to the labour. Another important change instead involved their audience. Once they

[155] Rame and Farrell, *Non è tempo di Nostalgia,* 51-52.
[156] T. Six, writing as T. Cornford, *Theatre Studios, A political history of ensemble theatre-making,* (London: Routledge, 2021), 20
[157] C. Valentini, *La Storia di Dario Fo*, 131.
[158] Ibid.,131.

were excluded from any theatrical or political circuit, they attracted a different audience, younger people, middle-class students, workers, and the new left militants and intellectuals. *La Comune* (The Commune) developed therefore as a unique model that emerged out of distinct circumstances. As in *Nuova Scena*, they recreated a private membership system to avoid censorship, and for their first production, they had eighteen thousand subscribers, which became thirty thousand after a year. As Behan explains, this was five times the number of season ticket holders at Milan's most prestigious theatre, the Piccolo Teatro.[159] On the other hand, *La Comune* began facing legal proceedings, as they once again refused to allow police attendance. The *Capannone* became a meeting point for left-wing extra-parliamentary groups, who helped to create *La Comune*'s local branches in Italian major cities, developing an alternative both to the official theatre circuit and to the ARCI circles.[160]

By this point, Rame and Fo had partially moved away from the horizontal model of creative collaboration, transitioning toward a more structured organisation for *La Comune*, one that included roles such as president and secretary. Although they remained allies of extra-parliamentary leftist groups, this time they did not intend to become the artistic instrument of any party or political organisation. This stance made their work even more difficult. In fact, they became outcasts within the Italian theatre world, excluded from both mainstream venues and left-wing ARCI spaces, despite continuing to attract considerable audience participation.[161] Fo and Rame this time wanted to keep some autonomy in the creative process to be able to experiment with new theatre forms and ideas. Gradually, the hierarchical structure of *capocomicato* tradition returned in their work, although still entangled with a co-operative way of working. The collective's life became highly intense and deeply dedicated to their political cause, with everyone working daily, even on weekends. Rather than taking summer vacations, they arranged seminars to delve into research topics for their upcoming productions, such as studying the history of the workers' movement in Italy or

[159] T. Behan, *Dario Fo. Revolutionary Theatre*, 42.
[160] C. Valentini, *La Storia di Dario Fo,* 134.
[161] P. Sciotto. Interview with the author, 30 June 2022.

the Chinese cultural revolution.[162] An example of this collective process is for example behind the production of La Comune's premiere of the play *Morte Accidentale di un anarchico* (Accidental Death of an Anarchist), which was based on real events.[163] To grasp the political and historical context in which the collective was operating, it is necessary to recall that during those years, as outlined in the thesis introduction, Italy experienced a wave of extreme terrorism marked by numerous attacks, such as the bombing at the Banca Nazionale Dell'Agricoltura (National Bank of Agriculture) in Milan in December 1969. Giuseppe Pinelli, an anarchist railway worker, was a suspect who fell from the fourth-floor window of a police station during his interrogation. Terrorist attacks were part of *strategia della tensione*, the so-called strategy of tension in Italy at that time, as explained in the thesis introduction. They were carried out by neo-fascist groups with the help of the secret services, aimed at criminalising the left and ultimately creating an authoritarian government.[164] This means that members of La Comune experienced threats and attacks because of their investigative research and the revolutionary political message of their performance. A strong sense of solidarity among members, together with a shared commitment to their political cause, informed their relations.

During the 1971/72 season, La Comune presented two shows, including *Fedayn* (Resistance Fighters), with eleven Palestinian refugees invited by Rame to perform in Italy after a trip to Lebanon, in Beirut, in 1971.[165] The income from the show was destined to the Palestinian Liberation Front. The collective's political activism however had significant repercussions. Valentini describes how the summer of 1972 marked the beginning of a series of serious and dangerous harassments against the collective: *La Comune* was evicted from their warehouse, the *Capannone*, while, at the same time, Rame and Fo were evicted from their flat in Milan as their landlord disapproved of their pro-Palestinian play, *Fedayn*.[166] On top of

[162] Valentini, *La Storia di Dario Fo,* 134.
[163] D. Fo, *Morte accidentale di un anarchico* (Torino: Einaudi, 1974); D. Fo, *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*. Transl. by G. Hanna, adapted by G. Richards (London: Methuen, 1980).
[164] T. Behan, *Dario Fo. Revolutionary Theatre,* 47.
[165] https://www.archivio.francarame.it/scheda.aspx?IDScheda=2077&IDOpera=66
[166] Valentini, *La Storia di Dario Fo,* 144.

this, they received a notice of an offence from a judge on charges of criminal-political activities for inciting prison riots. The accusation turned out to be a fabrication but contributed to the climate of suspicion surrounding their theatre work. As mentioned in the introduction, one factor behind the attacks on Rame was her involvement with *Soccorso Rosso* (Red Aid), a charitable organisation she founded through *La Comune t*o support left-wing political prisoners.[167] The problem however was that, during the same period, the far-left militant group *Brigate Rosse* (Red Brigades) began carrying out violent attacks in Italy. Rame's support for detainees, some of whom were accused of terrorism, drew suspicion from the authorities. As a result, *La Comune* faced difficulties securing performance venues and had to contend with growing threats to Rame and Fo's personal safety. In response, their partners organised safe escorts for the couple to ensure their security after shows.[168] Instead of portraying themselves as victims, *La Comune* opted to confront and expose on stage the challenges they faced, using farce and political satire. For example, on 27th October 1973, they performed their play *Guerra di Popolo in Cile* (*The People's War in Chile)* in response to the real coup d'etat in Chile.[169] They faked a repressive intervention by the police while on stage, 'accidentally' intercepting a police radio communication through their stage microphones, in front of ten thousand spectators at the *Palazzetto dello Sport* in Turin, who had not realised the deception. This strategy served as both a warning to the audience about the looming danger of a far-right *coup d'état* in Italy and to mock the authorities and the police at the same time.[170] Rame and Fo were in fact aware that the police were controlling their phone at home and spying on their performances. Constant police surveillance, along with threats from far-right extremists, significantly shaped the relationships among members of *La Comune,* fostering a network of mutual support and collective safety. This dynamic influenced not only their creative processes but also the content and structure of their

[167] Rame organised for three thousand people from their audience to send detainees letters, parcels, money, and books. She often went to visit them personally, to check how they were treated. See F. Rame, *Non parlami degli archi, parlami delle tue galere*, (F.R. Edizioni, 1984).
[168] P. Sciotto. Interview with the author, June 30, 2022.
[169] D. Fo, *Guerra di Popolo in Cile* (Verona: Bertani Editore, 1973).
[170] Farrell, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame. Theatre, Politics, Life*, 154-156.

performances, a theme I explore further through the perspective of one of the collective's artists.

1.6 Piero Sciotto: Direct Testimony about Social Relations of Production within *La Comune*

Sicilian musician and actor Piero Sciotto joined *La Comune* in 1972 when they wanted to create a show about prisons, and they were looking for a southern Italian singer-guitarist. He joined the collective as a musician, thinking of going back to Catania, in Sicily, where he was a university student. Instead, the experience of working with Rame and Fo, from whom he learned the art of acting, fundamentally changed his life. He worked with them as an actor and musician, later taking on roles as administrator and producer for *Compagnia Teatrale Fo Rame*. His memories of his experience help us understand 'what collective theatre work was like fifty years ago in Italy'.[171] In our interview, Sciotto explains that Rame was directly involved in *La Comune*'s organisation and administration: 'She was very present and had a lot of experience'.[172] He clarifies that, although the term *La Comune* is usually associated with the idea of a commune, where people live together, this was not the case as everybody lived in their own homes. They ran the venue, organised performances, raised funds for *Soccorso Rosso* and organised shows in occupied factories, universities, and schools. Sciotto describes what was a total way of living the experience, where there was no rigid division of roles in the collective, yet there was recognition of greater competence and responsibility among certain individuals over others: 'We would load and unload the truck, set up the scenes, lights, spotlights. I was also in charge of the tour and the organization together with Franca'.[173] This suggests a convergence of evenly distributed roles in the collective, this time recognising the pivotal roles of the leading actors Fo and Rame, which inclined the group towards adopting a *capocomicato* structure. Sciotto warns

[171] P. Sciotto. Interview with the author, June 30, 2022
[172] Ibid.
[173] Ibid.

about ‘the risk to talk about their work by abstracting them from the historical and political conflict, and the need of considering what was happening outside the theatre or rehearsal room.’[174] He had first-hand experience of the dramatic and violent events that impacted the collective during those years, which gradually undermined the group’s relationships. Every member was affected by these events, which ultimately led, if not to a definitive end, certainly to a redefinition of its structure and objectives. Sciotto refers to the many attacks, threats, bombs against *La Comune*, but, above all, to the most violent attack, which happened on March 9th, 1973. He recalls how that day he was rehearsing at Rame and Fo’s flat in Milan, together with Fo and musicians Ciccio Busacca and Carpo Lanzi, when Rame said she was going to the hairdresser. Later they received a frantic phone call, and they rushed out with Fo. They found Rame in front of Teatro Dal Verme, distraught, her jumper torn. As mentioned in the introduction, Rame had been kidnapped as soon as she left her flat, pushed into a van, tortured, and raped by five paramilitary fascists, who then threw her, bleeding, out of the van in a nearby park. Sciotto explains that only twenty-five years later, thanks to an investigative journalist for the newspaper Repubblica, Giovanni Maria Bellu, they found out that Rame's rape was ordered by high-ranking officials in the carabinieri, a branch of the Italian police.[175] These attacks inevitably shook and had a strong impact on the lives of each member of *La Comune*, affecting their relationships, friendships, and work. The pain of these memories remains vivid in Sciotto’s testimony, as well as in the accounts of others I interviewed who were close to Rame and Fo. They also illustrate how their bold, provocative political theatre and activism, particularly Rame’s involvement with *Soccorso Rosso*, posed a significant challenge to Italian authorities and right-wing movements. Indeed, the success of their theatre work and the large audiences they attracted, had a profound impact not only on Italian theatre but also on the cultural, political, and social landscape of Italy.[176]

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[174] Ibid.
[175] Although the names of the attackers and their senders are known, they have never been punished. It was ‘a state rape’. See Farrell, *Dario Fo Franca Rame,* 142.
[176] P. Sciotto. Interview with the author, June 30, 2022.

In the context of the social relations of production, Sciotto's testimony provides insight into the material conditions in which Rame shaped these dynamics, particularly regarding their private and public dimension. For example, he portrays Rame and Fo's apartment in those years was more than just their residence; it was the central hub where members of the collective engaged in work, research, writing, rehearsals, discussions, and simply spent time together, enjoying each other's company. It mirrored the dynamics of Rame's original theatre family, particularly in its emphasis on mutual care and a work ethic closely integrated with personal life. This aspect can be understood as an embryonic phase of a practice that Rame would later refine and expand, particularly in relation to the company's use of the home as a hub for artistic and political activity, an evolution that I will examine in greater depth in Chapter Three.

In the summer of 1973, tensions within *La Comune* however reached an insurmountable point. Valentini attributes the primary source of conflict to one of the extra parliamentary groups, *Avanguardia Operaia* (Workers' Vanguard), which sought control, particularly after *La Comune* had established a national organization with eighty local branches and an impressive theatrical infrastructure.[177] Simultaneously, Rame and Fo found themselves confronting once again accusations of dominating the collective, ultimately prompting their departure from the project. Rame recounted the reasons behind the end of the collectives' experience:

> The dominant force in our collective had been a sort of damaging cult of democracy, which was the prime cause of so much dissent, so many conflicts and separations. Determined not to be star players, Dario and I committed the opposite error, in other words, we had left our collective without any real direction.[178]

Rame was the first to leave the collective, partly because of her recent traumatic personal experience, followed a few months later by Fo, along with

[177] Valentini, *La Storia di Dario Fo,* 144.
[178] Farrell, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame*, 147.

a small part of the original collective.[179] They gave up their rights to company property, while the remaining members took possession of all the technical equipment belonging to the collective. This included stage structures, and the Volkswagen van used for touring.[180] Rame understood that a theatre collective lacking clear leadership would struggle to effectively produce and stage a show if all decisions were made collectively in assemblies. This realisation led to the understanding that some centralised decision-making was necessary for success.[181]

On December 12th, 1973, a third new group was finally created, with a different name: *Il Collettivo Teatrale La Comune, diretto da Dario Fo*, (Theatre Collective La Comune, directed by Dario Fo), which saw both Rame and Fo taking on leadership roles within their group, despite only Fo being officially recognised as the director. This naming choice highlighted the emergence of clear leadership within the collective, which marks the end of the co-operative system. However, it also reveals a problematic aspect, mirroring the patriarchal structure of the *capocomicato* system, where women artists in the company were assigned administrative and managerial roles, as happened in the *Famiglia Rame*. The new group rented from the municipality an old, abandoned building in a large park in the centre of Milan, Palazzina Liberty, in 1974.[182] They renovated it with the help of the neighbourhood, students, and workers, at which point the municipality tried to repossess the building. So they occupied it. They kept the membership card system and the purchase of admission tickets at more than popular prices, always with the function of evading censorship and permanently qualifying the relations with the spectators.

Sciotto recalls their work at Palazzina as an extraordinary experience. He describes it as 'the first great act of involvement from below, without populist rhetoric'.[183] He recounts how people from many parts of Italy and beyond were involved. Artists of all genres, including famous Italian

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[179] See Rame's letters to her comrades, following her resignation from *La Comune.* https://www.archivio.francarame.it/scheda.aspx?IDScheda=1949&IDOpera=86
[180] Farrell, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame*, 150.
[181] Ibid.
[182] P. Sciotto. Interview with the author, June 30, 2022.
[183] Ibid.

musicians such as Fabrizio De Andrè, Lucio Dalla, and Enzo Jannacci regularly visited Palazzina, which became an active hub of cultural production in Milan, which hosted performances as well as concerts, conferences, and talks with artists from all over the world including international theatre artists such as Arianne Mnouchkine, Odin Teatret, The Living Theatre, filmmakers Joris Ivens, Bernardo Bertolucci, while artists Sebastian Matta and Ibrahim Kodra painted frescoes on the walls of the Palazzina.[184] Theatre scholar, practitioner, and former collaborator of Rame and Fo, Walter Valeri describes those years at Palazzina as 'an extraordinary, unrepeatable chapter in the history of our country, of our European political theatre, in one of its most significant expressions'.[185]

The shift in conditions encouraged Rame to develop her own work. Her involvement at the Palazzina Liberty, alongside a wide range of activities, including international exchanges, encounters, including with feminist activist groups, contributed significantly to her artistic emancipation, ultimately establishing her as a renowned figure and leading to international recognition as an accomplished theatre practitioner. Palazzina Liberty provided the context where for the first time she officially expressed her artistic voice, finding her place centre stage, showcasing her monologues about women (which I analyse in the next chapter) and asserting her role more confidently within the collective's framework, despite maintaining the ambiguity of having her husband's name as the leader of the group. Sciotto recalls Rame's powerful performance presenting her solo show *Tutta Casa, Letto e Chiesa* (All House, Bed and Church) at Palazzina Liberty in front of 'an oceanic audience', which premiered on December 6, 1977.[186] This ground-breaking show made history, leading Rame to embark on solo international tours, including in the UK, in the following years.

This new version of *La Comune* still included their audience in the third act represented by the post-show discussions.[187] Rame's engagement with the audience extended even beyond the theatre, building strong bonds

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[184] Ibid.
[185] W. Valeri, http://www.lamacchinasognante.com/dario-fo-e-franca-rame-alla-palazzina-liberty-walter-valeri/.
[186] P. Sciotto. Interview with the author, June 30, 2022.
[187] Collettivo Teatrale La Comune, *Compagni senza Censura* (Mazzotta, 1970), Vol. 2.

with factory workers and local councils, for example rallying hundreds of supporters to resist a police eviction at Palazzina Liberty.[188] Rame actively listened to the workers' concerns and provided practical support, especially during factory closures in those years. The collective demonstrated solidarity by performing in occupied factories as workers engaged in strikes and occupations. One notable instance involved a glass factory where workers, in 1975, occupied the premises amidst unpaid wages and halted sales. A worker offered 8,000 unsold glasses for the cause, prompting Rame to arrange these glasses for sale during a performance attended by 7,000 people. Every glass was sold, showcasing the collective's community involvement.[189] However, not every actor agreed with these social causes, especially the ones who were hired for specific productions, as this way of working required a total commitment on the part of every member of the collective. As Farrell notices, 'the troupe was now a more conventional hire-and-fire company'.[190] Which means that, beyond working with their loyal collaborators, such as Piero Sciotto, they also brought in professional actors as needed.

Giorgio Biavati, a well-known Italian actor, was hired for the play *Clacson, Trombette e Pernacchi* (Trumpets and Raspberries), during for the 1980–81 season.[191] Biavati recounts how, at first, he was offered minimal pay, like everyone else in the collective, but he refused. Rame valued Biavati as an actor and wanted him to be part of the cast, therefore she mediated with him, proposing that they played for his salary in a game of poker.[192] He won and managed to secure higher pay. Biavati did not share the same political commitment as the rest of the collective, most of whom worked for a minimum wage: 'La Comune was a political thing, you carry the flag, you don't want money'.[193] However, he remembers Rame's attention and care towards her collaborators, for example when they rehearsed at Palazzina

[188] F. Rame with J. Farrell, *Non* è *tempo di nostalgia,* (Pisa-Cagliari: Della Porta, 2013).
[189] Franca Rame, interview with Eugenio Barba, ISTA 1996, Odin Teatret, Holstebro (Video recording, courtesy of Eugenio Barba and Odin Teatret archive).
[190] Ibid. 152.
[191] Sciotto said that this play was the last one performed by *La Comune* at Palazzina Liberty, before the group dissolved. P. Sciotto. Interview with the author, June 30, 2022.
[192] G. Biavati. Interview with the author, May 23, 2022.
[193] Ibid.

Liberty, where there was no heating, and they sat on rusty chairs. Rame, aware of how uncomfortable it was to work in that kind of environment, made sure they had regular breaks, treating them at the nearest bar or inviting them for a hot meal at hers and Fo's place after rehearsing. Biavati's account of the kind of labour demanded offers at the same time a different view of their relations in the last moments of the collective experience:

> For Clacson and Trumpets, we only rehearsed one day sitting around the table, the next day we were in the theatre. I liked it very much because we were in the theatre, where we had to build the scene, we cut, sewed, and painted. We would participate in the construction of the stage, a very beautiful thing, which everyone hated, but I liked it very much because I was born in the sawdust of the stage, having been born into a family that had a stage workshop […]. Other actors could not stand it.[194]

This highlights how the working conditions and financial compensation were far from ideal for actors. Furthermore, both Biavati and Sciotto describe *La Comune*'s actors as outsiders in the theatre world, without any official and recognised space or theatre in Milan, even though Rame and Fo at the time were the most performed authors around the world and they represented the Italian theatre company with the largest following in terms of audience and notoriety. Sciotto looks at the whole experience as off the record, part of the political mass movement, which eventually came to an end.[195] *La Comune* officially ended when in 1980 they lost their case with the Milan City Council, and they had to leave Palazzina Liberty.[196] *Clacson, Trombette e Pernacchi* was in fact the last play they performed there.[197] Rame and Fo were exhausted, as were their collaborators. Those had been exciting years for the collective, but they had worked under extremely difficult conditions. The *Palazzina Liberty* was uncomfortable, cold, and poorly equipped, making it a

[194] Ibid.
[195] P. Sciotto. Interview with the author, June 30, 2022.
[196] Farrell, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame,* 262.
[197] P. Sciotto. Interview with the author, June 30, 2022.

constant struggle to keep it operational. On top of that, they also had to organise their touring schedule.[198]

With the advent of Berlusconi's commercial television channels and the corruption of Italian politics in the following years, Sciotto describes how everything that had been dormant in the 1970s finally exploded: ‘Our experience no longer made sense and we disbanded. It had been an exciting experience, but it was over’.[199] In the following years, while keeping in touch, everyone went on to other experiences. Rame and Fo toured abroad, for example Rame with *Tutta Casa Letto e Chiesa* and Fo with *Mistero Buffo*. In 1980 Rame was the protagonist of the TV show *Buonasera con Franca Rame* (Good Evening with Franca Rame) on RAI TV. Sciotto describes the period post Palazzina Liberty as a moment of transition, during which each member of the collective sought their own path. He, for example, completed the university studies he had set aside while working with the collective, earning a degree in Political Science in 1981. By 1983, Rame and Fo had revived their *Compagnia Teatrale Fo Rame* and invited Sciotto to join them. He took on the role of organiser and administrator, recalling how Rame closely supervised all aspects of the company, increasingly assuming the role of *capacomica*.[200]

1.7 Conclusions

My reading of Rame’s active role in shaping the social relations of production highlights a practice grounded in material, embodied, and relational forms of collaboration. Her work demonstrates a commitment to collective creation not only as an aesthetic strategy but also as a mode of political engagement. This interpretation is informed by Damian Martin’s reading of Arendt’s notion of spaces of appearance, which emphasises the emergence of political subjectivity through visibility and relationality, as exemplified in the

[198] Ibid.
[199] Ibid.
[200] Ibid.

collectives' use of the *terzo atto* (third act).[201] Additionally, Federici's analysis of creative activity as a collective experience of struggle, inform my interpretation of Rame's agency in shaping the social relations of production as expressions of material and embodied relationality. This perspective has guided my analysis of how Rame gradually assumed the role of a radical *capacomica*, meaning a form of leadership that encompasses multiple responsibilities, including her political activism, attentiveness to collaborators, and ability to engage a broad popular audience, not merely as passive recipients, but as active participants in the theatre-making process. Therefore, I read the end of the experiences with *Nuova Scena* and *La Comune* not as a failure, but as an opportunity for Rame to explore and balance different approaches to social relations of production, in a process she continued to develop and adapt throughout her career. I interpret her work through a materialist and feminist engagement with creative collaboration, care, and social reproduction, an approach that foregrounds the political significance of her negotiation of hierarchy, individualism, and authorship. Rame's practice was undoubtedly shaped by early experiences within her theatre family, but she later asserted her agency in transforming the social relations of production through her work with Fo and their theatre collectives. Whereas *Nuova Scena* aspired to a cooperative and egalitarian model, Rame's experience with *La Comune* led her to recognise the need to balance a horizontal approach with elements of *capocomicato* inherited from her time with the *Famiglia Rame*. Although this model retained elements of patriarchy, it also entailed a form of mediated leadership in artistic matters, while still allowing for shared responsibility within the group. For Rame, this compromise was essential to maintaining the quality and coherence of their theatre work.

The comparison to a jazz ensemble, where individual improvisation is grounded in collective structure, demonstrates that leadership does not undermine collaboration, but can in fact foster and enhance it, allowing a collective endeavour. This reflected a commitment to an ethic of respect,

[201] D. Damian Martin, (2019) *Sites of Appearance, Matters of Thought: Hannah Arendt and Performance Philosophy.* Performance Philosophy Journal, 5 (1). ISSN 2057-7176.

care, and active listening, while navigating the unresolved tension between two opposing models: the hierarchical and gendered structure of *capocomicato* and the horizontal organisation of the collective. This was evident in her practice of involving others and creating space for them on stage, as well as in her efforts to empower those working alongside her, even as she and Fo retained leadership roles, with Fo maintaining a recognised position of authority, especially during the second iteration of *La Comune.* Rame demonstrated care by supporting colleagues when working in sub-optimal conditions, whether rehearsing in uncomfortable spaces, as in Palazzina Liberty, or playfully mediating delicate negotiations, such as suggesting a game of poker with a fellow performer in order to cast him and help secure a fair wage.

My reading of her role as a modern, radical *capacomica* therefore encompasses her multifaceted contributions to theatre and her active role in reshaping the social relations of production within collective contexts, framing these actions as a form of feminist praxis. As I have noted in the introduction, Rame did not publicly identify as a feminist. Nevertheless, my analysis has led me to explore the feminist potential embedded in her practice. Before examining how Rame developed her role as a *capacomica* in the post-collectives' phase of her theatre work with Fo and their collaborators, it is crucial to consider her engagement with Italian feminisms in the 1970s, which underpins my feminist reading of her practice and informs its later evolution, as I explore in the next chapter.

Chapter 2. Rame and Italian Feminisms (1970-1980)

Building on the previous discussion, this chapter examines whether and in what ways Rame's work in the 1970s drew on the theories and practices developed by Italian feminist movements. It explores how feminist discourses intersected with Rame's ideological stance and the extent to which they informed the development of theatre pieces centred on women's experiences. Key questions include: What was Rame's relationship to feminism? And how might this relationship reshape our understanding of the connection between her political commitments and her theatre practice? To address these questions, the first part of the chapter examines various strands of the emerging feminist movements in Italy between the late 1960s and early 1980s, mapping the political connections between Rame and these groups. The focus is on the social and political dynamics of specific groups active in Rome and Milan, where Rame lived. The second part of the chapter offers a thematic analysis of how Rame used her monologues to challenge her audience through a theatrical approach informed by personal experience, capturing and depicting women's oppression, while employing her theatre as a vehicle for activist struggle, aiming at women's liberation.

During their time with *La Comune*, Rame and Fo produced a series of theatre monologues that stood in solidarity with the Italian feminist campaigns of the 1970s and their pursuit of alternative politics.[1] Rame's relationship with the Italian women's movement in those years however needs to be understood in relation to her political activism on one hand, and her reluctance to join specific Italian feminist groups on the other. So far in the thesis I examined the roots of Rame's political activism and the reasons for leaving the Italian Communist Party (PCI) in 1969.[2] I also explored how *La Comune* engaged with extra-parliamentary leftist groups, such as *Avanguardia Operaia* (Workers' Vanguard*), Lotta Continua* (Ongoing

[1] J. Farrell, *Dario Fo Franca Rame. Theatre, Life, Politics*, (London: Methuen, 2019),
[2] Rame returned the PCI membership as an act of protest against the party's boycott of her and Fo's work with *Nuova Scena*, prompted by their critique of the PCI's overly moderate stance.
See Farrell*, Dario Fo Franca Rame. Theatre, Life, Politics,* 114.

Struggle) and *Potere Operaio* (Workers' Power*)*.[3] Rame chose not to pursue the path known as *doppia militanza* (dual militancy or activism) unlike some Italian feminists who navigated simultaneous political commitments to both feminism and communism by participating in feminist collectives as well as extra-parliamentary groups or political parties.[4] A comparable figure to Rame in this context is Rossana Rossanda (1924–2020), a member of the Italian Communist Party and co-founder of the leftist newspaper *Il manifesto.*[5] Like Rame, Rossanda did not formally join any feminist group during the 1970s, although she openly acknowledged the significance of these groups and maintained an active, ongoing dialogue with them, positioning herself as both a critic and an ally.[6] This distinction characterises Rame's political and feminist positioning in those years, as she elucidates in an interview in 1979:

> I am not a feminist in the sense of militant. In fact, I have never been a member of any group. I am a feminist by personal and political choice. I am not a separatist. For women to liberate themselves, it is not sufficient for us to change our heads, or that of men, we must change society.[7]

Rame embraced feminism as both a personal and political choice, emphasising its activist dimension and the belief that true liberation requires broader social transformation. This reflects, for example, the definition of feminism in the magazine *EFFE*, founded in 1973 to give voice to the many groups that emerged in Italy during those years: 'although coming from different political experiences, yet all moving in the same direction, we are convinced that only through the liberation of women can a real, authentic

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[3] R. Lumley, *States of Emergency*: *Cultures of Revolt in Italy from 1968 to 1978* (Verso Books, 1990).
[4] T. De Lauretis, 'Sexual Difference. A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice', in *The Milan Women's Bookstore Collective*, Indiana University Press),14.
[5] Rossanda joined the PCI during the antifascist Resistance and became part of its central committee. However, her open criticism of the party's more orthodox or moderate positions led to her expulsion in 1969.
[6] R. Rossanda, *Un secolo, due movimenti. Comunismo e femminismo, tracce di una vita* (Roma: Futura Editrice, 2022); English translation: *A Century, Two Movements: Communism and Feminism, Traces of a Life.*
[7] Franca Rame's interview, in La Sicilia, 5 March 1979, in Farrell, *Dario Fo Franca Rame. Theatre, Life, Politics*, 235.

renewal of society be achieved'.[8] However, Rame only occasionally described herself as a feminist. As Farrell observes, 'more commonly "feminist" was a word applied to other women whose idealism and fervour she admired but whose ways were not entirely hers'.[9] He also clarifies Rame's political priorities: 'The compatibility or incompatibility of socialism and feminism was a theme which recurred endlessly on the agenda of the conferences and gatherings of those years, but Franca remained a socialist first'.[10] Although Rame did not explicitly align herself with any feminist group, and remained loyal to her partnership with Fo and their left-wing ideals, her work nonetheless engaged with feminist politics. Theatre scholar Maggie Günsberg emphasises that the 1970s and 1980s were pivotal to Rame's political activism and her emergence as an independent performer and playwright.[11] In 1977, Rame co-signed her monologues with Fo for the first time, a landmark moment that coincided with her decision to perform alone on stage.[12] These monologues addressed key issues facing women in a patriarchal society, such as the demand for abortion rights and the fight against violence toward women**,** resonating with central concerns of the Italian women's movements. She performed them at Palazzina Liberty in Milan with the title *Tutta Casa, Letto, e Chiesa* (All home, bed, and church).[13] By examining Rame's broader engagement with feminism as a performer, practitioner, and public speaker, I demonstrate how she placed women's personal experiences at the centre of her work, aligning with the feminist principle of *il partire da sé,* starting from the self*,* which foregrounds subjectivity as the foundation for political awareness and collective action. These experiences are not only presented as deeply embedded in political and social contexts shaped by gender inequality, but my analysis also highlights how they articulate social relations, social reproduction, and labour politics as integral to Rame's artistic and political project.

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[8] P. Agosti and B. Tobagi, *Covando un Mondo Nuovo* (Torino: Einaudi, 2024), 36.
[9] Farrell, *Dario Fo Franca Rame. Theatre, Life, Politics,* 234.
[10] J. Farrell, *Dario Fo & Franca Rame: Harlequins of the Revolution* (London: Methuen, 2001), 198.
[11] M. Günsberg, 'Centre Stage: Franca Rame's female parts'*,* in *Gender and the Italian Stage*, (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 222.
[12] D. Radulescu, *Women's Comedic Art as Social Revolution* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company Publishers, 2012).
[13] D. Fo and F. Rame, *Tutta casa letto e chiesa* (Verona: Bertani, 1978).

Through performance analysis, drawing on various editions of Rame's monologues, including texts and video recordings from her archive, I examine how selected case studies from the collection *Tutta Casa, Letto e Chiesa* (*All Home, Bed, and Church*) reflect and theatrically interpret key practices and theories of 1970s Italian feminisms. In addition, I analyse Rame's 1994 monologue *Sesso? Grazie. Tanto per Gradire!*, which represents the culmination of a feminist trajectory rooted in that legacy. This chapter also introduces key feminist theorists who offer the theoretical framework for my analysis of Rame's work throughout the thesis.

2.1 From Emancipation to Liberation: Key Examples of Italian Feminist Groups and Strands in the 1970s

The Italian women's movement of the 1970s emerged from the social movements of 1968-69, which involved students, workers, and women actively involved in strikes and occupations.[14] The aim of this section is to trace some of the routes taken by Italian feminists who wanted to create a new politics centred on women's struggles and experience and forged autonomous forms and modes of organising.[15] Historian Benedetta Tobagi helps to articulate and clarify how Italian feminists understood the concepts of emancipation and liberation:

> L'emancipazione è la richiesta di uguaglianza formale e sostanziale tra donna e uomo, nelle leggi, sul lavoro; chiede alle maglie della società di allargarsi per accogliere le donne a parità di diritti. La liberazione, invece, comporta una trasformazione radicale dei ruoli, dei valori, dei comportamenti, delle istituzioni, sulla base di ciò che di nuovo portano le donne, elaborandolo insieme, a partire da sé, dalla propria soggettività.[16]

[14] Laura Mariani defines 1970 as the foundational year of Italian Neofeminism. See L. Mariani, 'Feminist Theory and Criticism', in G. Marrone (ed.), *Italian Literary Studies*, (Routledge, 2007, Vol. 1), 705-711.
[15] See http://www.herstory.it/category/gruppi/gruppi-anni-70
[16] Agosti and Tobagi, *Covando un Mondo Nuovo*, 30.

> Emancipation is the demand for formal and substantive equality between women and men, in the law, in the workplace; it asks the structures of society to expand to include women on equal terms. Liberation, on the other hand, entails a radical transformation of roles, values, behaviours, and institutions, based on what women bring that is new, developed collectively, starting from the self and their own subjectivity.

The feminist principle of il *partire da sé* (*starting from the self*) is therefore fundamental to understand how feminist movements developed. It was grounded in the idea that liberation begins with self-awareness. It recognises that oppression is internalised, and that women must first free themselves from emotional, affective, and intellectual dependence on patriarchal norms and values.[17] As highlighted by Robert Lumley's study of the Italian social movements of 1968-1978, 'in Italy more than in other countries, the women's movement after 1968 was divided along political lines. Women tended to become feminist after they had been activists on the Left, and the differences within the wider political field were echoed within the movement'.[18] The idea of women's equality was already embedded within the struggle for democratic and civil liberties led by the Socialists and Communist Parties: 'the idea of emancipation meant establishing women's full rights as citizens as guaranteed by the Constitution, and their integration into the workforce'.[19] In spite of this, one defining feature of women's movements was their effort to distance themselves from left-wing political movements, which they saw as dominated by male-centred party structures and political practices that failed to fully acknowledge women's voices and contributions. The trajectories and political confluences in the Italian women's movement of the 1970s are in fact extremely complex to navigate. Laura Mariani, for example, underscores the intricate relationship between different perspectives, emphasising the entanglement between demands for equality and the

[17] Ibid.
[18] Lumley, *States of Emergency. Culture of Revolts in Italy from 1968 to 1978,* 314.
[19] Ibid.

acknowledgment of sexual difference.[20] Although feminist collectives during this period differed in their approaches, their boundaries were often fluid. [21] As Tobagi notes, many activists participated in multiple organisations or moved between groups over time. [22] This explains the difficulty in pinpointing a definite end date for these movements, as they frequently changed names or evolved through the shifting involvement of their members.[23] While some factions of Italian feminism pursued radical anti-institutional politics and separatism, a significant number of women continued to work within Leftist parties and centre-left liberal organisations to advocate for women's rights and social equality. Their efforts contributed to major social reforms, including the legalization of abortion in 1978.[24] Here I examine key positions within different strands of Italian feminism of the 1970s by highlighting some groups that contributed to the political climate in which Rame developed her monologues. These groups include a broader progressive feminist approach, represented by *Movimento di Liberazione della Donna* (Women's Liberation Movement) and *Lotta Femminista* (Feminist Struggle). While *Lotta Femminista* emphasised the economic and social analysis of women's oppression, *Movimento di Liberazione della Donna* focused on achieving concrete transformations in power structures and institutions. Both groups prioritised the examination of material and political dynamics. This progressive approach set them apart from the radical feminist strand, which emphasised the cultural and symbolic dimensions of gender difference. *Rivolta Femminile* (Female Revolt) and *Libreria delle Donne di Milano* (Milan Women's Bookstore Co-operative) took in fact a radical separatist instance better known as *femminismo della differenza sessuale* (feminism of sexual difference).[25] In between these two strands, there were other collectives which experimented with new forms of feminist consciousness-raising and radical education which led for example to the establishment of alternative

[20] L. Mariani, 'Feminist Theory and Criticism', in G. Marrone (ed.), *Italian Literary Studies* (Routledge, 2007, Vol. 1), 705-711.
[21] L. Melandri, *Una viscerалità indicibile: La pratica dell'inconscio nel movimento delle donne degli anni Settanta* (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2000).
[22] Agosti and Tobagi, *Covando un Mondo Nuovo*, 31.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] A. Cavarero and F. Restaino, *Le Filosofie femministe* (Milano: Mondadori, 2002).

institutions run by women, as for example *La Libera Universita' delle Donne di Milano* (Milan Women's Free University) in the 1980s.[26] Although Rame was not affiliated with any of these groups and resisted being defined by them, the ideas and practices developed by the multiple feminist collectives of the time offer crucial analytical tools for understanding both Rame's monologues about women and her broader theatre practice. As theatre-making processes emerge from, and are often in tension with, the wider social and political dynamics that surround them,[27] it is key to understand the political water in which Rame was swimming.

Movimento di Liberazione della Donna

Movimento di liberazione della donna (Women's Liberation Movement, hereafter MLD) was created in 1970 by a group of activists including Partito Radicale (Radical Party) politician Adele Faccio (1920-2007), writer, linguist, and activist Alma Sabatini (1922-1988), and activist Liliana Ingargiola (1947-2012).[28] MLD's approach to women's liberation emphasised engaging in a dialogue with political institutions to secure women's rights and freedom, as well as to reform laws and social conventions that discriminated against women. They organised petitions, marches, and protests advocating for divorce, legal abortion, and changes to laws regarding sexual violence. They created the first Italian refuges for women escaping domestic violence and centres for women's sexual health.[29] Historian Beatrice Pisa provides a detailed history of MLD, arguing that its approach to women's liberation primarily centred on challenging the oppressive control that patriarchy exerted over their bodies.[30] Adele Faccio, one of MLD's founders and a Radical Party politician, who was arrested in 1975 for publicly declaring that she had chosen to have an abortion, which was illegal in Italy at the time,

[26] http://www.universitadelledonne.it/
[27] T. Six, writing as T. Cornford, *Theatre Studios, A political history of ensemble theatre-making,* (London: Routledge, 2021), 20.
[28] P. Bono and S. Kemp, *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993).
[29] Ibid.
[30] B. Pisa, *Il Movimento di Liberazione della Donna nel Femminismo Italiano* (Roma: Arcane, 2017)

said: ‘without sexual freedom, without the freedom to manage your own body, there cannot be any freedom’.[31] On this basis, MLD promoted a struggle against the hierarchical structure of society, focused in particular on the family, which represented the basis of social organization and was seen as the oppressive cause of women’s subordination. According to Pisa, for this group of feminist activists, liberation represented the fight against patriarchy to achieve the free expression of one’s body. This meant, for example, free access to contraception and abortion, sex education, and gynaecological self-help visits. This practice helped women understand how their bodies worked, challenging the authority of male doctors. Pisa explains how the woman's body was their focus because, through knowledge and control over their bodies, women could achieve self-determination.[32] While *MLD* addressed systemic issues and advocated for institutional change, its primary focus was on women’s rights, emphasising individual freedom, legal reforms, and the transformation of power structures. This emphasis on individual autonomy and the pursuit of institutional reforms aligns with key principles of liberal feminism, which seeks to achieve gender equality by advocating for legal and policy changes within existing social frameworks. Therefore, I categorise the MLD not only as progressive feminism, but also within the broader framework of liberal feminism, given its focus on reforming institutions and changing laws as a pathway to women’s emancipation.[33] However, there is an intriguing tension between their emphasis on liberal principles of individual freedom and the concept of collective freedom. While MLD was explicitly committed to liberal projects, some of their initiatives extended beyond these principles to involve collectives of women. MLD’s practices aimed to foster individual freedoms while also building collective power through the creation of alternative institutional structures.

There is evidence that Rame had some connections with the MLD. For instance, on April 11–13, 1975, the MLD participated in the *Congresso Nazionale del Movimento per la Liberazione della Donna* (National Congress of the Women's Liberation Movement), held at the *Palazzina Liberty* in Milan,

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[31] Ibid., 150.
[32] Beatrice Pisa’s personal e-mail to the author, Feb 2nd, 2021.
[33] D. Losurdo, G. Elliott, *Liberalism: A Counter-History* (Verso Books, 2014).

the venue occupied at the time by *La Comune*.[34] The conference acknowledged the long-standing condition of women's exploitation by patriarchal society, an oppression further exacerbated in Italy by the interference of clerical power in state institutions, and aimed at supporting a non-violent struggle for the alternative and comprehensive construction of a society of freedom and equality, in solidarity with the oppressed, exploited, and marginalized.[35] In 1976, MLD, together with other feminist groups, took over an old, abandoned building on Via del Governo Vecchio in Rome to create the first *Casa della Donna* (also called *Casa delle Donne*, Women's House).[36] This space became a safe space for women, a hub where they not only could gather to talk, but also to practice self-gynaecological examinations, provide safe abortions, offer sexual education and contraceptives, and support those escaping domestic violence. The following year, Rame performed her monologues about women at Palazzina Liberty. In her prologue, she openly voiced her support for feminist groups:

> Ho debuttato a Milano, alla Palazzina Liberty, nel 1977, in appoggio alle lotte del movimento femminista, poi l'ho portato in quasi tutta Italia, organizzato da gruppi femministi, e il ricavato di molte serate è stato devoluto a favore del movimento per varie esigenze: fabbriche in occupazione, rifacimento del tetto della Casa della Donna di via del Governo Vecchio a Roma, nascita di consultori, ecc. [37]
>
> I made my debut in Milan, at the Palazzina Liberty, in 1977, in support of the feminist movement's struggles. Afterwards, with the help of feminist groups, I toured it around almost the whole of Italy, and the proceeds from many performances were

[34] https://bibliotecadiviasenato.it/testo/piattaforma-e-documenti-proposti-al-congresso-nazionale-del-movimento-per-la-liberazione-della-donna-milano-11-12-13-aprile-1975-palazzina-liberty-1975/.
[35] B. Frabotta ed., *La politica del femminismo* (1973-76) (Roma: Savelli, 1978), 81.
[36] https://immaginidelnovecento.fondazionegramsci.org/photo/detail/IT-GRAMSCI-FT0001-0008762/la-casa-donne-via-del-governo-vecchio.
[37] Dario Fo, Franca Rame, in 'Tutta Casa Letto e Chiesa, in *Le Commedie di Dario Fo', Volume VIII, Venticinque monologhi per una donna,* (Torino: Einaudi,1989), 5.

> donated to the movement for various needs: occupied factories, repairing the roof of the *Women's House* on Via del Governo Vecchio in Rome, the establishment of counselling centres for women, etc.

Rame made it clear that *Tutta Casa, Letto e Chiesa* was created in solidarity with the feminist cause and was performed across the country, often in collaboration with feminist groups, though she did not specify which group. However, her connection with the MLD is evidenced by the fact that proceeds from the show were donated, among other causes, to help repair the roof of the *Casa della Donna* (Women's House) which the MLD was occupying at the time along with other groups.[38] MLD remained active until the late 1970s, eventually dissolving like many other feminist and political movements and collectives, including *La Comune*, due to the climate of fear caused by widespread terrorist attacks. As outlined earlier in the thesis, this atmosphere increasingly suppressed protest and activism.

Lotta Femminista

Lotta Femminista (Feminist struggle, hereafter LF) was created in 1971 in Padua by a group of activists led by Mariarosa Dalla Costa.[39] It was a group that advocated militant feminism, organising struggles from an anti-capitalist perspective, drawing attention to women's unpaid housework.[40] Their focus on the personal struggles of women as individuals and political agents was aimed at driving institutional change.[41]

> Quanto all'influenza che il movimento femminista, non solo Lotta Femminista, ha avuto su rilevanti mutamenti legislativi posso citare vari ambiti: divorzio, consultori, aborto, diritto di famiglia, violenza,

[38] Pisa, *Il Movimento di Liberazione della Donna nel Femminismo Italiano,* 109-136.
[39] Dalla Costa is also co-author with Selma James of the 1975 pamphlet *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community.*
[40] T. Bertilotti and A. Scattigno, *Il femminismo degli anni Settanta* (Roma: Viella, 2005), 37.
[41] Ibid.

> parità. Complessivamente si può dire che l'emergere della donna come persona passa anzitutto attraverso le lotte degli anni Settanta. [42]
>
> Regarding the influence of the feminist movement, not just Lotta Femminista, on significant legislative changes, I can cite various areas: divorce, health clinics, abortion, family law, violence, and equality. Overall, it can be said that the emergence of woman as an autonomous subject can be traced primarily to the feminist struggles of the 1970s.

Dalla Costa underscores the profound influence that *LF* and the Italian feminist movement had on driving legislative reforms in critical areas of women's rights and equality, issues that were equally important to Rame and that she passionately advocated for in her monologues. Despite a critique of how Marxist theory often overlooked women's oppression or subsumed it into the broader class struggle against capitalism, *Lotta Femminista* can be regarded as a Marxist feminist group. Their key demand was to recognise domestic work as paid work. Feminist and LF activist Leopoldina Fortunati explains how she had to bend Marxist theories in the context of feminist experience and political organisation for their Wages for Housework Campaign. She stated that LF 'brought the workerist experience to the feminist movement'.[43] Workerism (operaismo) is a political theory developed in 1960s Italy by Mario Tronti, which centred the industrial working class as a collective revolutionary subject.[44] Influential among extra-parliamentary groups like Potere Operaio (which was also involved with La Comune), it emphasised organised labour struggle as a key force against capitalism. Fortunati highlighted how the political left, including the most radical instances which broke the hegemony of the Communist Party, marginalised women and their domestic work. Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp clarify how

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[42] Interview with Mariarosa Dalla Costa, See Federica D'Auria, "Padova femminista. Le lotte per il salario domestico contro il 'lavoro invisibile,'" *Il Bo Live*, Università di Padova, July 4, 2022, https://ilbolive.unipd.it/it/news/societa/padova-femminista-lotte-salario-domestico-contro.

[43] L. Fortunati, https://libcom.org/library/learning-struggle-my-story-between-workerism-feminism-leopoldina-fortunati.

[44] M. Tronti, *Workerism and Politics,* Historical Materialism conference, 2006.

'the workers' struggle has always failed to include the reproduction of working strength and the absence of pay, which mystified that reproduction. […] This was women's work, the other half of the class which, as a class, has been denied by all'.[45] *Lotta Femminista* changed its name to *Committees and Groups for Wages for Housework* and organised a conference in 1972 in Padua, which, according to Dalla Costa, was pivotal in both Italian and international feminist history.[46] It highlighted the shared determination among women from various countries to transform their lives by addressing domestic labour, with the publication of Dalla Costa's book *Potere femminile e sovversione sociale* (Women's power and social subversion), serving as a manifesto that ignited international debate on the issue.[47] The conference in fact led to the establishment of the International Feminist Collective, tasked with promoting discussion and coordinating action. Key figures included Selma James, Silvia Federici, Brigitte Galtier, and an Italian representative. They initiated a campaign advocating for wages for housework.[48] In her 1975 pamphlet *Wages against Housework*, Federici clarified and further articulated how the demand for wages for housework paradoxically meant a refusal of that work, because it represented an expression of 'the female role that capital has invented for us'.[49] It was not simply a question of women asking to be paid for their domestic work. On the contrary, the action of asking to be paid exposed a role that for centuries has been considered woman's work, part of female nature, destroying in this way one of the bases of capitalist exploitation: 'To say that we want money for housework is the first step towards refusing to do it, because the demand for a wage makes our work visible'. [50] This issue remains unresolved and is now addressed within the broader theoretical framework of social reproduction theory, as mentioned in the previous chapter. According to Tithi Bhattacharya, this theory is 'built from Marx' and helps to understand the relationship between the labour

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[45] Bono and Kemp, *Italian Feminist Thought*, 262
[46] Interview with Mariarosa Dalla Costa, https://ilbolive.unipd.it/it/news/padova-femminista-lotte-salario-domestico-contro
[47] M. Dalla Costa*, Potere femminile e sovversione sociale,* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1972).
[48] S. Federici, and A. Austin, eds. *Wages for Housework: The New York Committee 1972–1977: History, Theory, Documents*. Brooklyn (NY: Autonomedia, 2017).
[49] S. Federici, Wages against Housework (Bristol: Power of Women Collective and the Falling Wall Press, Bristol, 1975).
[50] Ibid.

required to produce commodities and the labour necessary to produce people and the workforce within the capitalist system.[51] Bhattacharya clarifies that social reproduction encompasses not only domestic work but also any activity essential to human production and reproduction under capitalism, including education, healthcare, childcare, leisure, and anything that supports and rejuvenates people so they can be ready to work at their best. [52]

Unlike the more explicitly liberal approach of the *Movimento di Liberazione delle Donne* (MLD), *Lotta Femminista* prohibited *doppia militanza* (dual militancy or activism) among its members, meaning they could not simultaneously participate in other political parties. This restriction effectively excluded Rame from direct involvement, given her ongoing political activism and affiliation with the broader left. The irony is striking, as *Lotta Femminista*'s dual commitment to both Marxist and feminist principles arguably aligned more closely with Rame's own ideological position than that of other feminist movements. However, theatre scholar Fabio Contu notes that LF participated in a conference organized by *La Comune* at Palazzina Liberty from June 13-15, 1974, indicating that Rame had direct contact with the group.[53] During this event, a documentary film created by LF activists premiered, focusing on the condition of women, which was later used in the electoral campaign for the divorce referendum.[54] According to Contu, *Lotta Femminista*'s presence among the cultural producers at Palazzina Liberty was not a one-off event. *La Comune*, in fact, published a document on revolutionary culture serving the class struggle under the leadership of the workers' vanguards.[55] In this document, the collective expressed its openness to any contributions that would help expand the cultural intervention front, including support for production efforts outside traditional channels. This suggests that Rame's connection with feminist movements was aligned with efforts to broaden *La Comune*'s cultural intervention front.

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[51] T. Bhattacharya, *Social Reproduction Theory*, (London: Pluto Press, 2017).
[52] Ibid., 2.
[53] F. Contu, "Il femminismo di Franca Rame," in *Franca, pensaci tu*, ed. D. Cerrato (Rome: Aracneeditrice, 2016), 67.
[54] *Siamo tante, Siamo donne, Siamo stufe!* (We are many, we are women, we are fed up!) by Grazia Zerman, Chiara Gamba, Franca Barda and Adriana Monti, 1974).
[55] L. Binni, *Attento te…! Il teatro politico di Dario Fo* (Verona: Bertani editore,1975), 85-96.

Furthermore, the struggles of LF are clearly reflected in Rame's work, for example the issue of the double exploitation of women at work and at home, which I analyse in the second part of this chapter. While the historical context remains important, Federici's analytical approach, as anticipated in the previous chapter, provides essential tools for understanding Rame's relationship with feminism, as well as the deeper political and conceptual dimensions of her practice.

The Radical Separatist Strand: Rivolta Femminile, the Milan-based Collectives, and the Libreria Delle Donne di Milano

While MLD and LF focused on the struggle for institutional reforms, radical feminists, on the contrary, were not interested in the struggle for women's rights and equal rights with men, as they argued that a society organised according to a patriarchal system of institutions, laws, and hierarchies, created by and for men, could never offer women true freedom. To them, women's liberation stemmed from affirming sexual difference rather than pursuing equality with men. This perspective was rooted in the feminism of sexual difference, which emerged from women-only groups that placed the concept of women as social subjects at their core.[56] This idea emphasised women as autonomous agents of change, defining their own identities and experiences outside the framework of male-centred norms.

In 1970, feminist and art critic Carla Lonzi (1931-1982) co-founded the group *Rivolta Femminile* (Female Revolt) in Rome, together with artist Carla Accardi (1924- 2014), and writer Elvira Banotti (1933-2014).[57] The group was established from the outset as an *autocoscienza* (consciousness-raising) collective, where women met in small groups to share, reflect on, and discuss their personal experiences.[58] Their manifestos, *Manifesto di*

[56] See, 'Sexual Difference. A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice', in *The Milan Women's Bookstore Collective*, (Indiana University Press), 5.
[57] F. Lussana, *Il Movimento Femminista in Italia* (Roma: Carrocci Editore, 2012), 155.
[58] The practice of 'autocoscienza' has been described by Maggie Günsberg as 'the equivalent of American 'consciousness raising' but with the additional element of 'self-reconstruction'. See M. Günsberg, *Gender and the Italian Stage* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 205.

Rivolta Femminile and *Let's Spit on Hegel*, explicitly rejected the struggle for equality with men, asserting: 'Equality is what is offered as legal rights to colonised people'.[59] They also opposed the campaign for divorce, arguing: 'We are against marriage. Divorce is a welding of marriages that ultimately reinforces the institution'.[60] The analogy to colonised people suggests that women being granted equal rights within a system built on their exclusion does not dismantle that system, it only integrates them into it on unequal terms**.** Therefore, they argued for a radical rethinking of social structures rather than inclusion within them. Additionally, Rivolta Femminile critiqued efforts to legalise abortion, claiming: 'To try to protect our lives through a demand for legalised abortion leads to our suicide, the predominance of one sex over the other is ratified'.[61] To Lonzi, sexual liberation was not about legalising abortion but developing a sexuality focused on the female body, 'starting from our physiological centre of pleasure, namely, the clitoris'.[62] Her argument was that there was no point in fighting for legal abortion if sexuality could eventually be experienced without male penetration and the consequent risk of pregnancy. A social pact should make space for a society created and governed by women, where their sexual difference can freely signify. To *Rivolta Femminile,* to modify reality meant to impose the presence and the language of the female sex, which is denied in a patriarchal system. They believed that the world of humanity has always been considered as mankind, belonging to men, and there is no point for women to fight to be included in that 'one': their proposal is that the world should be divided, at least, into two, the masculine and the feminine.[63]

> Our message to man, to the genius, to the rational visionary is this: the future of the world does not lie in moving continually forwards along a path mapped out by man's desire for overcoming difficulties. The future of the world is open: it lies in starting along the path from

[59] C. Lonzi, in P. Bono and S. Kemp, 41.
[60] C. Lonzi, in P. Bono and S. Kemp, 38
[61] C. Lonzi*,* "Female Sexuality and Abortion, Rivolta Femminile 1971"*,* in P. Bono and S. Kemp, 215.
[62] Ibid.
[63] C. Lonzi*,* in P. Bono and S. Kemp, 214-218, see also A. Martinis Roe, *To Become Two: Propositions for Feminist Collective Practice* (Berlin: Archive Books, 2018).

> the beginning again with woman as a subject. […] We are the Unexpected Subject.[64]

Lonzi here illustrates the position of *Rivolta Femminile* in terms of their refusal to be included in the male paradigm, while arguing, instead, for the creation of woman as a social subject. These are two important aspects that I will use to discuss Rame's monologues and her use of theatrical language as a political, feminist act of self-narration. However, the political stance of *Rivolta Femminile* was quite distant from Rame's, not only because she was not a separatist, but also because the struggle for women's rights was a central theme in her monologues and a driving force in her political activism. Although based in Rome, Lonzi's thought had a lasting influence on the rise of separatist feminist collectives in Milan, shaping their theoretical foundations throughout the 1970s. The practice of *autocoscienza* (consciousness-raising) represented for many feminist collectives in Milan, where Rame lived, a form of political practice that centred shared personal experience. This micropolitics developed by small groups of women who would meet and listen to each other speak about their experiences in private and social spheres prioritised relationships among women. This practice was therefore necessary for women in the movement to gain awareness of themselves through others, and to start their knowledge from their self and their shared experience, rather than from the knowledge that is validated by patriarchal culture. As Lucia Farinati and Claudia Firth address in their study of political listening, consciousness-raising groups were an integral part of feminist movements across America and other Western countries.[65] Their legacy can be seen in terms of dialogic political practice based on the reciprocity of listening and speaking. Drawing on Lonzi, Farinati underlines how 'the practice of *autocoscienza* was a […] participatory space through which women manifest and recognise each other'.[66] This is a crucial aspect of feminist practice during those years, which I analyse in relation to Rame's work. Her political stance was quite distant from that of *Rivolta Femminile*,

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[64] C. Lonzi, "Let's spit on Hegel", in P. Bono and S. Kemp, 59.
[65] L. Farinati and C. Firth, *The Force of Listening.* (Berlin: Errant Bodies Press, 2017).
[66] Farinati and Firth, *The Force of Listening*, 156.

not only because she was not a separatist but also because the struggle for women's rights was a central theme in her monologues and a driving force in her political activism. However, I argue that her work is also entangled with certain aspects of these radical movements.

In 1972, several feminist groups from Milan met the French feminist group Politique et Psychanalyses.[67] Following this encounter, they developed new forms of *autocoscienza* and collective practices in the following years by exploring the practice of the unconscious. [68] Psychoanalytic practice among women developed as an approach to examining sexuality, relationships, motherhood, and lesbianism. It aimed to uncover unspoken aspects of individual experiences while maintaining a broader context.[69] This practice was applied and developed for example by Italian feminist activist Lea Melandri (born 1941).[70] During the 1970s, Melandri participated in several Milan-based feminist groups. She co-founded *Gruppo dell'inconscio* (Group of the Unconscious) with lawyer Lia Cigarini, *Gruppo NO.4* and *Gruppo Analisi* (Analysis group) with philosopher Luisa Muraro.[71] According to Melandri, the practice of the unconscious represented a shift from the early years of feminism, marked by the practice of *autocoscienza*, to a phase where it became necessary to delve into the narratives of women's lives to uncover what is implicit but unspoken. This phase required exploring the unconscious-conscious relationship, analysing conflicts, as well as the fantasies, desires, and fears emerging from interactions among women, both

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[67] P. Bono and S. Kemp, *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993).
[68] *Sexual Difference, A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice*, tr. P. Cicogna and T de Lauretis (Bloogmington: Indiana University Press, 1990). Sexual Difference is the translation of the Italian collection *Non credere di avere dei diritti,* La Libreria delle donne di Milano, 1987.
[69] L. Mariani, "Feminist Theory and Criticism", in G. Marrone (ed.), *Italian Literary Studies* (London: Routledge, 2007) Vol. 1, 705-711.
[70] Melandri, born in 1941, in 1968 collaborated with psychoanalyst Elvio Fachinelli to create the non-authoritarian teachers' movement, co-founding the magazine *L'erba voglio* (published from 1971 to 1978). She has authored numerous books on feminism, many of which have been translated into English. Melandri was also one of the first supporters of teaching for housewives through the Italian State funded '150-hour courses', a key turning point in feminist education, documented in the 1983 film documentary by Adriana Monti 'Scuola senza fine' (School with no end).
[71] E. Roncalli, *The Future of the World Is Open: Encounters with Lea Melandri, Luisa Muraro, Adriana Cavarero, and Rossana Rossanda* (SUNY Series in Contemporary Italian Philosophy. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2022). Together with philosopher Adriana Cavarero, Muraro is a key figure in the development of Italian feminism of sexual difference.

within groups and in daily life.[72] However, the practice of the unconscious found some resistance because it was difficult to explain as well as to understand it. Some women opposed the use of specialised language, arguing that it conflicted with the sense of sisterhood they sought within feminist spaces. [73] They also criticised those who used such language for alienating a broader group of women.[74] This resonates with Rame's opinion about the intellectual and complex language used by some feminist theorists:

> La solita menata femminista socialpolitica, scritta dalla solita intellettuale per altre intellettuali, quasi tutte saccenti, esibenti, compiaciute dello sfoggiar 'cultura', usanti un linguaggio da casta per quella 'casta', senza la minima preoccupazione di essere capite da chi aveva (sto parlando degli anni '70 in cui la donna cercava di crescere e di 'liberarsi') la necessità urgente di capire. [75]
>
> The same old social-political feminist nonsense, written by the same old intellectuals for other intellectuals, almost all knowledgeable, showing off their education and culture, using a caste language for their 'caste', without the slightest concern to be understood by those who had (I'm talking about the '70s in which women were struggling to emancipate and 'liberate' themselves) the urgent need to understand.

As well as the difficulty in explaining its concept, the practice of the unconscious represented another problem: 'the fact that it tended to end up in interpretation and commentary instead of direct social change'.[76] This approach therefore was far from Rame's focus on political activism over intellectualism, as she always emphasised the importance of practical action

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[72] L. Melandri, *Una visceralita' indicibile. La practice dell'inconscio nel movimento delle donne degli anni Settanta,* (Societa' per l'enciclopedia delle donne, 2023).
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Franca Rame in M. Pizza, *Al Lavoro con Dario Fo e Franca Rame* (Roma: Bulzoni, 2006), 36.
[76] *Sexual Difference: A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice, Non credere di avere dei diritti,* The Milan Womens' Bookstore Collective, 1987.

for social change. Melandri, however, clarified how engaging with the unconscious should encompass all aspects of experience, rather than isolating personal experiences as psychoanalysis tends to do, addressing the tension between both private and public spheres.[77] In her 1977 book *L'infamia originaria,* a seminal work in Italian feminism, she aimed to reconcile heart and politics, challenging the traditional binary division between nature and culture, body and mind, personal and political.[78] Furthermore, she promoted her practice of *scrittura d'esperienza* (experiential writing) as a new form of self-exploration, distinct from conventional literature. Her group, *Sessualità e Scrittura* (Sexuality and Writing) founded in Milan between 1976 and 1977, integrated writing into the practice of exploring the unconscious.[79] In those years, Melandri participated in feminist conferences organised at the Palazzina Liberty. Although she notes that Fo's presence was not welcomed by the separatist feminists, both Rame and Fo did at times attend these gatherings.[80] This connection opens up a consideration of Rame's writing process, particularly her engagement with subjects like sexuality, abortion and sexual violence, which she approached in her monologues through a personal exploration of trauma, articulated through a distinctive theatre language.

Feminist collectives in Milan stand out from other feminist movements due to their rapidly evolving practices, often characterised by a strong focus on experimentation.[81] Out of these experiences and critiques, some explored the idea of political space as a function of relations between women, which was initiated by the *autocoscienza* groups. In 1975, a group of feminists, including Luisa Muraro and Lia Cigarini, previously mentioned for their collaboration with Melandri, founded the *Libreria delle Donne di Milano*

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[77] Melandri, *Una visceralita' indicibile*, 147.
[78] L. Melandri, *L'infamia originaria* (Manifesto Libri, 2018).
[79] Melandri continues to develop and teach this method of experiential writing to feminist groups both in Italy and internationally. For example, The London feminist Autocoscienza Writing Group (AWG), established in 2022 (awg-london.com), has adopted and developed Melandri's practice.
[80] L. Melandri, conversation with the author, July 2024, personal archive of the author.
[81] L. Melandri*, Una visceralita' indicibile. La practice dell'inconscio nel movimento delle donne degli anni Settanta* (Milano: Societa' per l'enciclopedia delle donne, 2023).

(Milan Women's Bookstore Collective).[82] It represented, and it still does, a political space that further enhanced the idea of relationships between women as the core of feminist politics, as stated in their manifesto:

> La Libreria è un luogo di discussione, o meglio è essenzialmente un luogo politico, per come noi abbiamo inteso la politica. Niente a che vedere con istituzioni, partiti o gruppi omogenei. La chiamiamo politica del partire da sè; nasce dalla riflessione sull'esperienza che ciascuna fa, dallo stare insieme in un'impresa di donne ma anche nel mondo e si basa sulla relazione.[83]
>
> The Bookshop is a place of discussion, or rather it is essentially a political place, as we understand politics. Nothing to do with homogeneous institutions, parties or groups. We call it a politics of starting from the self, which was born from reflection on each woman's own experience, from being together in an enterprise of women but also in the world and is based on relations.

The *Libreria* started as a feminist endeavour that, still today, upholds the same principles of sexual difference. It does not seek equality but instead 'values and cultivates women's difference through the practice of relations among women and attention to poetry, literature, and philosophy'.[84] Their politics of sexual difference integrates sex and gender to emphasise the unique, inseparable nature of bodies and subjectivities.[85] While this challenges fixed identities and encouraged the creation of new embodied subjectivities, at the same time it also reinforces essentialist views of womanhood, raising tensions for example with contemporary trans-inclusive feminist frameworks that reject biologically determined definitions of gender.

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[82] Libreria delle Donne di Milano took inspiration from the *Librairie des femmes* della Rue des Saints-Pères in Paris: https://www.libreriadelledonne.it.
[83] Libreria delle Donne di Milano, homepage https://www.libreriadelledonne.it/.
[84] Ibid. See also the online documentary about Libreria delle Donne di Milano: https://memomi.it/libreria-delle-donne.
[85] A. Martinis Roe, *To Become Two, Propositions for Feminist Collective Practice*, (Archive Books, 2018), 60.

In the 1970s the Libreria embraced the need for new feminist practices, expanding from the intimate small groups of *autocoscienza* to the establishment of public spaces for women. They developed new forms of feminist practice, like the practice of doing and the practice of relationships among women.[86] The practice of doing is about creating new political and public spaces for women, such as bookshops, libraries, publishing houses, and meeting places where women can experiment and develop their practices.[87] The Milan Women's Bookstore Collective's book *Non credere di avere dei diritti* (Do not think you have rights) theorised their collective practice among women as a key strategy to build a female genealogy.[88] The concept of female genealogy, the transmission of meaning, authority, and knowledge through relationships between women, is central to Muraro's feminist philosophy, and continues to inform the theory and practice of the *Libreria delle Donne* today.[89] These ideas are exemplified in the practice of *affidamento* (entrustment), in which one woman symbolically entrusts herself to another whom she recognises as a source of authority or meaning. As feminist artist Alex Martinis Roe explains, this relational dynamic fosters mutual support and validation, establishing a woman-centred structure of recognition.[90] This approach moves beyond the pursuit of equality with men, seeking instead to cultivate new forms of female freedom and subjectivity rooted in women's own experiences and desires. The concept of female genealogy and the practice of *affidamento* (entrustment) resonate with Rame's tradition of learning her craft directly, *mouth to mouth*, from her mother, as analysed in the previous chapter. This method of embodied transmission later extended in the way she passed on her monologues to younger actresses, as I will show in the next chapters. However, the practice of *affidamento* at *Libreria delle Donne di Milano*, which involves women recognising and valuing authority in other women to foster a female-centred symbolic

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[86] A. Martinis Roe, *To Become Two,* 49-91.
[87] Ibid.
[88] *Sexual Difference, A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice*, tr. Patricia Cicogna and Teresa de Lauretis (Bloogmington: Indiana University Press, 1990). It is the English translation of the collection *Non credere di avere dei diritti,* La Libreria delle donne di Milano, 1987.
[89] A. Martinis Roe, *To Become Two*, 61-65.
[90] Ibid.,*56-57.*

order, risks reproducing hierarchical structures that echo the very patriarchal systems it seeks to subvert. The desire to create women's culture starting from their history and their own literature was meant to develop new feminist practices which embodied women's liberation, moving on from the idea of emancipation and embracing sexual difference.[91]

As noted by feminist and gender studies scholar Paola Di Cori, the crisis of *autocoscienza* collectives at the end of the 1970s highlighted the need for a different kind of dialogue and listening.[92] Another factor contributing to the crisis was that, after the initial years, the *autocoscienza* groups could no longer resolve the numerous internal conflicts among the women involved. There was a need for women to speak and listen differently, to invent a new language.[93] The establishment of *the Libreria delle donne di Milano* and their development of new feminist practices, can therefore be understood more in general as a direct response to the decline of the *autocoscienza* groups which become even more evident during the period from 1977 to 1980, known as the *anni di piombo* (years of lead). As explained in the introduction and partly in the previous chapter, these years were marked by pervasive political unrest and terrorist violence carried out by extremist groups. The escalating instability led to the disbanding of Rame and Fo's collective*, La Comune,* as well as Rame's activist association *Soccorso Rosso* (Red Aid), both of which had served as key platforms for Rame's political engagement and cultural activism. In addition, the fragmentation of social movements in 1978 reflected the broader disintegration of extra-parliamentary groups, such as *Avanguardia Operaia* (Workers' Vanguard*), Lotta Continua* (Ongoing Struggle), and *Potere Operaio* (Workers' Power), all of whom collaborated with *La Comune*. Despite this crisis, Lumley notes that the creation of alternative institutions and women's spaces represented a positive response to the decline of the

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[91] Libreria delle donne di Milano, ed., *Non credere di avere dei diritti: La generazione della libertà femminile nell'idea e nelle vicende di un gruppo di donne* (Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1987).
[92] P. Di Cori, *Asincronie del femminismo: Scritti e interventi 1986–2011* (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2012), 187-202.
[93] Ibid.

Left and the phenomenon known as *riflusso* (the reflux), a widespread withdrawal from political activism and collective engagement, marking a shift toward individualism, consumption, and disillusionment with the revolutionary ideals of the previous years.[94]

> The women's movement, too, was deeply affected by this political climate […]. In fact the period 1978-80 became known as the 'years of silence' (gli anni del silenzio). The feeling that great changes could be carried through by collective mobilisation was weakened by prevailing doubts and uncertainties. Yet, while the feminist project suffered from the crisis, it was not itself at the centre of the crisis; and it was precisely this distance from the dominant forms of oppositional politics, which were the main victims, that made the movement the carrier of hopes for a future regeneration of social movements in the following decade.[95]

Building on Lumley's analysis, I argue that the separatism within the radical strand of Italian feminism, in some ways shielded it from the devastating crisis that impacted both political and feminist liberal and Marxist movements and that inevitably also involved Rame and Fo's theatre collective *La Comune*.[96] This political and social crisis prompted Rame to modify and adapt her political and activist theatre practice in the following years. The feminist principle of *il partire da se'* (starting from the self) gained greater significance, encouraging her autobiographical work and influencing her approach to theatre-making with her collaborators. This crisis highlighted the necessity for a new language and practices within the feminist movement, which developed in different directions. One direction was represented by a shift towards the symbolic order, exemplified by Muraro's theorisation of the symbolic order of the mother at the *Libreria delle Donne di Milano*.[97]

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[94] R. Lumley, *States of Emergency*: *Cultures of Revolt in Italy from 1968 to 1978* (Verso Books, 1990).
[95] Lumley, *States of Emergency*, 550.
[96] Pisa, *Il Movemiento di Liberazione della Donna nel Femminismo Italiano,* 406.
[97] L. Muraro, *L'ordine simbolico della madre* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1991) In *L'ordine simbolico della madre* (the symbolic order of the mother), Luisa Muraro argues that it is the mother who teaches us language, a symbolic tool we use to interpret the world. She

Meanwhile, Melandri in 1987 established the *Libera Università delle Donne di Milano* (Free Women's University of Milan), which is still active today and aims to promote the understanding of social issues from a female perspective through research, education, and cultural activities. It fosters dialogue, creates educational opportunities, and organises artistic and cultural events to empower women and the broader community.[98] Feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero, who co-founded and was briefly part of the female philosophical community *Diotima* in Verona with Luisa Muraro in 1983,[99] later developed a philosophy of sexual difference centred on the bodily dimension of existence.[100] Her work challenges the phallogocentric language of Western philosophy and has established strong connections with international feminist thought.[101] While the ideas of Cavarero, along with those of Federici and other feminist theorists from a broader contemporary framework, will be central to my analysis of Rame's later work in the following chapters, it is now crucial to examine how Rame engaged with the various feminist currents of the 1970s discussed so far, through an exploration of the theatre language she employed in her monologues about women.

2.2 Rame's Monologues as a Response to Italian Feminisms

The conceptual frameworks of the feminist thinkers and activists discussed so far serve to map the intellectual and political terrain in which Rame's creative and activist practices took shape during the 1970s, particularly in the

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contrasts traditional philosophy's use of metaphor, which abstracts concepts, with metonymy, which is rooted in concrete experiences and relationships. Muraro critiques the Cartesian 'I think, therefore I am' for ignoring maternal power, which she sees as fundamental not only in giving birth but also in generating language. This perspective leads to a search for a female genealogy, beginning with reconnecting with the symbolic mother, whether a real mother or an influential female figure, and is foundational to the feminist practice of *affidamento* (entrustment).

[98] See http://www.universitadelledonne.it.

[99] Bono and Kamp, *Italian Feminist Thought*, 181-185.

[100] A. Cavarero, *In Spite of Plato: A Feminist Rewriting of Ancient Philosophy*, trans. Serena Anderlini-D'Onofrio and Áine O'Healy (New York: Routledge, 1995).

[101] A. Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. P. A. Kottman (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).

development of her 1977 monologues about women. The analysis draws, for instance, on MLD's struggles for women's rights, *Lotta Femminista* and Federici's Marxist-feminist critique of capitalism and women's unpaid domestic labour, alongside the radical feminist strand represented by Lonzi, Melandri, and the *Libreria delle Donne di Milano*, particularly in their rethinking of subjectivity and relationality. These perspectives provide essential tools for analysing the intersections of gender and power in Rame's monologues, and to position her as a central voice whose performances and interventions constitute a feminist intervention. By sketching out these theoretical concerns, we can more fully understand how Rame's work embodies key feminist principles explored in the previous section.

Rame's position toward feminism, as we have seen, was characterised by a deliberate distance from both *doppia militanza* (dual militancy or activism) and the more radical groups. Although she was actively involved in numerous campaigns for women's rights, she did not align with separatist ideologies and was openly critical of the intellectual and complex language used by some feminists.[102] Rame in fact was not a theorist, but a theatre practitioner and political activist, who prioritised her commitment to theatre and social causes, for example her work with *Soccorso Rosso* (Red Aid). However, as shown in the previous section, Rame supported certain feminist groups, and I argue that during the 1970s she began to develop both a theatre language and political strategies that reflected, or responded to, some of the practices and theories of the feminist movements discussed earlier. To explore her response to these movements, this section focuses on her collection of monologues *Tutta Casa, Letto e Chiesa* (All Home, Bed, and Church) and examine if and how these works are informed by the struggles, ideas, and practices of those groups.[103] The monologues performed in 1977 at Palazzina Liberty included: *Il Risveglio* (Waking up), Rame and Fo's adaptation of Euripides' *Medea*, *Abbiamo tutte la stessa storia (*We All Have the Same Story*)*, *La mamma fricchettona (*The Hippie Mother*),* and *Una*

[102] Farrell, *Dario Fo Franca Rame. Theatre, Life, Politics,* 230-248.
[103] D. Fo, F. Rame, *Tutta casa letto e chiesa* (Verona: Bertani, 1978).

*donna sola (*A Woman Alone*).*[104] For my analysis I use different editions of the original script, and the video recording of Rame's performance in 1977 with her theatre collective *La Comune* at Palazzina Liberty recorded for RAI TV.[105] The final section of the chapter examines the monologue *Lo Stupro (The Rape),* which, although written in several stages during the 1970s, was performed by Rame for the first time in 1979 and later became part of the published collection and tour of *Tutta Casa Letto e Chiesa* (All Home, Bed, and Church). *Lo Stupro* was subsequently incorporated into other works Rame developed in the following decades, such as her 1994 autobiographical monologue *Sesso? Grazie. Tanto per gradire!* (*Sex? Thanks! Don't Mind If I Do!*), which will also be considered in this analysis. Although written years later, I argue that this monologue represents the culmination of Rame's sustained engagement with feminist thought and activism, which began in the 1970s. Rame's 1977 monologues portrayed women, such as workers and housewives, who were also part of *La Comune*'s audience. Rather than addressing her monologues to feminist activists or theorists, she sought to share, discuss, and understand political and feminist issues directly with a broader audience, beyond any distinction of gender, believing that without such involvement, her work would lack purpose.[106] In addition to her active participation in feminist spaces, such as her support for the *Casa della Donna* (Women's House) in Rome and her engagement with feminist conferences at the *Palazzina Liberty* in Milan, Rame here goes a step further by explicitly voicing her admiration for the initiatives and political commitment of feminist activists:

> I have a great deal of respect for the feminists, especially for those who don't take up positions of out and out antagonism to men, and for those who are working courageously to change reality, beavering away in their boroughs, carrying out abortions, etc. […]. I

[104] Other monologues were later added and published in the volume *Venticinque Monologhi per una donna* (Twenty-five monologues for a woman) in D. Fo and F. Rame, *Le Commedie di Dario Fo,* (Milano: Einaudi 1989).
[105] DVD (Italian) D. Fo, F. Rame, *Tutta Casa Letto e Chiesa*, (Fabbri Editore, 1977).
[106] Franca Rame and Joseph Farrell, *Non è tempo di nostalgia* (Pisa: Della Porta Editori, 2013), 111.

> was present, for instance, at the work of a group of young women who carry out abortions, and I must confess I was dumbfounded. I watched them (both those who performed the abortion and those who underwent it) and they were truly heroic.[107]

Rame shows her respect for what seems to be a description of the practices of MLD at *Casa della Donna*. Her connection with groups such as MLD, for instance, must have had a relevant influence in the creation of her monologues. Furthermore, the fact that, after more than twenty years of working alongside Fo, Rame performed alone on stage for the first time was in itself a feminist statement, an assertion of autonomy that echoed MLD's emphasis on women's self-determination and the refusal to be defined through male counterparts.

I read this as a theatrical enactment of feminist self-determination, marking her shift from Fo's *supporting actor* to a protagonist in her own right. In an interview to Walter Valeri, Rame confirmed the link between *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa* and Italian feminism. She described the topicality covered in her work, which aligns with the issues analysed in the previous section about MLD and LF.

> La versione originale di *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa* è stata scritta nel 1977 […]. Allora ci sono raccolti tutti i fermenti e i temi più importanti del movimento femminista emersi dal decennio che va dal 1968 al 1977. I contenuti riguardavano l'aborto, la gravidanza, il figlio voluto, la donna sola, il doppio sfruttamento a cui è sottoposta la casalinga, la pillola, la violenza, etc. Dopo quella prima stesura, mano a mano il testo si è venuto affinando, elaborando in un continuo rapporto col pubblico, quasi come una creatura o un organismo vivente. Successivamente altri monologhi si sono aggiunti, legati a vicende strettamente personali, altri da esperienze

[107] J. Farrell, *Dario Fo & Franca Rame, Harlequins of the Revolution* (London: Methuen, 2001),198.

> e conoscenze accumulate in anni di lavoro politico o intervento sociale che faccio nelle carceri.[108]
>
> The original version of Tutta casa, letto e chiesa (All Home, Bed, and Church) was written in 1977 [...]. It collects all the ferments and the most important themes of the feminist movement that emerged in the decade from 1968 to 1977. The contents were about abortion, pregnancy, the wanted child, the lonely woman, the double exploitation of the housewife, the contraceptive pill, sexual violence, and so on. After that first draft, the text was gradually refined, developing through a continuous relationship with the public, almost like a creature or a living organism. Later on, other monologues have been added, linked to personal events, others from experiences and knowledge I accumulated in years of political work and social intervention that I do in prisons.

Rame explicitly articulates the ways in which her theatre and activism engaged with the feminist movement. She explains that the content of her work is linked to her personal experience, which reflects the feminist practice of 'starting from the self' and adapting it to her theatre writing. Secondly, Rame's work is deeply intertwined with her relationship to the audience, listening to their reactions, allowing text and performance to evolve continuously and organically. This approach led to the development of a distinctive work-in-progress technique of stage writing, shaped by audience reactions, which I analyse in Chapter Four. In this context, it becomes evident how her artistic practice is closely entangled with her political activism and principles, which, I argue, she developed during those years in solidarity with the feminist movement, both in the content of her work, as I analyse here, as well as and in the modes and forms of her practice, which I analyse in Chapter Three. Analysing the content of Rame's monologues in relation to the feminist groups discussed earlier

[108] W. Valeri, Interview to Franca Rame (Sipario, Nov 1992) in Lorenzetti F, *Bella Ciao, Pensieri e Parole di Franca Rame* (Milano: Kaos, 2018), 198.

reveals an approach that integrates elements from various and sometimes contradictive feminist perspectives. These include liberal, Marxist and radical views. This integration is evident in Rame's focus on rights, narratives, and advocacy, which draw from and reflect the diverse priorities and practices of these movements.

Il Risveglio

In this section, I examine how Rame's monologue *Il Risveglio* (Waking Up) reflects key principles of *LF,* particularly its emphasis on the exploitation of women's unpaid domestic labour. I also consider other feminist perspectives and discourses to better understand Rame's thinking on this issue. The prologue to the piece offers an example of Rame's intersectional approach, foregrounding her primary investment in Marxist critiques of gendered labour. In fact, it develops a critique of the gendered operation of capitalism, focusing on a nameless working-class woman who juggles a full-time factory job with the demands of managing her household, caring for her husband, and raising her toddler.

> Qui abbiamo una donna, un'operaia, sfruttata tre volte: in casa come 'donna tuttofare', in fabbrica, e a letto. Non poteva mancare questo personaggio femminile nella nostra galleria: personaggio, badate bene, 'portante' nella nostra società.[109]
>
> Here we have a woman, a factory worker, exploited three times: at home as a 'jack-of-all-trades,' in the factory, and in bed. This female character could not be absent from our gallery: a character, mind you, who is 'key' in our society.

The protagonist wakes from a nightmare of injuring herself on the assembly line, only to realize she is late for work. She then rushes to get ready, while

[109] Rame's prologue in D. Fo, F. Rame, *Tutta Casa, Letto e Chiesa*, 11.

also dressing her toddler, whom she needs to drop off at a nursery on her way to the factory. Unable to find her keys, she tries to recall every action from the previous day, all while changing her toddler's nappies, mistakenly using cheese instead of baby powder, and facing other similar mishaps, in a farcical crescendo that builds until she discovers it is Sunday. This narrative reflects the relentless pressures faced by women in both domestic and industrial spheres, using comedy and farce to depict the dramatic reality of an overburdened woman struggling to manage multiple roles and responsibilities.

Lotta Femminista founder Mariarosa Dalla Costa foregrounded the social nature of women's unpaid domestic labour within a Marxist framework. While Marxist feminist Heidi Hartmann acknowledges the importance of Dalla Costa's contribution, she critiques this perspective for focusing primarily on capital, while neglecting the relational power dynamics between men and women.[110] Hartmann's analysis of the intersection between Marxism and feminism here helps to understand how these frameworks operate together in Rame's monologue. She argues that capitalism perpetuates the exploitation of women by their proletarian husbands as a means of securing the reproduction of the labour force. While Chapter One introduced social reproduction theory, here I develop it as a more explicit analytical framework. Social reproduction is constructed as a 'woman's job', and, as Hartmann observes, men, particularly within the working class, benefit significantly from this gendered division of labour.[111] They are freed from housework, enjoy leisure activities (as reflected in the monologue, where the husband watches television in the evenings and attends football matches on Sundays), evade childcare responsibilities, and maintain sexual access to their wives' bodies. This aligns with Federici's view of capitalism's reliance on patriarchy and the exploitation of women's reproductive labour. [112] This perspective shows how *Il Risveglio* (Waking Up) addresses both the economic and gendered dimensions of exploitation, highlighting the interconnected nature of these

[110] H. Hartmann, *The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a more Progressive Union.* Capital & Class. 1979;3(2):1-33.
[111] Ibid.
[112] S. Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* (NY: Autonomedia, 2014), 8.

forms of oppression. This issue is exemplified in the monologue through the depiction of a domestic dynamic where the protagonist struggles while her husband snores in bed, highlighting the power imbalance within the couple's relationship at home. This dynamic serves as the foundation for feminist performance theorist Sue-Ellen Case's analysis, which examines how *Il risveglio* problematises the personal-political relationship between married Marxists, revealing the wife's exploitation within the household.[113] Case argues that the couple's problems stem from the husband's failure to share his wife's feminist perspective. However, she also asserts that 'the Marxist feminist critique notes that marital problems are caused by the corporation that profits from the unpaid labour of both husband and wife'.[114] Building on this, I read Rame's approach to this issue not solely from an anti-capitalist perspective but also by emphasising the gendered power imbalance between men and women within capitalist societies.[115] Rame's performance exposes the effect of what Federici describes as a social system that conceals the economic value of reproductive labour by framing it as natural or personal, while profiting from its unwaged exploitation.[116] Rame exposes this dynamic, de-naturalising and de-personalising it through her use of epic performance techniques, drawing on Brechtian alienation effects and comedy, as well as through the content of her monologue. Instead of victimising the protagonist, or making the audience feel sorry for her, she demolishes the myth of women's natural disposition to care. This clearly resonates with *Lotta Femminista*'s activism at the time of writing. Rame articulates her protagonist's anger towards the institutions of family and religion by directing it at her husband, even though he is asleep and cannot hear her.

> La famiglia, sta sacra famiglia l'hanno inventata apposta perché tutti quelli sballati dalla nevrosi dei ritmi di lavoro bestiali come te ritrovino in

[113] S.E. Case, *Feminism and Theatre* (London: Red Globe Press, 1988), 91.
[114] Ibid.
[115] In this context Melandri's work is also relevant as it addresses the hidden violence and oppression that are obscured by the idealised notion of romantic unity between men and women. See L. Melandri*, Una* visceralità *indicibile. La practice dell'inconscio nel movimento delle donne degli anni Settanta* (Società per l'enciclopedia delle donne, 2023).
[116] Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 8.

> noi mogli tutto fare, il materassone!! Noi vi rigeneriamo… gratis, per essere pronti l'indomani a tornare belli scaricati a produrre ancora meglio per lui, il multinazionale![117]

> They invented the family, and they called it sacred just to keep you nervous wrecks on the assembly line from going completely bonkers. You come home from the factory to an all-purpose unpaid wife that you can take it out on like a space mattress. We recondition you, regenerate you…reproduce you! And all for free! We feed you, we wash you, we dress you and brush you down and send you back to the factory as good as new and for what! He's like God Almighty, that multinational.[118]

Rame's protagonist sees family as a trick to oppress women with the complicity of religion, which forces women to work for free and be sexually exploited for the benefit of their husbands, so that they can be ready to go to work and be fully productive workers. Through the lens of *Lotta Femminista*, what becomes clear is the extent to which Rame's work develops from her engagement with activism. Her work echoes the critique of patriarchal structures within religion, family, and corporations, satirically elevating capital to the status of God. The monologue ends with the woman's relief as she realises it is a Sunday, but it is implicit that her day off from work in the factory does not mean it is a day off at home. I argue that this monologue exemplifies how Rame's creative efforts serve as a political intervention. It extends beyond LF's ideas by illustrating the interconnected impacts of capitalism and patriarchy on the lives of housewives and proletarian women, revealing how these oppressions are intertwined through institutions like the family and church. While Case's analysis focuses on textual interpretation, I argue that *Il Risveglio* demonstrates how Rame's artistic methods, such as placing the female protagonist centre stage while her male partner remains silent in bed, and employing didactic farce, alienation techniques, comedy, laughter, improvisation, challenge and deconstruct traditional notions of

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[117] D. Fo, 'Parliamo di Donne', in *Le Commedie di Dario Fo*, *Volume VIII, Venticinque monologhi per una donna,* (Torino: Einaudi, 1989).
[118] F. Rame, *Female Parts* (transl. by M. Kunzle) (London: Pluto Press, 1981), 5.

women's natural roles in care and housework. This means that Rame applies her skills as a *capacomica* to develop a feminist intervention through her theatre work. Furthermore, during *La Comune*'s occupation of the Palazzina Liberty*,* Rame engaged with an audience which included workers, students, and members of left-wing extra-parliamentary groups. This context is significant because it provided a crucial platform not only for engaging the audience in direct dialogue and discussion, but also for exposing and critiquing power dynamics, particularly those embedded within Marxist couples. By performing *Il Risveglio* (Waking Up), Rame aimed both to educate and to provoke reflection among working-class audiences on the interlocking nature of gendered and class-based exploitation, while also raising awareness of the pervasive structures of capitalist and patriarchal oppression.

Medea

The question of maternity and the institution of marriage and family as a condemnation for women, which are a common topic for both progressive and radical feminist strands, are the focus of another monologue part of *Tutta Casa Letto e Chiesa*, Rame's adaptation of Euripides' tragedy *Medea.*[119] This monologue reflects the growing significance of women's issues in Rame and Fo's theatre during the 1970s, exemplified in this case by a shift from comedy to a more tragic tone. Marga Cottino-Jones highlights the transgressive nature of this monologue, driven by its dominant subversive female voice, which makes it one of the most disruptive works in Italian theatre.[120] In the prologue, Rame explains how she and Fo adapted Euripides' original play, which she performs in a Central Italian dialect, taking

[119] Euripides's tragedy Medea tells the story of a noble woman who, driven by revenge after her husband leaves her to marry the young daughter of the king, murders their own children and his husband's new bride to exact her vengeance.
[120] M. Cottino-Jones. 'Franca Rame on Stage. The Militant Voice of a Resisting Woman'. *Italica* 72, no. 3 (1995): 323–39. https://doi.org/10.2307/479722.

on the roles of both Medea and the women of the Chorus. The motivations in this version differ significantly from those in the original.

> Non è il dramma della gelosia e della rabbia, bensì della presa di coscienza, del rifiuto di una legge e di una cultura che vuole la femmina prona e ossequiente ancorché umiliata e offesa. Infatti, Medea pronuncia una frase a mio avviso straordinaria: 'I figli sono come il basto di legno duro alla vacca, che voi uomini ci mettete al collo, per meglio tenerce sotto, manzuete, per meglio poter mungere, meglio poterce montare. Per questo li uccido, perché possa nascere una donna nuova!'.[121]

> It is not a drama of jealousy and anger, but rather of self-awareness and the rejection of a law and culture that demands women to be submissive and obedient, even when humiliated and insulted. Indeed, Medea utters a line that I find extraordinary: 'Children are like the hard wooden yoke on cows, that you men place on our necks, 'to keep us under control, more docile, to better milk, to better mount us. This is why I kill them, to let a new woman be born!'.

In her dialogue with the female chorus, Medea encourages the birth of a new woman, free from the patriarchal chains of marriage and maternity.[122] I read Rame's vision for the creation of a new woman as strongly resonating with Lonzi and the radical feminist struggle to redefine woman as a subject: 'The future of the world is open: it lies in starting along the path from the beginning again with woman as a subject. […] We are the Unexpected Subject'.[123] Rame's *Medea* acquires therefore a new dimension, becoming a symbol of a new woman who is determined to take control of her life, reflecting feminist critiques of motherhood and marriage. As Milagro Martin Clavijo points out, Rame's Medea reinterprets the myth of the infanticide in a time of significant

[121] Medea, in *Tutta Casa letto e chiesa*, in D. Fo, F. Rame, *Teatro*, (Einaudi, 2020).
[122] M. Cottino Jones, "The transgressive voice of a resisting woman", in Valeri, ed. *Franca Rame, A Woman on Stage*, 8-56.
[123] Lonzi, "*Let's spit on Hegel",* in Bono and Kemp*, Italian Feminist Thought*, 59.

social debate about women's rights, particularly focusing on female identity and bodily autonomy, influenced by the 1978 abortion law, which represented a key victory for Italian feminism.[124] Medea's words echo 1970s feminist struggles against the institution of the family and motherhood as the primary tools of women's subordination, embraced in different ways by both strands. For example, Lonzi's radical position against of what she sees as the repressive institutions of marriage and family:

> Verginità, castità, fedeltà non sono virtù, ma vincoli per costruire e mantenere la famiglia. L'onore ne è la conseguente codificazione repressiva.[125]
>
> Virginity, chastity, and fidelity are not virtues; they are means to build and maintain the family. Honour is its resultant repressive codification.

Rame's monologue challenges traditional notions of women's roles as wives and mothers, deconstructing the myth that maternal instinct defines female identity. In the monologue, Clavijo observes a clash between the traditional view of motherhood and family, as represented by the chorus of women, and the feminist perspective represented by Medea. The Chorus voices the conventional, submissive view of women, resigned to the roles imposed by a patriarchal society. In contrast, Medea's perspective rejects these societal norms and institutions, as well as the Chorus itself, which can only interpret her actions as madness. I read Medea's rebellion as resonating with the radical feminist rejection of patriarchal laws and institutions, particularly as articulated by Lonzi, who critiqued traditional structures like the family and marriage as instruments of women's subjugation. While the chorus advocates for silence and self-sacrifice, Medea rejects these 'leggi infami' (infamous laws) which are myths created by men to justify the oppression of women, and seeks to overturn them: 'L'ommini, l'ommini contro de noialtre

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[124] M. Martin Clavijo, "Franca Rame e la revisione del mito", in D. Cerrato, *Franca Pensaci Tu*, 93.
[125] C. Lonzi, *Manifesto di Rivolta Femminile*, in A. Buttarelli, Ed. *C. Lonzi, Sputiamo su Hegel e altri scritti,* (Milano: Baldini + Castoldi, La Tartaruga, 2023), 14.

femmene l'hanno pensata e segnata e sacrata 'sta legge. E sacra fatta per scrittura dello re' (Men, men have thought up and created this law against us women, and the king made it sacred).[126] Marriage and motherhood both represent a form of coercion that must be resisted. The act of killing one's children is not a gratuitous act or an act of revenge but rather a form of affirmation.[127] Infanticide symbolises the need for women to redefine the concept of motherhood and free themselves from the constraints, responsibilities, and sacrifices imposed on them for centuries. I argue that Rame's *Medea* is the embodiment of a new female subjectivity, one that emerges at the intersection of radical feminism's emphasis on sexual difference and the emancipatory goals of progressive feminism. To Rame, this 'new woman' is characterised not by a complete separation from men, but by a rejection of the roles traditionally assigned to women within patriarchal structures, particularly those of wife and mother. Rame's Medea refuses submission and domestic containment by confronting the social institutions that define and limit female identity. In crafting and performing this subject position, Rame draws on radical feminist thought while also staging a call for transformation that is both personal and collective. The play's provocative, open-ended conclusion culminates in Medea's final cry: *'Mori, mori! Pe' fa nasce' 'na donna nuova!'* ('Die, die! To give birth to a new woman!'), delivered on stage with raw intensity, as Rame repeats, and nearly shouts, placing emphatic weight on the final word *nuova*, *new.* This line encapsulates the violent rupture necessary to imagine and create a different future for women as new political and social subjects.[128]

Abbiamo Tutte la Stessa Storia*, *La Mamma Fricchettona*, and *Una Donna Sola

[126] D. Fo e F. Rame, *Tutta Casa, Letto e Chiesa*, 31.
[127]M. Martin Clavijo, "Franca Rame e la revisione del mito", in Cerrato, *Franca Pensaci Tu*, 109.
[128] Dario Fo and Franca Rame, *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa*, Book and DVD (Milan: Fabbri Editori, 2006).

MLD's struggle to legalise abortion and advocate for women's right to enjoy sex and sexuality, are central to the monologue *Abbiamo tutte la stessa storia (The Same Old Story).* This comic and surreal piece expresses the right of women to experience and enjoy both sex and the sexual dimension of their existence more widely from the point of view of a woman and her body, against a patriarchal view of sex.

> Abbiamo tutte la stessa storia è la rappresentazione di un rapporto sessuale tra un maschio e una femmina. […] In questo brano c'è una favola […], un momento surreale, con tutti gli ingredienti classici: il lupo, la strega, e qualche personaggio che va indicato. […] La bambina dolce è quella parte di noi, docile, che subisce, che accetta; la bambolina delle parolacce rappresenta invece le nostre ribellioni. Il 'gattaccio rosso' sta a indicare 'il compagno' che dovrebbe essere compagno sempre, soprattutto in casa […] Sto parlando dei compagni di movimento, dei compagni del PCI e del Partito Socialista. […] C'è anche il 'lupo'. Che rappresenta tutti quei personaggi maschi che ci opprimono fin dall'infanzia. Poi cresciamo, le due parti si fondono, diventiamo una cosa sola, c'è la maturazione e, ci si augura, la presa di coscienza. [129]
>
> We all share the same story; it is the representation of sexual intercourse between a male and a female. […] In this piece, there is a fable […] a surreal moment, with all the classic elements: the wolf, the witch, and some characters that need to be identified. […] The sweet little girl represents that part of us which is submissive, which accepts, whereas the doll with bad words represents our rebellions. The 'red tomcat' symbolizes the 'partner' who should always be a true partner, especially at home. […] I'm talking about movement comrades, comrades from the PCI (Italian Communist Party) and the Socialist Party. […] There is also the 'wolf,' which represents all those male figures who oppress us from childhood. As we grow up, the two parts

[129] Ibid, 11.

merge, we become one, there is maturation and, hopefully, self-consciousness.

This monologue emphasises women's right to equality and their demand to be treated as equals by their political comrades and sexual partners. It also addresses women's right to safe and legal abortion, depicting the traumatic experience of undergoing a clandestine and painful procedure. In the first part of this chapter, I examined how MLD activists, including Adele Faccio, were arrested for openly declaring their decisions to undergo or perform abortions. This act of civil disobedience was a protest against the illegality of abortion in Italy at the time, intended to expose the dangers of clandestine procedures and the oppressive legal framework surrounding reproductive rights.[130] The issue was personal for Rame, who, like many other women, had undergone a painful and costly abortion in her youth. It stands as a clear example of how personal experience informed her politics and artistic approach.[131] While Rame here did not explicitly disclose that the experience was her own, she used her character to convey a personal narrative that simultaneously served as a powerful political statement. The surreal and grotesque element of the fable in the monologue resonates with Melandri's idea of exploring 'the unconscious-conscious relationship, analysing conflicts, as well as the fantasies, desires, and fears'.[132] For example, the conscious side is represented by the good girl, while the unconscious by the rebellious doll, which subverts the story through the grotesque key of comedy, to the point of killing the male figure who oppressed her. The monologue significantly ends with the protagonist meeting with other women in what looks as an *autocoscienza* gathering, where each one shares their personal story, which turns out to be the same.

[130] Together with Faccio, Emma Bonino, a member of the Radical Party, who is still an active member of the Italian parliament, was arrested following her self-denunciation for performing abortions.
[131] This is an issue that she will openly disclose years later in her 1994 autobiographical monologue *Sesso? Grazie! Tanto per gradire!* (Sex? Thanks! Don't mind if I do!), that I analyse in this chapter.
[132] L. Melandri, *L'infamia originaria* (Manifesto Libri, 2018).

> Di nuovo l'idea di una comunità femminile che riceve altre donne che raccontano e condividono il loro 'privato' per renderlo 'pubblico', ma questa volta inteso come punto di arrivo possibile in alternativa all'oppressione.[133]
>
> Once again, the idea of a female community emerges, one that welcomes women who share and transform their 'private' into 'public', this time envisioned as a potential alternative endpoint to oppression.

D'Arcangeli notices that this is a recurrent process in Rame's monologues, where self-awareness happens when a woman shares her personal story with other women.[134] Sexual liberation and the patriarchal oppression of women are also the topic of *Una donna sola (A Woman Alone)*: locked up by her husband in her flat, surrounded by the latest appliances, a housewife tells her story of abuse, loneliness, sexual and domestic violence. Rame describes this woman in her prologue:

> Nel primo brano, 'Una donna sola', troviamo una casalinga, la casalinga per antonomasia, che ha tutto all'interno della sua famiglia, meno la cosa più importante: la considerazione, l'essere trattata dai maschi di casa come una persona, un individuo e rispettata in quanto tale, non solo usata come oggetto sessuale e come domestica senza stipendio né pensione. La nostra donna è un personaggio semplice, naif, il suo abbigliamento si rifa' ai canoni televisivi. Inizia la sua giornata lavorando, e a un tratto scopre, nel palazzo di fronte, una nuova inquilina. Non le par vero di avere qualcuno con cui parlare, con cui confidarsi. [135]
>
> In the first piece, *A Woman Alone*, we find a housewife, the quintessential housewife, who has everything within her family except

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[133] L. D' Arcangeli, *I Personaggi Femminili nel Teatro di Dario Fo e Franca Rame,* (Firenze: Cesati, 2009), 220.
[134] Ibid.
[135] D. Fo, F. Rame, 'Tutta casa, letto e chiesa', in *Tutto il Teatro di Dario Fo e Franca Rame*, (Milano: Fabbri editori, 2000), 10.

> the most important thing: consideration, and to be treated by the men in the house as a person, an individual, and respected as such. Instead, she is only used as a sexual object and as an unpaid domestic worker without salary or pension. Our woman is a simple, naive character; her clothing reflects television standards. She begins her day working and suddenly discovers a new neighbour lady in the building across the street. She can't believe she finally has someone to talk to, someone to confide in.

The protagonist attains self-awareness of her oppressed condition through a conversation with her new neighbour across the window, revealing the importance of this practice, as her consciousness emerges talking to and sharing her personal life with another woman. I would add that Rame, as a *capacomica*, skilfully engages her audience on stage to create an intimate atmosphere, using them to embody the neighbour she addresses. The comic register of the monologue further aids this engagement, making it especially compelling as it resonates not only with women but with the entire audience. Many of the issues in this monologue stem from Rame's personal experiences as a woman, worker, activist, and artist, as well as from the stories she heard from workers and housewives who participated in discussions and political meetings at *La Comune's* post-show sessions, the *Terzo Atto* (third act) as well as from the feminist gatherings at Palazzina Liberty. These women were encouraged to speak up, to voice the problems they wanted to see portrayed on stage. Her characters embodied those women, giving them voice, and body, on stage. Instead of engaging with the feminist practice of *autocoscienza*, meeting in small, women-only groups, I argue that Rame extended these dynamics into a broader, more inclusive public space during her solo performances. I read her monologues in a way as her distinctive, theatrical evolution of the *autocoscienza* practice, where personal reflection and shared experiences were no longer confined to private women's groups but expanded to include and engage her entire audience. This participatory space allowed women to recognise and connect

with one another.[136] At the same time, by addressing intimate issues through personal storytelling, Rame fostered a sense of shared understanding and camaraderie that transcended gender, transforming her performances into a creative and political space that encouraged collective engagement and reflection.

La Mamma Fricchettona (The Hippie Mum), is about a mother who, while chasing her son who left home to join a commune, revels in her newly discovered freedom and sexuality. She ultimately decides to leave her family and home for good.[137]

> Mi troverò un lavoro, piccolo, a mezzo tempo, che mi dia da mangiare e da dormire. Il resto del mio tempo lo voglio passare tra la gente, tra le donne…Regalare quello che ho dentro, che sono piena di cose bellissime…prendere quello che la gente ha da darmi…le esperienze… Voglio parlare, ridere, cantare… Voglio stare a guardare il Cielo […] No, caro, a casa non ci torno, neanche se mi mandate a prendere con i carabinieri.
>
> I'll find myself a job, a small one, part-time, that will give me food and a place to sleep. The rest of my time, I want to spend among people, among women... giving what I have inside, because I'm full of beautiful things... taking what people have to give me... their experiences... I want to talk, laugh, sing... I want to look at the sky [...] No, dear, I'm not going back home, not even if you send the police to get me.[138]

In this monologue, the protagonist, much like Medea, refuses to accept her condition as an oppressed woman, to remain at home, or return to her roles as mother and wife in the family. Instead, she drastically subverts her situation. She chooses to pursue economic independence and dedicate her time to sharing her experiences and 'giving what she has inside' with others,

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[136] Farinati and Firth, *The Force of Listening*, 156.
[137] D' Arcangeli, *I Personaggi Femminili nel Teatro di Dario Fo e Franca Rame,* 213-217.
[138] Fo and Rame, *Tutta casa, Letto e Chiesa*, 54.

particularly with other women. Although the police ultimately intervene to forcibly stop her, she nonetheless achieves a sense of self-awareness and self-determination.

Lo Stupro

This monologue stands out as one of Rame's most powerful expressions of political activism, closely aligned with the feminist genealogy discussed above.[139] I examine how Rame fully embraced the struggle against violence towards women, as promoted for example by the *Movimento di Liberazione della Donna* (Women's Liberation Movement) by adopting the transversal feminist principle of il *partire da sé* (starting from the self). Through this approach, she transformed her autobiographical trauma into a political and collective call for awareness and social change. *Lo Stupro* (The Rape) became, in fact, a signature piece for Rame, remaining a cornerstone of her activism until the end of her career. Two aspects stand out: first, the distinctive theatrical style she adopts in the piece; and second, her long-standing fight for the reform of Italy's laws on sexual violence, which became one of her most significant and enduring causes. Both in the previous chapter and in the introduction, I discussed the horrific violence Rame endured on March 9, 1973, when she was kidnapped in Milan, tortured and raped by five neo-fascists.[140] Although the crime was time-barred by the statute of limitations, it was 'later proven beyond all conceivable doubt, that the attack was premeditated and planned with the connivance of officials in the Italian police forces'.[141] The violence against Rame was a punitive act for her political views, that targeted her as a woman.[142] The attack was part of a

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[139] The original script is available online on Rame's archive: https://www.archivio.francarame.it/scheda.aspx?IDScheda=1194&IDOpera=170 and in F. Rame, *Una Vita all'Improvvisa*, 255-260.
See also L. D' Arcangeli, "'Lo stupro' by Franca Rame: Political Violence and Political Theatre", In P. Antonello & A. O'Leary (Eds.), *Imagining Terrorism: The Rhetoric and Representation of Political Violence in Italy, 1969–2009* (Oxford: Legenda, 2009), 101-115.
[140] Farrell, *Dario Fo Franca Rame*, 141.
[141] Ibid.
[142] L. D' Arcangeli, "'Lo stupro' by Franca Rame: Political Violence and Political Theatre", 101-115.

broader effort to target Rame's activism with *Soccorso Rosso* (Red Aid), which, as analysed previously, supported political detainees, including members of the extra-parliamentary left-wing movements that collaborated with La Comune in the 1970s, particularly those who were detained or in hiding.[143] In 1972 the association debated whether to extend support to a new category of political detainees accused of violent terrorism.[144] Despite divisions and tensions within the group, Rame continued her involvement, emphasising the defence of human rights over ideological alignment. She rejected the actions of these detainees but advocated for humane treatment.[145] While some saw her as an advocate for human rights, others labelled her an apologist for terrorism. This dual perception led to widespread public hostility, making Rame, even more so than Dario Fo, Italy's 'public enemy number one', especially for the far-right extremists.[146]

> L'azione, scrive il giudice, era stata suggerita da alcuni ufficiali dei carabinieri della Divisione Pastrengo, nel quadro del sostanziale atteggiamento di cobelligeranza esistente all'epoca tra alcuni settori di tale Divisione e gli estremisti di destra.[147]
>
> The action, the judge writes, was suggested by certain officers of the Carabinieri from the Pastrengo Division, within the framework of the substantial collaboration that existed at the time between some sectors of this Division and right-wing extremists.

Far-right extremists with ties to police officers, sought to punish and silence Rame. The targeted attack highlights the political significance of her work, which posed a clear challenge to the status quo. However, their efforts were unsuccessful, as both Rame and Fo persisted in their work. What is significant here is that, although Rame chose not to report the attack to the

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[143] L. D' Arcangeli, *I Personaggi Femminili nel Teatro di Dario Fo e Franca Rame,* 230.
[144] L. D' Arcangeli, "'Lo stupro' by Franca Rame: Political Violence and Political Theatre", 101-115
[145] Farrell, *Dario Fo & Franca Rame: Harlequins of the Revolution,* 110.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Rame, *Una Vita all'improvvisa*, 264.

authorities, she transformed the experience into a powerful act that I read as a feminist intervention.

Rame crafted *Lo Stupro* as a concise three-and-a-half-page monologue written in a tragic register. Using sparse and precise language, she recounts the events that unfolded in the van she was forced into, narrating with meticulous detail and a sense of detachment. On stage, the setting was minimal, she was sitting on a chair, and she did not move. Using the present tense, the protagonist describes what she sees and hears.

> 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.
> Si, è una radio. Musica leggera: Cielo stelle cuore amore…amore…
> 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, fortemente, girandomele all'incontrario.[148]

> There's a radio playing... but I only hear it after a while.
> Only after a while do I realise that someone is singing.
> Yes, it's a radio. Light music: sky, stars, heart, love…love…
> I have a single knee pressing into my back, as though the person behind me has their other knee on the ground…with their hands, they grip mine tightly, twisting them the wrong way around.

From that still position on the chair, her voice is almost flat, with no emotion. She describes what is happening, with an epic detachment that makes her delivery extremely powerful. The description of the torture with cigarettes burnt on her skin, her clothes and skin cut with a knife, and the gang rape that follow are told with a detached tone, detailed as if seen outside her body. Once over, the attackers throw her out of the van in a park, bruised and covered in blood.

> Senza accorgermi mi trovo davanti alla Questura […]

[148] Rame, *Una Vita all'improvvisa*,155-260.

> Penso a quello che dovrei affrontare, subire.. se entrassi ora…
> Sento le loro domande.
> Vedo le loro facce... i loro mezzi sorrisi...
> Penso e ci ripenso...
> Poi mi decido...
> Torno a casa... torno a casa...
> Li denuncerò domani.[149]

> Suddenly I realise I am in front of the police station. […] I lean against the wall across the street and look at the building. I take a long look. Thinking of what I would have to face if I went in. Hear their questions. See their faces…their half-hidden smiles.
> I think once. I think twice.
> Then I make up my mind. I'll go home.
> I'll report it tomorrow.

The choice of not reporting the attack to the police at the end of the piece, is significant as it means a lack of trust in the institutions because of patriarchal bias. Rame developed her monologue's prologue over time, adapting to current events, reflecting the dynamic and responsive nature of her theatre work. Her prologue was in fact a critique of the Italian judicial system, which not only does not protect, but exposes survivors of violence to further trauma through humiliating examinations and interrogations.

> Una donna convince veramente di aver subito violenza carnale contro la sua volontà, se ha la 'fortuna' di presentarsi alle autorità competenti pestata e sanguinante, se si presenta morta è meglio![150]

> A woman can only truly convince others that she has suffered sexual violence against her will if she has the 'good fortune' to present herself

[149] Rame, *Una Vita all'improvvisa*, 260.
[150] Fo and Rame, *Le Commedie di Dario Fo, Vol.* VIII, 91.

to the authorities bruised and bleeding. If she shows up dead, even better!

In some performances, she read real transcripts of interrogations from rape trials, addressing the audience:

> MEDICO: Dica, signorina, o signora, durante l'aggressione lei ha provato solo disgusto o anche un certo piacere… una inconscia soddisfazione?
> POLIZIOTTO: Non s'è sentita lusingata che tanti uomini, quattro mi pare, tutti insieme, la desiderassero tanto, con così dura passione?
> GIUDICE: È rimasta sempre passiva o ad un certo punto ha partecipato?[151]

> DOCTOR: Tell me, miss or madam, during the assault, did you feel only disgust, or perhaps a certain pleasure... an unconscious satisfaction?
> POLICE OFFICER: Didn't you feel flattered that so many men, four, I believe, all together, desired you so passionately?
> JUDGE: Did you remain completely passive, or did you participate at some point?

The three male figures of authority, the doctor, police officer, and judge, are portrayed as oppressors, perpetuating another layer of abuse against survivors of sexual assault. This means that writing and performing *Lo Stupro* represents Rame's personal fight for social change, with an impact far greater than reporting the assault to the police could have achieved.

The exact dates when the monologue was written and presented to an audience are not entirely clear.[152] However, cross-checking various sources reveals how the development of the piece mirrors Rame's involvement in

[151] F. Rame, *Una Vita all'Improvvisa,* 261.
[152] M. Fo. Interview with the author, June 5, 2022.

various feminist campaigns. Rame apparently wrote down the events in a notebook in 1973. Two years later, in 1975, she revised the text and turned it into a monologue.[153] Following the success of *Tutta Casa, Letto e Chiesa (All Home, Bed, and Church)*, in 1978 she decided to publish it in the newspaper *Quotidiano Donna* (Women's Daily) saying it was the story of another woman.[154] At that time, there was an ongoing debate about the need to reform the Italian law on sexual violence, and Rame decided to share her story to raise awareness. D'Arcangeli notes that 'It was only in 1979 that Rame decided to perform the monologue, following numerous reports of rape in the newspapers'.[155] At the time, the Italian law still classified sexual violence as a crime against morality rather than against the individual'.[156] This meant that punishments were often lenient, prioritising social order instead of justice for the victims, and sometimes resulting in reduced sentences or impunity for perpetrators. Fighting to change this law therefore became one of Rame's main struggles both as an activist and theatre artist. Walter Valeri was present when Rame performed the monologue for the first time, without informing anyone beforehand. He recalls that he and the other collaborators backstage cried 'come vitelli' (like calves).[157] In her autobiography, Rame explains how this piece, from that moment on, became integral to her struggle against violence toward women:

> Da quella sera ho replicato Lo Stupro […] almeno duemila volte […]. Passano gli anni ma gli atti di violenza sessuale contro ragazze sono sempre all'ordine del giorno: stupri, violenze fisiche e morali contro le donne. Processi dove, guarda caso. Le donne sono sempre colpevoli.[158]
>
> From that evening on, I've performed The Rape […] at least two thousand times […]. The years go by but acts of sexual violence

[153] D' Arcangeli, *I Personaggi Femminili nel Teatro di Dario Fo e Franca Rame,* 227-244.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Franca Rame in L. D' Arcangeli, *I Personaggi Femminili nel Teatro di Dario Fo e Franca Rame,* 233.
[157] W. Valeri. Interview with the author, May 24, 2024.
[158] F. Rame, *Una vita all'improvvisa*, 261.

> against young women are still a daily occurrence: rapes, physical and psychological abuse against women. And at the trials, by chance, women always end up being blamed.

Since that first performance, the monologue became the new closing piece of *Tutta Casa, Letto e Chiesa*. She continued to claim that the story was not her own, to prevent the audience from identifying too closely with her and to maintain the necessary detachment for her epic, objective style of performance. Most importantly, this approach preserved the power of the monologue's message as a denunciation. Rame's struggle to reform the law inspired her to seek ways to spread the message to the widest possible audience by leveraging her influence as both a public speaker and figure. In 1987 Rame reached out to Italian showman Adriano Celentano, requesting the opportunity to present her monologue on his highly popular Saturday night TV show *Fantastico*, broadcast on the national channel RAI 1. Preceding the monologue, the program showcased press clippings and statistics highlighting the alarming rise in sexual violence across Italy. In her autobiography, she recalls how she felt that night, and the reason behind her choice to perform *Lo Stupro* on TV.[159]

> Eseguo il brano, precisando come sempre che è una testimonianza trovata su un giornale.
> Sono molto tesa.
> I fotografi non stanno fermi un attimo.
> Per riuscire ad arrivare alla fine mi devo concentrare completamente.
> Ci sono dentro in pieno.
> Soffro come allora. Rabbia, umiliazione, terrore.
> Un brutto momento.
> Presento questo brano in appoggio alla campagna per l'approvazione della legge contro la violenza sessuale, attesa dalle donne per ben diciott'anni.[160]

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[160] Ibid., 263.

> I perform the piece, saying once again that it is a testimony found in a newspaper.
> I'm very tense.
> The photographers won't stand still for a second.
> To make it to the end, I must concentrate completely.
> I'm fully immersed in it.
> I suffer just as before.
> Anger, humiliation, terror.
> A terrible moment.
> I present this piece in support of the campaign for the approval of the sexual violence law, which women have been waiting for eighteen long years.

This extract demonstrates how Rame's political determination outweighed the difficulty of sharing her personal experience and trauma. The monologue sparked intense reactions and widespread protests from those who deemed it inappropriate for an entertainment TV show. Nevertheless, performing *Lo Stupro* live on TV in front of almost twelve million people, played a pivotal role in raising public awareness and advancing the feminist movement's efforts toward legislative change.[161] Although it took another nine years, her performances continued to support the feminist campaign that culminated in the passage of Law No. 66 in 1996, which finally redefined sexual violence as a crime against the individual.[162] This clearly illustrates Rame's alignment with the more progressive strand of Italian feminism, whose causes she powerfully championed through her performances. Even after the law was eventually modified, Rame continued to perform this monologue in the years that followed, consistently updating it with current data and statistics to highlight the ongoing prevalence of sexual violence against women.

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[161] The performance aired before an audience of 11,524,000 viewers. See press reviews on the archive: https://www.archivio.francarame.it/elenco.aspx?IDOpera=170&IDTipologia=3&IDPagina=1.
YouTube video of Rame performing at RAI TV: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q0kXh8QyCQs .

[162] D' Arcangeli, *I Personaggi Femminili nel Teatro di Dario Fo e Franca Rame,* 236.

Furthermore, Rame toured this monologue abroad, first as part of *Tutta Casa Letto e Chiesa* and later as part of other plays. During the workshop Rame conducted at the Riverside Studios in London in 1983, documented in the book *Dario Fo and Franca Rame. Theatre workshops at Riverside Studios, London,* she guided young actresses as they worked on this monologue.[163] The piece was entitled 'I don't move, I don't scream, my voice is gone'. Here she introduces the piece:

> I don't move […] is a piece which every actress should have in her repertoire, and which she should perform wherever and whenever she can. It is a piece in which you must always keep the tension up, never let it drop. But at the same time, you mustn't let yourself get emotionally upset. You must try and remain detached. When you've got an audience in front of you, it's easy to feel like you want to cry. But you must try not to cry. Because, as I repeat, theatre is fiction. […]. This piece cannot just be performed straight off, as it stands. It needs presenting, explaining. I've prepared a small introduction for it, which we'll get translated for you. At a general point, you should not give too much colour to the piece. It needs detachment. Not too involved. It needs to be more controlled, internal. And don't overstate the physical movement either. […] It's very easy to try and exaggerate, but it's harder to keep your movements restrained. […] And you have to use your voice to convey the feelings to the audience. Your only way of conveying all this is with your voice, and with pauses, which give more weight to the words. You have to convey the atmosphere to the audience. So you have to project your voice. But you must talk sotto voce. […] Don't talk from your head and your throat. Use your diaphragm! Try to get the right pitch of voice. The lower the voice you use, the more effective it is. Beware of tending to cry, though. The more you manage to perform this piece,

[163] Dario Fo and Franca Rame, *Theatre Workshops at Riverside Studios*, (London: Red Notes, 1983).

> giving tone and intensity, without crying, the more you will move the audience to tears.[164]

The way Rame directed the participants demonstrates how she incorporated her epic style into the performance of this piece, highlighting how her activism was deeply intertwined with her theatre practice and acting style. Rame's detached, epic approach is evident both in her writing and her performance. In the workshop, she emphasised the articulation of the text, focusing intently on vocal expression, pitch, tone, and pauses, rather than physical movement. This focus on voice is a crucial element of her practice, revealing how her performance emerged from an embodied theatre style rooted in the work of her original family and the Italian theatre tradition. It was combined with an epic, detached approach that, unlike Fo's, did not rely on gestures. On the contrary, it emphasised restraint in physical movement and concentrated on the modulation of voice, deliberately avoiding emotional embellishment. The emotional weight of the text was in fact already inherent in its content; adding more would diminish its power. The more detached the delivery, the more potent the impact.

Presenting this monologue in different contexts, not only in theatres, but also in schools and universities was, for Rame, a crucial step in addressing the ongoing issue of sexual violence. Regardless of its emotional weight, she believed strongly in the importance of sharing this piece with students of all ages in order to foster awareness and encourage dialogue from an early stage.[165] In 2012, I worked on this monologue in the UK with a group of university students.[166] Given the sensitive nature of the piece, I sought Rame's advice. She recommended avoiding excessive dramatisation, insisting that the text should be delivered plainly, relying on the power of the words themselves, with minimal gestures. While reading the script, one of the students, who was a survivor of sexual violence, broke down in tears. It was the first time she had spoken about her experience. Rame supported me

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[164] Ibid, 49-50.
[165] Conversation with Franca Rame, 2012, the author's private archive.
[166] I directed a group of BA Physical Theatre third year students at East 15 Acting School in Southend-on-Sea. Rame helped me directing her monologues with a group of twenty performers, while Marcello Magni (Complicite) choreographed the group movement.

in handling the situation and asked me to pass along her phone number so the student could speak with her directly, demonstrating her willingness to be personally available and to offer help.

I argue that the circumstances surrounding this monologue make clear that *Lo Stupro* was a feminist intervention, not only because of its content but also because of the style in which Rame performed it and the diverse contexts in which she chose to present it. Rame's articulation of trauma reconfigures the stage as a site of *autocoscienza*, a shared space through which personal experience is externalized and collectively examined, not solely inviting engagement from women, as proposed by the separatist radical strand, but from all spectators, thereby fostering a moment of shared reflection and confrontation. By employing her theatrical craft, Rame staged her traumatic personal experiences to articulate a powerful political message. Furthermore, in this piece she occupied the roles of author, performer, director, and, crucially, the subject of the narrative itself. This convergence of identities enacts the emergent subjectivity articulated by radical feminist thought, wherein autobiographical narration operates as a foundational practice of consciousness-raising, producing an immediate and affective impact on audiences. Her embodiment of lived experience resonates with the experiential writing and the unconscious practices theorised for example by Melandri, further affirming the feminist imperative to politicise the personal. Recognising the importance of addressing a female audience on issues that directly impact women, Rame established *Lo Stupro* as a signature piece within her feminist theatre, often serving as the conclusion to her performances over the following decades, for instance in her 1994 autobiographical monologue *Sesso? Grazie. Tanto per Gradire!* (Sex? Thanks! Don't Mind if I Do!).[167]

The Lasting Influence of Italian Feminisms on Rame's Post-1970s Theatre: *Sesso? Grazie. Tanto per Gradire!*

[167] This monologue is co-signed by Rame, Fo, and their son Jacopo. It was partly inspired by a book written by Jacopo Fo, *Lo zen e l'arte di scopare* (Firenze: Giunti, 1993).

As discussed earlier, in the decades following the 1970s, the radical separatist movement became the dominant strand within Italian feminism. Although Rame in the 1970s consistently distanced herself from its core principles, an autobiographical fragment, written in 1993 and later published by Pizza, reveals a moment of feminist self-reflection and consciousness-raising, a shift prompted by Rame's reading a book about other women's biographies, including Carla Lonzi's. This experience led Rame to reflect on her personal and artistic identity in relation to a broader feminist legacy.[168]

> Altre biografie di donne. Leggere, conoscere, approfondire, passare il tempo con loro, con la loro forza, la loro caparbietà, persistenza, lucidità, intelligenza, sapere, donne che sono riuscite ad emergere dallo sterminato femminile sommerso, in un mondo al maschile, mi costringe ad interrompere la lettura e a ragionare su di me. […] Di colpo mi sento come se non avessi mai pensato. Non ho visto, non ho notato, non ho desiderato. […] Sono certa di non aver mai voluto con forza qualcosa per me. Già arresa prima di essere vinta. Mi sento come se, in questa mia frenetica vita, non avessi vissuto. Mi sento inutile, banale, vuota, come un libro rilegato con pagine bianche, numerate solo in calce. […] Sento l'esigenza di esprimermi, di puntualizzarmi, di cercarmi. Oh mio Dio, cos'è che sto cercando, me stessa?… Il mio io?… Ci ho tanto ironizzato sopra nei nostri spettacoli… Ma ora qualcosa di concreto mi urge. Devo fissare qualche punto.[169]
>
> Other women's biographies. Reading them, getting to know them, delving deeper, spending time with their strength, their determination, persistence, clarity, intelligence, and knowledge, women who have managed to emerge from the vast, submerged world of the feminine, in a male-dominated society, forces me to pause my reading and

[168] G. Livi, *Le lettere del mio nome* (Milano: La Tartaruga, 1991).
[169] F. Rame, "Libera associazione di idee. Note per biografia, 11.7.1993", in M. Pizza, *Al lavoro con Dario Fo and Franca Rame,* 37.

> reflect on myself. […] Suddenly, I feel as if I have never truly thought. I have not seen, not noticed, not desired. […] I am certain I have never firmly wanted something for myself. Already resigned before ever being defeated. I feel as though, in this frantic life of mine, I have not lived. I feel useless, trivial, empty, like a bound book filled with blank pages, numbered only at the bottom. […] I feel the urgent need to express myself, to define myself, to search for myself. Oh my God, what is it that I am looking for, myself? My ego? I've joked about it so much in our performances… but now something tangible presses within me. I need to pin down a few truths.

Through reading other women's biographies, here Rame is confronted with a profound realisation about her own life: she recognises that she has not fought with sufficient determination to assert herself within a male-dominated world. This awareness sparks an urgent need to act, to define herself more clearly and respond to a concrete internal demand for self-articulation. This moment of introspection exemplifies a crucial instance of feminist consciousness for Rame, prompted by her encounter with ideas more closely aligned with the radical separatist tradition, exemplified by Lonzi, that she had previously rejected. It is no coincidence that, during this same period, Rame began developing an autobiographical piece which, I argue, marked a turning point in her artistic trajectory, enabling her to fully articulate her theatrical voice. In this light, Rame's development of *Sesso? Grazie. Tanto per Gradire!* (Sex? Thanks! Don't mind if I Do!) originally performed as part of the 1992 monologue *Settimo: ruba un po' meno 2 (Seventh: Steal a Bit Less 2),*[170] and then expanded into a full-length piece in 1994, can be seen as a culmination of this shift.[171] Although this chapter focuses on her work in the 1970s, I make an exception here because this later monologue, together with Rame's inner written reflection discussed above, demonstrates how the

[170] D. Fo and F. Rame, *Settimo: Ruba un po' meno 2* (Book and DVD), (Milano: Fabbri Editore, 1992).
[171] For this analysis, alongside my direct experience as a spectator, I draw on the second and third versions of the original 1994 Italian script, which I consulted at the Rame Fo Archive in Verona. To support my recollection of the performance, I also refer to the DVD recording of the show, available through the website of the Fondazione Fo Rame.

feminist legacy of that decade continued to shape her artistic development. Unlike her earlier works, which often centred on other women's experiences, *Sesso? Grazie. Tanto per Gradire!* brings Rame's own story to the foreground. Building on the autobiographical impulse initiated in *Lo Stupro*, this piece expands to address other dimensions of her life and sexuality. Blending farcical humour with didactic sex education, the play consists of a montage of autobiographical vignettes, except for one fictional scene depicting the first sexual encounter between Adam and Eve.[172] Rame reflects on topics including her relationship with her mother, menstruation, virginity, orgasm, abortion, and the myths surrounding female frigidity. She also discusses male sexuality, including anecdotes involving her son Jacopo.[173] The play ends with the final dramatic twist of *The Rape,* which substituted a final comic fable written by Fo.[174] I personally attended the performance in 1995 at Teatro delle Saline in Cagliari, Sardinia, where Rame's approach, combining intimacy with satire and comedy, fostered an atmosphere of trust and camaraderie with the audience. The minimal set included a backdrop painted by Dario Fo depicting the Garden of Eden, and large ceremonial candles used in Italian religious processions. Rame used a lectern to prompt herself with key notes,[175] and the soundtrack featured Fo's songs and vocal improvisations. Her prologue, always improvised, set the thematic tone and often included satirical takes on current politics and culture, including sharp critiques of then-Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. Rame's technique, that I read as rooted in the feminist practice of *il partire da sé* (starting from the self), established the audience as participants rather than passive observers.[176]

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[172] The character of Eve appears in many of Rame's plays: Parliamo di Donne (1977), Sex? Thanks! Don't mind if I do! (1994), *La Bibbia Dei Villani* (1996), and in Rame's unpublished monologue, *Eve's Choice* (2023).
[173] M. Cottino-Jones, in W. Valeri, *Franca Rame. A Woman on Stage*, 46.
[174] The original 1994 production of *Sesso? Grazie, tanto per gradire* concluded with *La favola dei tre desideria* (The fable of the three wishes), a comic fable written by Fo, adapted from a medieval tale and performed in an old Padano dialect. It appears in the printed copy of the stage script, third draft, dated 18 November 1994, held at the Franca Rame Dario Fo Archive in Verona.
[175] Rame's stage script is preserved at her Archive: https://www.archivio.francarame.it/scheda.aspx?IDScheda=4336&IDOpera=159
[176] C. Hanish, 'The Personal Is Political'. In *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation*, edited by Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt, (New York: Radical Feminism, 1970), 76–78.

> I hope our little chat will be informative…Without being presumptuous, I'd like it to be a 'lesson of love'. Let's begin in tranquillity…relaxed…so we can let ourselves go…in this happy group therapy.[177]

The ironic comparison to a therapy group breaks the ice and allows Rame to begin disclosing intimate aspects of her private life. Some audience members were even seated on both sides of the stage, reinforcing this relational dynamic. The performance space became a site of feminist inquiry, where personal narrative functioned as political intervention. Through comedy, satire, and autobiographical disclosure, Rame reconfigured the boundaries between public and private, actor and audience. From a feminist theoretical standpoint, Rame's work embodies the dialectic between personal agency and collective resistance. Her body and voice became tools of political expression, challenging patriarchal conceptions of female subjectivity and transforming the stage into a feminist space. *Sesso? Grazie! Tanto per Gradire!* not only subverts taboos surrounding female sexuality but also deploys laughter as a means to building solidarity and breaking silence, particularly potent in a cultural context still shaped by Catholic conservatism.[178]

> My mother was a very talented woman... well brought up, a fervent practising Catholic... and voting too! She never talked about sex with us, her daughters... As far as my mother was concerned, we were made like dolls... We ended here. (*She points just below her waist level*).
>
> For my mother, sex equalled obscenity. To give you an idea: she called our bum: our bottom, and our front bits: the front bottom. Then, every now and then I'd be sitting there doing my homework... I was a very good girl...And my mother would arrive with one of those looks that mothers have at serious solemn moments, and she would say in

[177] Jenkins, in W. Valeri, *Franca Rame. A Woman on stage,* 68.
[178] The play was censured in 1994 and Rame fought until she had the censorship removed.

> a voice... like the voice of God! ‘Beware child! Men only want that one thing!’
> But she never said *what* thing!
> I was terrified. Anytime a boy came near me... I used to throw stones at them.
> ‘Go awaaaay! You'll never have it!’
> ‘What?’
> ‘I don't know!’[179]

Through such narratives, using autobiographical storytelling and laughter to confront taboos around female sexuality, her work positions theatre as a subversive transformative tool, where ‘starting from the self’ becomes a strategy of both resistance and liberation. Together with *Lo Stupro*, this piece turned Rame’s physical presence into a form of evidence that reinforced her argument, situating her work within what Marga Cottino-Jones defines as feminist performance art theatre.

> Rame here constantly uses herself and her own body as text on which the sexual history of Italian women is inscribed, and as metaphor… through which she negotiates and conveys the need to reconsider women’s sexuality, while her voice reformulates her resistance to the laws of the father that insist on keeping women in ignorance and submission.[180]

Sesso? Grazie. Tanto per Gradire! represents the culmination of a feminist trajectory rooted in the legacy of the 1970s Italian feminist movements. It marks Rame’s artistic emancipation, asserting her authentic artistic voice while redefining her feminist theatre as a platform for collective resistance, education, and social transformation.

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[179] F. Rame, D. Fo, J. Fo, Sesso? Grazie! Tanto per gradire! in *Le Commedia di Dario Fo e Franca Rame,* Vol XIII (Torino: Einaudi, 1998), 95-96.
[180] M. Cottino-Jones, ‘The Transgressive Voice of a Resisting Woman’. In W. Valeri ed, *Franca Rame: A Woman on Stage* (West Lafayette, IN: Bordighera Press, 2000).

2.3 Conclusions

Although in the recurring debates of the time regarding the compatibility of socialism and feminism, Rame ultimately prioritised her socialist principles, *Tutta Casa, Letto e Chiesa* (All Home, Bed, and Church) reflects a multifaceted interplay of ideas and practices that resists simplistic categorisation. While Rame's advocacy for women's rights aligned with the progressive feminist strand of the MLD and the LF, I argue that her engagement with certain radical feminist ideas and Milan-based collectives, although never explicit, emerged through her focus on the practice of *partire da sé* (starting from the self) and the creation of a new female subject, as conceived by the feminism of sexual difference: an autonomous social agent capable of shaping her identity beyond male-centred norms. The emphasis on self-awareness about women's sexuality and the sharing of personal experiences became a cornerstone of her creative and political output. This culminated in the publication of *Venticinque monologhi per una donna* (Twenty-five Monologues for a Woman) in 1989, which included *Lo Stupro* (The Rape), and in her monologue *Sesso? Grazie. Tanto per Gradire!* (Sex? Thanks! Don't Mind If I Do!) published in 1998. In these plays, Rame asserted her presence on stage as a woman, as the sole character and voice heard by the audience. The exclusive use of a female voice in her performances served to confront and disrupt the male gaze, provoking the audience into reconsidering familiar perspectives and engaging with women's issues in a transformative way.[181] Rame in fact saw performance as a vehicle for her political commitments to rights and social intervention, part of a broader social experience that included audience interaction, such as in the feminist gatherings at Palazzina Liberty, and *La Comune*'s support for fundraising efforts, including feminist causes, such as helping *Casa delle Donne* (Women's House) in Rome. These events fostered dialogue, debate, and critical reflection, positioning theatre as a space for community engagement and political inquiry into women's experiences and conditions.

[181] Ibid.

Reading her monologues in dialogue with the principles of movements like MLD or LF, for example, has revealed how Rame was informed and inspired by their struggles, and how she translated those issues into her theatre work. Moreover, the public platform of Rame's theatre functioned as a participatory space where women could recognise and affirm one another.[182] While openly distancing herself from separatist feminist approaches, Rame expanded this space beyond gender boundaries to raise awareness of women's issues within the broader community of her audience.

For these reasons, I read Rame's monologues as a feminist intervention in the way they explore the intersection of personal, public, and political spaces, relative not only to content and context but also to relations. This is evident in how she further developed her solo work in the following decades, as in *Sesso? Grazie. Tanto per Gradire!*, creating a participatory environment that, in my reading, mirrors the dynamics of women's groups practicing *autocoscienza*, fostering connections through shared experiences and a sense of community and camaraderie. This inclusive space invited all audience members into a realm of intimate storytelling, transforming her performances into both creative expressions and political interventions. In this context, I interpret Rame's theatre as an amplifier of feminist voices and as an alternative form of direct social action. Building on the experiences of the 1970s examined both here and previously, this chapter lays the groundwork for expanding my definition of Rame as a radical *capacomica* in light of her engagement with feminist ideas, which informed not only the content of her work but also modes and forms of production. Following the end of *La Comune* and the loss of the Palazzina Liberty, I argue that Rame began to cultivate a different kind of leadership that she developed within an alternative collaborative space that emerged at the intersection of the public stage and the intimate sphere of the home. This evolving creative dynamic will be explored further in the next chapter.

[182] L. Farinati, C. Firth, *The Force of Listening.* (Berlin: Errant Bodies Press, 2017).

Chapter 3. A Feminist *Capacomica*: An Oral History of Rame's Practices with Compagnia Teatrale Fo Rame (1980-2013)

This chapter explores the politics of Franca Rame's theatre practices with Dario Fo and their collaborators following the dissolution of *La Comune* and the reconstitution of the *Compagnia Teatrale Fo Rame* (Theatre Company Fo Rame, hereafter CTFR), from 1980 till 2013. Chapters One and Two examined how Rame's experiences with her theatre family, along with her involvement in theatre collectives and 1970s feminist movements, shaped her political and artistic development. Building on this foundation, Chapter Three asks: in what ways did Rame draw on these experiences to shape her creative leadership? What kind of collaborative environment did she contribute to create within the CTFR? What practices and forms of relationship did she cultivate within this space? To address these questions, I employ oral history as a methodological tool, drawing on interviews with Rame's close collaborators, including actors, family members, friends, and academics. These testimonies offer critical insight into the interpersonal dynamics and collaborative processes that shaped the CTFR's work within the creative environment Rame fostered at the intersection of the domestic sphere of her home and the public space of the theatre. A broader feminist theoretical framework provides the lens through which I assess both the values and limitations of the collaborative environment that Rame envisioned. This framework also enables an evaluation of whether her practice ultimately reproduced or subverted patriarchal hierarchies of *capocomicato*.

The loss of Palazzina Liberty led to the development of a different kind of creative space for the newly reformed *Compagnia Teatrale Fo Rame* (CTFR). Following the social and political crisis in Italy in the late 1970s, although no longer aligned with the politics of either the Italian Communist party (PCI) or the extra-parliamentary groups, Rame and Fo's work remained deeply rooted in anti-capitalist values.[1] However, because of the political disillusionment of the *riflusso* period in Italy (late 1970s–early 1980s), as

[1]J. Farrell, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame*, *Theatre, Politics, Life* (London: Methuen,2019).

explained earlier, activism and militancy were increasingly turned inward, toward domestic life, the private sphere, and new forms of cultural intervention.[2] This shift laid the foundation for Rame to play a central role in shaping and reimagining a domestic and artistic environment that redefined the boundaries between private life and collective creation, within which she exercised significant agency in the company's daily practices. Before turning to the oral histories, it is essential to establish the theoretical framework necessary to define, situate, and contextualise the hybrid space in which, from the 1980s onwards, Rame developed a distinct form of *capacomica* leadership, fostering a new model of creative collaboration.

In his book *Theatre & Politics*, Joe Kelleher cites Stefan Collini's definition of politics as the challenging 'effort to determine power relations in a given space'.[3] Unpacking this given space, specifically the kinds of relationships and power dynamics that operated within the CTFR, is part of my analysis in this chapter. What emerges most clearly is Rame's leadership in facilitating a creative environment described by the company's long-time collaborator, archivist, and theatre scholar, Marisa Pizza as a *casa-laboratorio* (home-laboratory).[4] I adopt Pizza's term to refer to the domestic space in which theatre-making, archival practices, political activism, charitable work, and social reproduction coexisted and mutually informed one another.[5] *Casa-laboratorio* was not one static entity, but rather a dynamic and evolving multiple space.[6] It represented, for example, the place where Rame lived and worked with her husband, Dario Fo, and other family members, as well as with invited collaborators and guests. This could be their flat in Milan, their Emilia Romagna summer house in Sala di Cesenatico, or the Santa Cristina estate in Gubbio (Umbria), where their son and granddaughters still live.[7] In these domestic spaces, they also welcomed a multitude of visiting friends and artists for collaborative work and social

[2] J. Farrell, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame*, 249.
[3] J. Kelleher, *Theatre & Politics* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 3.
[4] M. Pizza, *Al lavoro con Dario Fo e Franca Rame* (Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 2006), 21.
[5] Ibid.
[6] M. Pizza, Interview with the author, May 16, 2022.
[7] At Santa Cristina, Rame and Fo also organised artistic events and workshops with their son Jacopo Fo since the 1980s. Today it is Fondazione Fo Rame's headquarters.

interaction.[8] Furthermore, the interviews will show how the *casa-laboratorio* came to include other spaces that functioned as extensions of it, for instance, rehearsal spaces rented by the company, as well as theatres and Rame's dressing room while on tour. To critically examine the forms of leadership cultivated by Rame at the *casa-laboratorio*, I draw on contemporary feminist theory.

The previous chapter analysed how Italian feminists in the 1970s, including Federici, viewed the home as an oppressive space for women. The concepts of both *casa* (home) and *laboratorio* (laboratory) have since been reinterpreted within feminist theory. For instance, in their volume *The Home as Laboratory: Finance, Housing, and Feminist Struggle,* Cavallero, Gago, and Mason-Deese examine how the home may function as both a site of capitalist exploitation and feminist resistance.[9] The authors argue that the domestic sphere, often portrayed as private and unproductive, is central to capitalism, particularly through unpaid labour, and the intensification of social reproduction.[10] Feminist movements have challenged this by deconfining the household and highlighting the potential of feminist methodologies to reclaim domestic spaces as collective territories, linking personal struggles to broader systems of oppression. Ultimately, they argue that the home is not merely a private domain but 'a battleground for social change and liberation'.[11] Building on this feminist project of politicising the private space of the home, I engage with the concept of care to investigate the ethical, relational, and political dimensions of Rame's practices within the *casa-laboratorio*. I draw on Emma Dowling's definition of care as the labour of sustaining life in its emotional, physical, and intellectual dimensions, which resonates with the Care Collective's call to politicise care.[12] The Collective advocates for policies that recognise care as a public concern and promotes alternatives to traditional family-based kinship through collective models such as cooperatives and shared spaces that cultivate interdependence and

[8] M. Pizza, Interview with the author.
[9] L. Cavallero, V. Gago, and L. Mason-Deese, *The Home as Laboratory: Finance, Housing, and Feminist Struggle* (Brooklyn, NY: Common Notions, 2022).
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.,82
[12] The Care Collective, *The Care Manifesto: The Politics of Interdependence* (London: Verso, 2020).

collective responsibility.[13] This framing informs my reading of the *casa-laboratorio* not merely as a site of artistic production, but as a lived experiment in mutual reliance, shared responsibility, and co-creation. To clarify how Rame embedded care into both the structure and process of her performance practices, I also draw on care ethicist Joan Tronto's four ethical elements of care: attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness.[14] Within the *casa-laboratorio*, I analyse how care functioned not only as personal attention and responsibility toward others, but also as a politicised and collective endeavour to construct an alternative mode of social and creative life, one that resisted commodification and centred on human flourishing. Drawing on this framework of care, I turn to Rosi Braidotti's concept of affirmation to further extend my investigation of the *casa-laboratorio*.

In an article discussing the late Italian queer intersectional feminist thinker, writer, and activist Michela Murgia (1972-2023), Braidotti outlines a relational ethic based on the assumption that we are all involved in caring for the state of the world and for others in their intersectional differences. This is an ethics that rejects bonds of power and affirms that we are living and embodied subjects, situated in time and space, banishing universalisms.[15] Braidotti specifically sees Murgia as an advocate of an affirmative ethics that emphasises the pursuit of individual freedom as a collective project, fostered among kindred spirits and shared affections. This perspective aligns with my reading of social relations within Rame's *casa-laboratorio*, a model of collaboration characterised by affective bonds and mutual care,[16] as the testimonies will illustrate. Drawing on Braidotti, I read these practices as contributing to 'the collective ability to build social horizons of hope and affirmation'.[17] Belonging to a different generation, having grown up in the

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[13] Ibid.
[14] J. Tronto, as quoted in Amanda Stuart Fisher, "Introduction: Thinking Through Care in Performance," in *Performing Care: New Perspectives on Socially Engaged Performance*, ed. J.Thompson and A. Stuart Fisher (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022), 3.
[15] R. Braidotti, in the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera,* 13 August 2013. https://27esimaora.corriere.it/23_agosto_13/solo-persone-serie-come-lei-sanno-cosa-sia-leggerezza-michela-murgia-ricordo-32734e04-395c-11ee-8ab6-bfc43d02bf12.shtml
[16] J. Thompson and A. Stuart Fisher, eds., *Performing Care: New Perspectives on Socially Engaged Performance*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022).
[17] R. Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 287-291.

1930s and 1940s, Rame lacked the linguistic resources available today to articulate and interpret her practices. Although this terminology may not perfectly align with her experiences, it offers a new perspective for my analysis of how Rame, in the context of *casa-laboratorio*, entrusted the company to translate shared principles into both words and actions. This approach therefore looks at her practice as a potential feminist and political experiment that, while fostering alternative forms of kinship relationships, seeks social horizons of metamorphosis. In Braidottian terms, this involves 'the search for and diffusion of sustainable alternatives to the schizoid economy of advanced capitalism, its brutal materiality, and murderous violence'.[18] A practice that employs laughter and lightness, entangled with discipline and a serious professional ethos, as tools to resist victimization or catharsis: 'Affirmation, not sadness, fuels feminist politics'.[19] An ethics of affirmation that is about desires, freedom, and becoming is reflected in Rame's purpose of her theatre as 'a political discourse that gets into people's heads, not as a rally, but as humanitarian work for human rights'.[20] A common political goal is in fact what motivates the hard work of the company as well as care and collaboration in the creative ecology of Rame's *casa-laboratorio*. In my reading of this environment, Braidotti's politics of joyous affirmation encounters Federici's concept of joyful militancy, which embraces joy and fun as part of the commitment of a group's political and activist work: 'The principle of joyful militancy is that either our politics are liberating, either they change our life in a way that is positive, that make us grow, give us joy, or there is something wrong with them'.[21] Rame's vision of theatre as a political project was shared by those who participated in this creative habitat and reflected the aspiration to a world without discrimination and injustice. Expanding on this vision and building on both Federici and Braidotti's theories, in what follows I examine Rame's *casa-laboratorio* beyond its function as a private household, as a site of political engagement and artistic

[18] Ibid
[19] R. Braidotti, 2015. *Punk Women and Riot Girls*. Oslo: First Supper Symposium. Published in *Performance Philosophy*, 1: 252.
[20] Franca Rame, *Interview in London*, British Library Sound Archive, May 20, 1982, transcribed and translated by the author.
[21] S. Federici, *Beyond the periphery of the skin*, (Oakland: PM Press, 2020),125.

production shaped by a collective vision of social transformation and liberation.

3.1 An Oral History of Rame's Casa-Laboratorio

The interviews with Rame's former collaborators reveal a common pattern in the way she chose the people to join the company and, in some cases, invited them not only to work but also to live at her home. Theatre scholar, author, translator, and director Walter Valeri joined Rame and Fo in 1980 when they re-established *CTFR*.[22] He met them in their summer house in Cesenatico, when Rame invited him to join the company and work with them in Milan. Rame's brother Enrico was the company administrator, and Valeri was appointed as the person responsible for international copyright relations and press office coordinator. His testimony resonates with those of many other collaborators who, beside their official role, contributed to other tasks in the company:

> Avevi ruoli e responsabilità, ma poi poteva capitare che dovessi fare il facchino, il pittore, la spesa. Essendo una compagnia capocomica con un background di famiglia teatrale, c'era questa osmosi di funzioni diverse che facevano parte della nostra quotidianità. [23]
>
> You had roles and responsibilities, but then it could happen that you had to be a porter, a painter, do the shopping. Being a capocomical company with a theatre family background, there was this osmosis of various functions as part of our daily life.

Valeri emphasises how this distribution of roles in CTFR reflected the Italian theatre tradition, which, as analysed in the first chapter, was deeply rooted in the experience of *famiglie d'arte* (families belonging to the tradition of

[22] W. Valeri. Interview with the author, May 24, 2024.
[23] Ibid.

Commedia dell'arte) where theatrical skills and family bonds intertwined to form professional theatre companies.

> Dal 1500 in poi, a partire dagli Andreini, dai Gelosi, e includendo anche Ruzzante, la prima compagnia professionista nasce come *fraternal compagnia*: i legami più intensi, tu mi sei fratello, sorella, fai parte della famiglia che mette in scena gli spettacoli. Franca fa parte di questa tradizione. Il timone che univa tutti, sia coloro che collaboravano in modo provvisorio che quelli in modo continuativo, era proprio Franca.[24]
>
> From the 1500s onwards, starting with the Andreinis, the Gelosi, and including Ruzzante, the first professional theatre company was born as a *fraternal company*: the most intense bonds, you're my brother, my sister, you are part of the family that brings the performances to life. Franca is part of this tradition. She was the helm that connected everyone, whether they collaborated temporarily or continuously.

This definition is significant, as it resonates with other testimonies that describe the company's practices as an extension of Rame's theatre family.[25] However, while familial ties were undoubtedly significant due to Rame's artistic partnership with her husband Dario Fo and the involvement of other family members, here I am interested in exploring whether and how the *casa-laboratorio* can be understood as an alternative to the theatre family, one that challenges and redefines conventional notions of kinship by cultivating new, collaborative relational forms.

Valeri ironically suggests that CTFR could be the acronym for *Compagnia Teatrale Franca Rame.*[26] He defines Rame as the cornerstone of every collaboration in the company, possessing a natural ability to connect and guide those working with her. In fact, he acknowledges how Rame 'was the guiding force for all collaborators, possessing a unique radar and

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[24] Ibid.
[25] J. Farrell. Interview with the author, May 17, 2022
[26] W. Valeri. Interview with the author, May 24, 2024.

sensitivity in choosing people to join the company'.[27] I would add that Rame's skills were not simply natural or inherited, but the result of decades of experience, knowledge, and practice. In addition to the family members who held various roles within the company, Rame carefully selected individuals to participate in her *casa-laboratorio* experience, and her leadership style reflected a complex and ambivalent disposition:

> Franca Rame era una persona a modo suo religiosa; un po' marxista e un po' francescana 'sine glossa'; a volte dolcissima e a volte inflessibile, benché pronta a chiedere scusa nell'evidenza dell'errore.[28]
>
> Franca Rame was, in her own way, a religious person, part Marxist and part 'sine glossa' Franciscan. She could be both exceedingly gentle and uncompromising, though always willing to apologise when recognising her mistakes.

As anticipated earlier, Rame's politics and theatre practice during those years remained shaped by her anti-capitalist stance. When I asked Valeri if he or other collaborators ever felt exploited due to their involvement in multiple roles, he responded that he did not. He describes his experience as *un felice auto-sfruttamento*, or happy self-exploitation, motivated by shared political values and commitment to creating social theatre together.[29]

> Compagnia teatrale capocomicale. Più che controllare, per Franca si può parlare di competenza, esperienza, sensibilità: era un'egemonia sensibile, in ascolto. Lei capiva subito cosa non andava e lo si risolveva, si ragionava insieme e, se non c'erano compatibilità, ci si

[27] Ibid.
[28] W. Valeri, ed., "Franca Rame – *Ritorno alla vita* (a cura di Walter Valeri)," *La Macchina Sognante*, March 2018,http://www.lamacchinasognante.com/franca-rame-ritorno-alla-vita-a-cura-di-walter-valeri/.
[29] W. Valeri. Interview with the author, May 24, 2024.

> salutava e si lasciava. Era una libera scelta. Si condivideva tanto, il discorso della creazione. [30]
>
> It's the capocomical theatre company. More than exercising control, in Franca's case it was about competence, experience, and sensitivity: it was a form of sensitive leadership, grounded in active listening. She would immediately sense when something was not working, and it would be resolved, together, through discussion. If there was no compatibility, people would part ways respectfully. It was always a free choice. There was a deep sense of sharing, especially in the creative process.

This underscores how Rame cultivated an environment of political education and collaborative labour. Furthermore, Valeri explains how working with artists of Rame and Fo's stature, sharing their artistic, political, and social vision, provided significant benefits to their collaborators. For instance, it opened doors to future opportunities, creating connections and networks with international institutions such as universities, theatres, consulates, cultural institutes, and other global artists.[31] A similar experience was shared by Marisa Pizza, who met Rame and Fo in 1989, after she wrote her dissertation thesis about their theatre.[32] Pizza's thesis was five hundred pages long, accompanied by three volumes of critically analysed press reviews. Rame and Fo were impressed by her work and Rame invited her to collaborate and live with them in Milan. Originally from Naples, Pizza moved from Rome and lived with them from 1993 to 2003 and kept working at the *casa-laboratorio* until Fo's death in 2016.[33]

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[30] Ibid.
[31] Thanks to the many international connections created working with Fo and Rame, Valeri for example has worked at the American Repertory Theatre's Institute for Advanced Theatre Training at Harvard University, and he taught at Harvard University, RLL, from 2000 to 2006.
[32] Pizza's PhD thesis on the theatre of Fo and Rame became a publication, see M. Pizza, *Al lavoro con Dario Fo e Franca Rame* (Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 2006).
[33] M. Pizza, Interview with the author, May 16, 2022. Pizza was a direct collaborator of Rame and Fo on the archive and on research for their dramaturgical writing from 1993 to 2016. She served as the director of the archive from 2008 to 2020.

> Quando li ho conosciuti, vivevano già a Porta Romana. La nostra collaborazione è iniziata quasi subito dopo la mia laurea, perché fu Franca a chiamarmi direttamente per chiedermi se mi sarebbe piaciuto raggiungerli a Milano per un periodo di lavoro insieme. Era rimasta molto colpita dalla mia tesi e voleva che lavorassi con loro. Sono arrivata a Milano a maggio e da quel momento non ci siamo mai più separati. Abbiamo vissuto insieme, nelle loro case sia a Milano che a Cesenatico.[34]
>
> When I met them, they were already living in Porta Romana. Our collaboration began almost immediately after my graduation because Franca called me directly to ask if I would like to join them in Milan for a period of work together. She had been very pleased with my thesis and wanted me to work with them. I arrived in Milan in May and from that point on we never parted ways. We lived together in their homes in both Milan and Cesenatico.

As with other interviews, it is evident that the invitation to collaborate, and, in some instances, to live together, originated with Rame. She was the one who selected their collaborators and determined the conditions of the partnership.

> Quando sono arrivata a Milano, Franca e Dario erano impegnati con i loro collaboratori, ma come sempre furono gentili e calorosi nell'accogliermi, facendomi sentire a casa. Dario mi salutò non appena uscii dall'ascensore. Mentre ancora pensavo a cosa dire, Franca mi mise subito a mio agio, saltando ogni formalità. Come se fossi già parte della famiglia, mi porse delle lenzuola e mi accompagnò nella mia stanza. Da quel primo giorno in poi, non c'era bisogno che qualcuno ti dicesse cosa fare; ci si aiutava semplicemente a vicenda, passo dopo passo. In quella casa, piena di

[34] M. Pizza. Interview with the author, May 16, 2022.

> quadri, pennelli, colori, libri, foto e posta, sembrava di vivere in un laboratorio sempre in fermento. [35]
>
> When I arrived in Milan, Franca and Dario were busy with their collaborators, but as always, they were kind and warm in welcoming me, making me feel at home. Dario greeted me as I stepped out of the elevator. While I was still thinking about what to say, Franca immediately put me at ease, skipping all formalities. As if I had already been part of the household, she handed me some bedsheets and showed me to my room. From that first day on there was no need for anyone to tell you what to do; we simply helped each other as we went along. In that house, filled with paintings, brushes, colours, books, photos, and mail, it felt like living in a constantly active laboratory.

Pizza describes Rame's *casa-laboratorio* as a dynamic, mobile, multifunctional, private, and public creative space that encompassed aspects of reproduction, both domestic and company related. For example, although Rame at times employed a couple of live-in domestic workers, who were fully integrated into the household and with whom she established affective bonds, social reproduction at the *casa-laboratorio* often extended to the collaborators of the company.[36] Daily routines such as grocery shopping, cooking, eating, and driving were sometimes shared collectively. Pizza recalls going to the vegetable and fish markets with Rame and Fo, with one or both preparing meals and the group dining together. These practices reinforced a sense of mutual care and collaboration, embedding social reproduction within a broader ethos of shared domestic and creative life.

> Come gli altri collaboratori, mi sono davvero goduta il lavoro che facevamo insieme. Ogni progetto comportava una ricerca su tematiche politiche e sociali, e già questo ti faceva sentire coinvolta.

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[35] Pizza, *Al lavoro con Dario Fo e Franca Rame*, 20.
[36] M. Pizza, Interview with the author, May 16, 2022.

Lavorare insieme a uno spettacolo, una conferenza, un libro o un'intervista era qualcosa che accresceva la consapevolezza su questioni importanti e allo stesso tempo creava un'atmosfera di allegra e quasi goliardica complicità. Questo spirito portava spesso a delle digressioni. Per esempio, mentre si pianificava un evento, Franca iniziava a ricordare i suoi spettacoli in tournée negli anni Settanta per la liberazione di giovani innocenti dal carcere. Oppure parlava del suo amore per i Beatles, o delle sue esperienze di canto con Rosa Balistreri durante *Ci ragiono e canto*. Franca condivideva molto, anche perché sapeva che ero interessata alle loro storie. E quando viaggiavamo in macchina, i racconti continuavano: storie della sua infanzia e della sua famiglia, soprattutto del fratello amatissimo, ricordi delle prove con Dario, della scrittura e della regia in scena, delle discussioni con Dario che non voleva registrazioni degli spettacoli, e dei racconti sul loro amore e i tradimenti. Durante quei viaggi cantavamo all'infinito, da Gino Paoli a Roberto Murolo, da Mina ai canti popolari di lavoro. Amavamo profondamente tutto il processo di lavoro, dalla ricerca alla scrittura, dallo sviluppo alla lettura, dalle prove alla messa in scena, fino al montaggio dei testi e al lavoro d'archivio. Eravamo sempre profondamente coinvolti, soprattutto perché ci sentivamo uniti in questo, condividendo prospettive e lavorando insieme come collettivo.[37]

Like the other collaborators, I truly enjoyed the work we did together. Each project involved research into political and social issues, and that alone made you feel involved. Working together on a performance, a conference, a book, or an interview was something that raised awareness about important issues and at the same time created an atmosphere of boisterous, almost collegiate camaraderie. This spirit would often lead to digressions. For example, while planning an event. Franca would start recalling her touring shows in the 1970s for the liberation of innocent youth from prison. Or she

[37] M. Pizza. Interview with the author, May 29, 2025.

> would speak of her love for the Beatles, or her experiences singing with Rosa Balistreri during *Ci ragiono e canto*. Franca shared a lot, partly because she knew I was interested in their stories. And when we travelled by car, the stories continued, tales from her childhood and family, especially about her beloved brother, memories of rehearsals with Dario, their on-stage writing and direction, arguments with Dario, who didn't want recordings of their shows, and stories of the couple's love and betrayal. During those drives, we would sing endlessly, from Gino Paoli to Roberto Murolo, from Mina to traditional work songs. We absolutely loved the entire work process, from research, writing, development, readings, rehearsals, staging, and editing the texts, to the archival work. We were always deeply involved, especially because we felt united in it, sharing perspectives and working together as a collective.

Reproductive aspects of work, such as communal activities like singing, eating together, alongside affective relations and Rame's inclusive approach to collaboration, played a transformative role in reshaping interpersonal dynamics and fostering collective political action. At the end of each season, during the summer many continued to collaborate with Rame and Fo at their *casa-laboratorio*, as that was the time when new plays were developed. For example, Valeri, who had his own house in Cesenatico, helped them with their research for new pieces, gathering materials and information. He further clarified that the company members' annual salary was sufficient to cover the summer months when the company was not touring. Moreover, the contract was not exclusive, allowing collaborators to work with other theatres. For instance, the technicians took on summer jobs with other companies.[38] Notably, many artists and friends of Rame and Fo visited the *casa-laboratorio* during the summer months in either Cesenatico or at Santa Cristina. Author and playwright Stefano Benni was a regular presence who actively participated in the creative process, such as the collective readings of early script drafts and offering constructive feedback, in this way

[38] W. Valeri. Interview with the author, May 24, 2024.

contributing meaningfully to the shared artistic environment.[39] These exchanges with guest artists, which extended the collaborative tradition established during the years of the theatre collectives, particularly at the Palazzina Liberty, where both Italian and international artists, activists, and intellectuals were often present, were foundational to the group's artistic practice.[40]

The collaborators' involvement in the company's work included transcribing, assisting during rehearsals, digitising and cataloguing Rame's archive, helping to organise tours, and participating in her charitable and political initiatives, including both Rame and Fo's political campaigns in the 2000s, which will be discussed in this chapter.[41] Most importantly, Pizza elucidates how Rame managed to expand and reimagine the workspace of the *casa-laboratorio* in locations outside their home. One such space was a warehouse they hired on Via Bordighera in Milan, which was used for rehearsals and housed a significant collection of materials that formed part of the archive Rame was developing.[42] These included drawings, posters, banners, photos, costumes, puppets, and masks that on certain occasions became part of national or international exhibitions that the company organised.[43] Significantly, Pizza identifies Rame's dressing room as a key site within the broader prism of the *casa-laboratorio*.

> Anche il camerino faceva parte della *casa-laboratorio*, e il teatro stesso veniva trasformato in un laboratorio-casa. Durante le tournée, i ruoli si invertivano. Il camerino diventava un ufficio vero e proprio, non certo il tipo di camerino che ci si potrebbe immaginare per una prima attrice. Nel camerino di Franca c'era di tutto: un computer, lavori amministrativi, revisioni di copioni, costumi che controllava prima che venissero consegnati, perché nulla arrivava a Dario senza passare prima dalle sue mani. C'era davvero un po' di tutto: i cambi d'abito di Franca, il trucco, gli oggetti personali. Era il suo laboratorio. Ci

[39] M. Pizza. Interview with the author, May 16, 2022.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Pizza*, Al lavoro con Dario Fo e Franca Rame*, 22.

> passava molto tempo, anche nelle ore più insolite. Se qualcuno chiedeva: 'Dov'è Franca?', era molto probabile che fosse lì, a lavorare su qualcos'altro.[44]

> Even the dressing room was part of *casa-laboratorio*, and the theatre itself was transformed into a laboratory-home. The roles were reversed when touring. The dressing room became a fully functional office, not the kind of dressing room you might imagine for a leading actress. In Franca's dressing room there was everything: a computer, administrative work, script revisions, costumes she checked before they were passed on as nothing went to Dario without first passing through her hand. There was truly a bit of everything: Franca's costume changes, her makeup, her personal items. It was her laboratory. She would spend time there, even at the most unusual hours. If you asked, 'Where's Franca?' chances were she'd be there, working on something else.

While on tour, Rame recreated her office in her dressing room, complete with her computer, documents, and various tools necessary for carrying out her numerous responsibilities. The intent was to facilitate her work with her collaborators, to keep working in the moments when she was not on stage, sometimes even in between scenes. For example, collecting press reviews and other documents, digitising her archive, fixing costumes or props, editing the script, while simultaneously managing her political and social activities.[45] Recreating her workplace on tour facilitated her multiple roles as a *capacomica*, as Rame reflects here:

> Sto bene nei camerini, anche se squallidi. Non li addobbo con sete colorate. […] L'unica cosa alla quale non rinuncio è la luce. La luce e il mio baule. […] È un classico baule armadio di attori, verde fuori a fiorellini l'interno. Ci sono i cassetti e nei cassetti tutto: maglioni, libri,

[44] M. Pizza. Interview with the author, May 16, 2022.
[45] Ibid.

> fogli, macchina da scrivere, computer, pennarelli, lettere e cianfrusaglie di ogni genere. […] Il mio baule, il suo contenuto, il camerino, il palcoscenico: sono a casa. Io non mi considero un'attrice, sono 'anche' un'attrice. In casa mia ho imparato tutto quello che può servire per poter fare questo lavoro: attrice, elettricista, fonico, costumista, trovarobe, direttore di scena, servo di scena, piazzare le luci, suggerire, sarta, vendere i biglietti, truccare, pettinare, ballare, cantare, la ricerca delle piazze, l'amministratore, fare un borderò.[46]
>
> I feel comfortable in dressing rooms, even if they are shabby. I don't decorate them with colourful silks. […] The only thing I can't do without is light. The light and my trunk. […]. It's a classic actor's wardrobe trunk, green, with a floral interior, and drawers inside. In the drawers, there's everything: sweaters, books, papers, a typewriter, a computer, markers, letters, and all kinds of odds and ends. […] My trunk, its contents, the dressing room, the stage, that's home. I don't consider myself just an actress; I am 'also' an actress. At home, I learned everything that might be useful for this work: actress, electrician, sound engineer, costume designer, props master, stage manager, stagehand, light technician, prompter, seamstress, ticket seller, makeup artist, hairdresser, dancer, singer, tour manager, administrator, and box office manager.

This passage captures Rame's work and her deep connection to the theatre as both a public and domestic, familial space of comfort and self-identity. Theatre to Rame meant feeling at home, because it was the space where she grew up. She did not just see herself as an actress, but as a multifaceted artist, in the tradition of *capocomicato*, where everyone in the company had to master all aspects and activities of the theatrical world. Furthermore, Rame's dressing room functioned as a significant space of encounter, where she cultivated a new kind of relationship with her spectators. I interpret this practice as drawing on the tradition of the *terzo*

[46] F. Rame in M. Pizza, *Al lavoro con Dario Fo e Franca Rame*, 43.

atto (third act), the post-show discussions initiated during her time with the theatre collectives, where audiences were invited to share their reflections and feedback. In keeping with this ethos, Rame would often leave the door to her dressing room open after performances, welcoming audience members who wished to meet and speak with her, especially women.[47] This was for example the context of my very first encounter with Rame, in 1995, at a theatre in Cagliari, Sardinia, following a performance of *Sesso? Grazie. Tanto per gradire!* (Sex? Thanks! Don't Mind if I Do!). I approached her dressing room and she received me with warmth and curiosity, asking about my background and interests. At the time, I was writing a dissertation on theatre semiotics, and she spoke to me about her friendship with the semiotician and writer Umberto Eco. We exchanged ideas, and I was struck by her attentiveness and openness to dialogue. Rame's dressing room represented an intimate yet porous space where encounters with spectators occasionally informed her creative process.[48] Giovanni Viganò, IT specialist and former digital archivist for the company, recalls how Rame's dressing room often became a space where women shared their personal stories and struggles.

> Lei portava sul palco i problemi reali delle persone. Franca mi raccontò, in maniera tragicomica, che quando finivano gli spettacoli, nel camerino di Dario entravano ragazze che volevano andare a letto con lui, mentre nel suo camerino entravano donne che volevano raccontarsi, portare a Franca i propri problemi, perché Franca li metteva in scena. Quei problemi diventavano problemi di Franca. Parlavano di storie personali, reali, della gente che seguiva il loro teatro. Ho scoperto recentemente che provenivano da ogni estrazione sociale e orientamento politico, anche non di sinistra. I temi e le preoccupazioni che portavano erano ampi e attraversavano confini sociali e politici.[49]

[47] M. Pizza, Interview with the author, May 16, 2022.
[48] G. Viganò. Interview with the author, August 23, 2022.
[49] Ibid.

> She brought the real problems of people to the stage. Franca once told me, in a tragicomic way, that after their performances, young women would enter Dario's dressing room wanting to sleep with him, while in her dressing room, women would come in to share their stories and bring her their problems, because Franca brought those issues to the stage. These problems became Franca's own, drawn from the audience that followed their theatre. The women would speak about their personal, real-life experiences. I recently discovered that these individuals came from all walks of life and political affiliations, not just from the left. Their themes and concerns were wide-ranging and cut across social and political boundaries.

Viganò observes how these encounters often fed directly into Rame's work, how she listened to the women, made their problems her own, and ultimately wove them into her performances.[50] By listening to women's personal stories and concerns in the intimate space of her dressing room, Rame effectively reconfigured the theatre collective's practice of the *terzo atto* into a feminist methodology centred on attentive listening and the sharing of lived experiences.

When working with the company, elements of *capocomicato* emerged in the way Rame engaged with her collaborators. While she did not aim to make anyone feel uncomfortable, she maintained clear and well-understood expectations regarding punctuality and precision in their work. Pizza recalls how Rame organised the work with her collaborators while working in Cesenatico in the summer:

> Franca, a tarda sera, quando decide di staccarsi dal lavoro al computer, comincia a riporre libri, disegni, colori, tavolozze e fogli, rimediando al disordine che, immersi nel lavoro, nessuno si era reso conto di aver creato. Al mattino tutto è in ordine, e ognuno, alla propria postazione, trova un foglietto con i gentili

[50] This happened, for example, in the collection of plays *Parliamo di Donne* (*Let's Talk About Women*), in which Rame addressed themes related to women, including depression, eating disorders, loneliness, drug-related issues, and ageism.

> ma categorici ammonimenti di Franca, scritti in penna rossa, che invita all'ordine, alla razionalità e alla chiarezza nell'organizzazione e nello svolgimento del lavoro, affinché si possa lavorare meglio insieme.[51]
>
> Franca, late in the evening, when she decides to step away from her work at the computer, begins to put away books, drawings, colours, palettes, and papers, tidying up the mess that, absorbed in work, no one had realised they had created. In the morning, everything is in order, and everyone at their workstation finds a piece of paper with Franca's gentle but firm reminders written in red ink, urging order, rationality, and clarity in the organisation and execution of tasks so that we can work better together.

Alongside these high standards, she demonstrated great attentiveness to ensuring that everyone had the tools and resources they needed to succeed. She took care to provide scripts to actors, incorporate updated revisions, and address any logistical needs. Known for her exceptional punctuality, she upheld this standard for herself and expected the same level of commitment from those around her.[52]

In parallel with this ethos of hard work, discipline, and control, creative moments of improvisation, fun, singing, and music-making with the many artists and friends who regularly visited were central to daily life.[53] Communal meals, recreational activities, including Rame's love of playing cards, and a shared sense of conviviality all contributed to a joyful environment that, I argue, fostered creative empowerment.[54] Furthermore, Pizza emphasises how both Rame and Fo encouraged actors and collaborators to express their potential in this environment, making each one feel an equal part of the group, trusted, valued, and fully engaged in the collective experience. Based on the analysis so far, the *casa-laboratorio* can be understood as a

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[51] M. Pizza, *Al Lavoro con Dario Fo e Franca Rame*, 33.
[52] M. Pizza. Interview with the author, May 16, 2022.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Silvia Federici, "Putting Feminism Back on Its Feet," *Social Text*, no. 9/10 (Spring–Summer 1984): 338–46.

collaborative and creative space in which individuals worked toward a shared goal, sustained by mutual affection and a sense of common purpose. These dynamics help to explain the enduring loyalty of those I interviewed, many of whom remained close to Rame and Fo until their final years.

3.2 Auditions, Casting, Rehearsals, Research, and Training at *Casa-Laboratorio*

Within the CTFR, the process of casting for new productions reverted to more conventional audition practices, which were frequently conducted at the home of Rame and Fo.[55] Every year, the company formally hired actors in September and dismissed them in May at the end of the season, following the standard practice of most Italian theatre companies.[56] Actor, practitioner, and author Fabrizio de Giovanni joined the company for the 1991/92 tour of Rame's one act plays: *Parliamo di donne*: *L'eroina, Grasso è Bello, Una Giornata Qualunque* (Let's Talk About Women: The Heroine, Fat is Beautiful, An Ordinary Day).[57] He started through auditions as an actor, and later became one of Rame's personal collaborators, helping her in different tasks. His audition was quite traditional, with actors reading their scripts sitting down around a table. Then parts were decided, and it was Rame who cast the actors and their parts.

> Nel 1991, quando terminai una scuola professionale di teatro, durante l'estate uscì un annuncio sul quotidiano *La Repubblica*: 'Compagnia teatrale primaria di Milano cerca giovani attori per tournée 1991/92'. Si presentarono in trecento, giovani attori provenienti dalle scuole di teatro di Milano e della Lombardia. Facemmo le audizioni, e per tutti noi fu già un'esperienza straordinaria incontrare Dario Fo e Franca Rame; lavorare con loro, sotto la loro direzione, era emozionante. Cercavano solo due attori, ma alla fine ne presero cinque, inclusi

[55] Ibid.
[56] W. Valeri. Interview with the author, May 24, 2024.
[57] D. Fo and F. Rame, *Parliamo di donne* in *Il Teatro di Dario Fo* (Torino: Einaudi, 1998).

> alcuni figuranti. Andammo nella loro casa estiva a Cesenatico per alcune settimane di prove. A settembre provammo a Milano e, a novembre, debuttammo con la tournée di *Parliamo di Donne*, dove Franca era la protagonista. Era l'anno in cui Dario era in tournée con *Johan Padan a la descoverta de le Americhe*, e Franca con *Parliamo di Donne*.[58]
>
> In 1991, when I finished professional theatre school, in the summer, there was an advert in La Repubblica newspaper: 'Primary theatre company in Milan seeks young actors for tour 1991/92'. Three hundred people showed up, young actors from theatre schools in Milan and Lombardia. We auditioned, and for all of us it was already a great experience to meet Dario Fo and Franca Rame, it was exciting working with them directing us. They were only looking for two actors, they took five in the end, including some extras. We went to their summer house in Cesenatico to rehearse for a few weeks. In September we rehearsed in Milan, and in November we debuted the tour of *Parliamo di Donne (Let's Talk About Women)* where Franca was the protagonist. It was the year when Dario toured with *Johan Padan and the Discovery of the Americas* and Franca with *Parliamo di Donne.*

Auditions and rehearsals started at *casa-laboratorio* in Milan or Cesenatico, before moving to rehearsal spaces and theatres. De Giovanni's following anecdote emphasises a distinction between actors who become part of *casa-laboratorio*, and others who were just hired by the company for specific productions.

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[58] F. De Giovanni, interview with the author, June 21, 2022. See D. Fo, F. Rame, 'L'eroina and Grasso e' Bello', in *Le Commedia di Dario Fo e Franca Rame*, Vol.XIII, (Torino: Einaudi, 1998); Fo, Dario. *Johan Padan a la descoverta de le Americhe.* Edited by Franca Rame. Firenze: Giunti, 1992. D. Fo, *Johan Padan and the Discovery of the Americas*. Transl. by Ron Jenkins and Stefania Taviano (NY: Grove Press, 2001).

> Uno dei primi giorni di prove in via Bordighera a Milano, a settembre, scoppiò un tubo dell'acqua nel bagno al piano di sopra, e Dario e Franca, con stracci, secchi e i piedi nell'acqua, si misero a lavorare per portarla via. Li aiutai anch'io, mentre gli altri giovani attori restarono seduti sulle gradinate. Franca commentò: 'Anche quest'anno abbiamo "gli attori" in compagnia', sottolineando con ironia la loro riluttanza a dare una mano, mentre lei e Dario lavoravano instancabilmente per togliere l'acqua.[59]
>
> On one of the first days of rehearsals in Via Bordighera in Milan, in September, a water pipe burst in the upstairs bathroom, and Dario and Franca, with rags, buckets, with their feet in the water, cleaned it up. I helped them, while the other young actors remained on the bleachers. Franca remarked, 'Looks like we've got "the actors" in the company again this year', highlighting their reluctance to give a hand while she and Dario worked tirelessly to get the water away.

This anecdote illustrates how Rame did not hesitate to get her hands dirty when there was work to be done, setting an example for the others. At the same time, it shows a certain disregard towards people who were not keen to be involved in extra tasks beyond acting. The testimonies in fact show how people who were part of *casa-laboratorio* were expected to contribute to the company's many activities, in contrast to guest performers, hired for specific productions. Another actress, Marina De Juli, joined *Compagnia Teatrale Fo Rame* for the same 1991/92 tour of Rame's play *Parliamo di donne* (Let's Talk About Women).[60] In her first year, De Juli worked just as an actor, then she realised that she also wanted to be part of Rame and Fo's *casa-laboratorio*, which she describes as particular and anomalous, compared to conventional theatre companies.

[59] F. De Giovanni. Interview with the author, June 21, 2022.
[60] M. De Juli. Interview with the author, June 30, 2022.

> Prima di tutto, se ci sei, devi esserci al 100%, e non puoi semplicemente esserci per fare la tua parte, punto. O meglio, puoi anche farlo, ma la tua resistenza sarà molto limitata. Mi piaceva il loro modo di essere artigiani del teatro, di crearlo da zero. Poi il lavoro si mescolava ai sentimenti: devi voler loro bene, perché la presenza di artisti di questo tipo è anche ingombrante, c'è una forma di egocentrismo in queste personalità. Io amavo soprattutto Franca, così sono rimasta con loro per circa dieci anni ininterrottamente, durante i quali ho fatto di tutto. [61]
>
> First of all, if you're there, you have to be there 100%. You can't just show up to do your part, full stop. Or rather, you can, but your endurance will be very limited. I liked their way of being theatre artisans, of creating it from scratch. Then, work became intertwined with emotion: you have to care for them, because the presence of artists like that can be overwhelming, there's a form of egocentrism in such personalities. I especially loved Franca, and so I stayed with them for about ten uninterrupted years, during which I did a bit of everything.

The presence of two artists of the calibre of Rame and Fo could be overwhelming and, in some cases, even frustrating for young actors, especially on stage. However, affection and shared principles, along with the opportunity to grow as actors, learning their skills while working and living with them, contributed to developing long-term friendships that were not only based on work. This reflected the tradition of *capocomicato*, which included training, relations, and collaboration, and explains why actors hired for specific productions did not really become part of *casa-laboratorio*.[62] De Giovanni also chose to became part of Rame's *casa-laboratorio*, and, as

[61] Ibid.
[62] L. Mariani. Interview with the author, July 18, 2022.

Valeri, Pizza, and De Juli, he engaged in other roles in the company, for example as prompter, driver, and archivist.[63]

> Era bello. Il teatro è la tua vita. ti ci immergi, si mangiava insieme, si facevano le prove a casa, tutto l'anno tranne i tre mesi in cui ci si trasferiva a Cesenatico, dove avevano la casa al mare. A Milano, a Porta Romana 132, la casa e uffici, al quinto piano la casa, al sesto e ultimo delle specie di uffici e deposito delle opere di Dario, etc., al primo e secondo piano c'era il laboratorio dove si facevano prove, e dove Dario dipingeva con i suoi collaboratori negli ultimi anni.[64]
>
> It was wonderful. Theatre is your life; you immerse yourself in it. We would eat together, rehearse at home, all year round except for the three months spent in Cesenatico, where they had their summer house. In Milan, at 132 Porta Romana, they had their home and offices. The apartment was on the 5th floor, and on the 6th and top floor were makeshift offices and a storage space for Dario's works, etc. On the 1st and 2nd floors was the workshop where rehearsals took place, and where Dario painted with his collaborators in the last years.

It was an all-encompassing approach to experiencing theatre work, blending life with artistic practice. Many interviewees depict their time at *casa-laboratorio* as predominantly joyful, while acknowledging how discipline and hard work were embedded in their daily routines.[65] The integration of play and pleasure into their daily routines resonates with Federici's perspective on the significance of joyous moments in motivating collective engagement and collaboration.[66] Federici insightfully acknowledges the historical struggle of the radical Left to attract support due to its neglect of the reproductive aspects of political work, such as communal activities, songs, dance, and

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[63] De Giovanni prompted Fo's eulogy/monologue during Rame's funeral, through in-ear headphones.
[64] F. De Giovanni. Interview with the author, June 21, 2022.
[65] Ibid.
[66] S. Federici, *Beyond the periphery of the skin*, (Oakland: PM Press, 2020),126.

affective relations, leading consequently to a sense of dissatisfaction.[67] Building on this perspective, I interpret the political and creative engagement fostered by Rame with Fo and their artistic community as a feminist affirmative strategy aimed at transforming interpersonal relations and encouraging collective political action. This is particularly pertinent in the context of a politically engaged theatre group led by two comic artists who regarded laughter and satire as powerful means of challenging injustice. Within this collective, shared experiences of joy and playfulness helped transcend internal contradictions and power dynamics, nurturing both creativity and a strong sense of common purpose.

On the other hand, Pizza acknowledges that working with Rame was not an easy task.[68] Although there were regular breaks, rehearsals were nevertheless intense, and Rame was very precise about the rules. There were sometimes fines for those who failed to keep an appointment or complete a task.[69] Each person had to undergo a one-year trial period before being officially admitted to the company, a process that was not easy as Rame was quite strict.[70] She consistently encouraged her collaborators not to be complacent, but to cultivate a critical and objective perspective in order to contribute to the creative process.[71] This illustrates another important factor regarding theatre-making at the *casa-laboratorio.* Training within the company did not consist of formal classes, workshops, or exercises. Instead, skills and knowledge were absorbed through the shared experience of working and living together.

> C'era una forte attenzione rivolta agli attori, e Franca era sempre presente. Ciò che colpiva particolarmente di Franca era il suo coinvolgimento profondo nelle prove degli attori. Seguiva con grande attenzione il loro lavoro, li osservava a lungo, e spesso si avvicinava a ciascuno individualmente per offrire consigli o suggerimenti. Aveva un

[67] Ibid.
[68] M. Pizza. Interview with the author, May 16, 2022.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.

> reale bisogno di conoscere e interagire con le persone con cui lavorava. [72]
>
> There was a strong focus on the actors, and Franca was always present. What was particularly interesting about Franca was her deep involvement in the actors' rehearsals. She paid close attention to their work, observing them extensively, and she often approached them individually to offer advice or suggestions. She had a genuine need to get to know and engage with the people she worked with.

Rame actively participated in and engaged with the actors' work and during rehearsals. It was her way to train them. Her ability to connect with collaborators on a personal level was greatly enriched by the collaborative and immersive environment of the *casa-laboratorio*, an environment the company actively sought to recreate even when on tour or during rehearsal periods outside of Milan, carefully selecting residences or venues that supported their working methods and collective practices.[73]

Apart from conventional casting, collaborations and new additions to the company could be initiated by chance encounters, as exemplified by the actor Mario Pirovano. He met Rame and Fo in London in 1983, when they were performing at Riverside Studios.[74] Pirovano was living and working in London and despite having no prior theatre experience, witnessing Rame and Fo on stage profoundly impacted his life. Impressed by his enthusiasm and curiosity about theatre, Rame invited him to make a bold decision: to leave London and return to Italy to join their company and live in their Milan home. [75] He accepted the invitation, becoming an active and integral member of the *casa-laboratorio*, and a loyal collaborator of both Rame and Fo until the end of their lives. Like all collaborators, he received a salary.[76] Having no prior theatrical experience, he began by taking on a variety of roles: cleaning, driving, sourcing props, selling photocopies of scripts or books after

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[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.
[74] M. Pirovano. Interview with the author, June 1, 2022.
[75] Ibid.
[76] M. Pizza. Interview with the author, May 16, 2022.

performances, operating surtitles during international shows, and performing as an extra in their productions.[77] It took him decades to realise that he had absorbed and internalised both Rame and Fo's theatre techniques and had, in effect, become an actor.[78] Both Pirovano and De Juli exemplify the embodied practices and transmission of knowledge that characterised the company's approach, having been trained through the immersive experience of living and working alongside Rame and Fo.[79] When asked about Rame's methods of working with actors, Pirovano emphasises the significance of her empathy, attentiveness, care, and active listening within the collective's dynamics, as well as in her one-to-one relationships with her collaborators, particularly the women in the company.[80] He describes how Rame had a clear vision and control of the dynamics in the company, and how she understood situations that even Fo did not perceive: 'This was an important aspect, an added value within the company. Her ability to understand human beings in this way was very significant'.[81] This is an aspect that resonates in other interviews. De Juli and Pizza talk about the genuine and intimate friendship they developed with Rame and how she listened and took care of them. De Giovanni recalls how Rame cared for him during an illness, even going so far as to personally administer his injections.[82] This anecdote underscores the importance of personal relationships in her pedagogical and artistic practice.

Pirovano, Pizza, and De Juli lived and worked closely with Rame and Fo in what could be considered permanent collaborative roles. Pizza's work with Fo primarily involved extensive text research. This included studying sources in libraries, creating detailed notes, identifying key elements, conducting iconographic research, and compiling everything into cohesive narratives.[83] Fo would provide oral narrations, which were recorded,

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[77] M. Pirovano. Interview with the author, June 1, 2022.
[78] Ibid.
[79] To this day, they continue to perform the duo's repertoire, primarily Fo and Rame's monologues, with Pirovano presenting works such as *Mistero Buffo* in both Italian and English.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.
[82] F. De Giovanni. Interview with the author.
[83] M. Pizza. Interview with the author.

transcribed, and then further refined and developed into finalised works.[84] Although Rame did not participate directly in the research process, she was always aware and informed about the progress.[85] Her primary focus was editorial work. She meticulously prepared texts for publication, ensuring translations were included alongside the originals, and paid close attention to details such as accents, punctuation, and stage directions.[86] Pirovano regarded both Rame and Fo as *capocomici*, albeit with different roles, and he clarifies the ways in which Rame was both included in and excluded from this position.

> Oggi esistono operazioni su larga scala con produttori e impresari; fanno tournée per un anno e poi passano oltre. Il termine *capocomico* ha un significato diverso in inglese. Franca si occupava di tutto. Dario scriveva, rilasciava interviste, dirigeva e provava con gli attori. Quando si faceva la lettura del copione, partecipava alle prove e la sera, insieme a Franca, decidevano il cast. Tutto il lavoro dietro le quinte era gestito da Franca. Era sempre al telefono, a coordinare senza sosta. Inoltre, si occupava della revisione dei testi, di tutta la documentazione e spesso restava sveglia fino alle tre del mattino.[87]

> Today there are large-scale operations with producers and impresarios; they tour for a year and then move on. The term *capocomico* has a different meaning for English speakers. Franca took care of everything. Dario wrote, gave interviews, directed, and rehearsed with the actors. When the script was read through, he participated in the rehearsals, and in the evening he and Franca decided whom to cast. All the behind-the-scenes work was handled by Franca. She was always on the phone, continuously coordinating. Moreover, she handled the text editing, all the documentation, and often stayed up until three in the morning.

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[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.
[87] M. Pirovano. Interview with the author, June 1, 2022.

The role of the *capocomico* traditionally encompassed the management of the theatre company. In this capacity, it was Rame who oversaw the company's operations behind the scenes. She was responsible for organising venues, conducting auditions, and overseeing all aspects of the production and administration. In line with Pirovano's testimony, Felice Cappa, an Italian journalist, director, TV author, and former longstanding collaborator of Fo and Rame, describes Rame as a woman who managed what could be compared to an international enterprise.[88] He highlights how Rame also managed the company's external relations, allowing Fo to focus entirely on his creative work, especially remaining undistracted in his writing.[89] In the daily rituals at the *casa-laboratorio*, collaborators, including Cappa, took turns reading the morning newspaper to Fo due to his poor sight.[90]

> Franca non partecipava a queste sessioni, ma leggeva in modo autonomo. Anche il loro processo creativo era simile: Dario buttava giù delle idee che Franca rivedeva, oppure era Franca a scrivere dei testi che Dario poi correggeva. Lavoravano in modo collaborativo, ma non fianco a fianco. Franca era molto più di un'attrice o di una scrittrice; era una visionaria che comprendeva profondamente il potere politico del teatro, incarnandone il potenziale di trasformazione e cambiamento. [91]
>
> Franca did not participate in these sessions but read independently. Their creative process was similarly separate: Dario would draft ideas for Franca to revise, or Franca would write pieces for Dario to edit. They worked collaboratively but not side by side. Franca was far more than an actress or writer; she was a visionary who deeply understood the political power of theatre, embodying its potential to drive change.

[88] F. Cappa. Interview with the author, June 20, 2022.
[89] Ibid.
[90] In 1995, Fo suffered a stroke that caused severe vision loss, from which he partially recovered in the following years.
[91] Ibid.

Traces of the patriarchal structure of Famiglia Rame, where women were responsible for the material work and organization of the company, are still evident, suggesting that the couple's relationship was not exactly egalitarian.

Pizza recalls that, both in the *casa-laboratorio* in Milan and in Cesenatico, Rame actively involved her collaborators in a wide range of tasks, including selecting materials for exhibitions, editing texts for Einaudi, and managing the archive.[92] In addition to these responsibilities, she also handled administrative duties and responded to international requests to stage their works abroad. However, as noted earlier, during the summer months in Cesenatico, Rame found time to relax, playing cards, walking by the sea, and spending time with family and friends. Pizza observes that these moments of leisure also served as opportunities for Rame to share stories from her theatrical career and experience with friends and collaborators, representing yet another important moment of informal training and knowledge transmission.[93]

3.3 A Collaborative Effort to Develop Rame's Archive

In the context of *casa-laboratorio*, Pizza, De Juli, Pirovano, De Giovanni, and many more were involved in what Viganò defines as Rame's project.[94] She was responsible for the conception, creation, and development of the company's physical and digital archive, which she initially curated in various c*asa-laboratorio* spaces, mainly in Milan.[95] Throughout her life she meticulously collected a vast array of items, encompassing personal and professional artifacts. Rame aimed to catalogue and organise the entire creative output and practices of the various incarnations of her company with

[92] M. Pizza. Interview with the author, May 16, 2022.
[93] Many of these stories are collected in M. Pizza, *Al lavoro con Dario Fo e Franca Rame* (Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 2006)
[94] G. Viganò. Interview with the author, August 23, 2022.
[95] The physical archive since 2016 has been housed at the State Archive in Verona, northern Italy, while part of the material is held at the family estate in Gubbio. Pizza served as the director of the Archive in Verona from 2008 to 2020, renaming the archive as *MusALab*, which stands for Museum/Archive/Laboratory, to summarise its many roles. M. Pizza, interview with the author, May 16, 2022.

Fo, including works that had never been staged but held the potential to be used or adapted in the future, either by the company or by others. This material reflects more than sixty years of Rame and Fo's theatre career at the intersection with an Italian historical and political context.[96] This extensive collection evolved into the *Archivio Franca Rame Dario Fo*, established by Rame in 1995. According to Pizza, who significantly contributed to the company's archival work, it is recognised as one of the world's most significant theatre archives.[97]

> Aveva un modo tutto suo di trattare questo archivio, che aggiornava quotidianamente, anche in vista di una narrazione di sé stessa. L'archivio è un grande baule, il baule dell'attore. Un baule dentro il quale trovi di tutto, a uso e consumo dell'attore. Lo capisci proprio da come lei lo ha organizzato. Lo ha esposto così perché lei e Fo hanno sempre fatto così: hanno sempre svelato il loro modo di agire e si sono sempre confrontati con il pubblico in questo modo, mettendo in discussione le proprie pratiche. Hanno mostrato il loro baule d'attore proprio per dire: il mio archivio è libero, è a disposizione di tutti.[98]
>
> She had her own unique way of handling this archive, which she updated daily, also with a view toward narrating herself. The archive is a large trunk, the actor's trunk. A trunk in which you find everything, for the actor's use and benefit. You can understand this simply by how she organised it. She displayed it this way because that's how she and Fo had always worked: they had always revealed their way of working and consistently engaged with the public in this way, questioning their own practices. They showed their actor's trunk precisely to say: my archive is open, it's available to everyone.

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[96] M. Pizza. Interview with the author, May 16, 2022.
[97] Today the Archive Franca Rame Dario Fo, managed by *Fondazione Fo Rame,* has been acknowledged by Italy's Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities for its cultural importance. It represents a didactic tool that encourages multi-disciplinary approaches to the study of theatre and performance. See https://www.ilmondodegliarchivi.org/archivio-rame-fo-un-esempio-di-patrimonio-integrato-di-arte-e-spettacolo/
[98] Ibid.

Rame's archive represented a repository containing everything an actor might need, carefully organised and maintained for practical use.[99] It became a crucial tool for the company, a source of material, information, documents, scripts, and other materials that could be drawn upon to adapt or rework earlier plays of portions of them. This was for example the case with the scene depicting Adam and Eve's first sexual encounter, which was reimagined in multiple performances, including *Sesso? Grazie, Tanto per Gradire!* (1994) and *La Bibbia dei Villani (The Peasants' Bible,* 1996).[100] This process of recontextualising past work allowed the company to generate new performances that remained politically relevant within changing contemporary contexts.[101] For this reason Pizza defines the archive as an active memory that encompasses a vast collection of materials, including documents and materials belonging to the history of the *Famiglia Rame*.[102] Each play was preserved in folders within the physical archive and as files in the digital archive, which Rame made immediately accessible online.[103]

> Ho sempre archiviato tutto, ma proprio tutto, articoli, fotografie, scenografie, ritagli, stampa, copioni, prima stesura, seconda…decima, lettere, disegni…tutto! Raccoglievo, archiviavo, catalogavo. Poi è arrivato internet. Che magnificenza! Covano dentro di me il desiderio, forse troppo ambizioso per una donna della mia età'…avevo già 67 anni, di mettere il nostro archivio online. Tutti mi davano della pazza. […] Dopo tre anni di inchiesta dal 1994 al 1997, mi sono decisa. Eravamo nel mio ufficio in diciotto a lavorare. Io a scegliere I documenti e gli altri a digitalizzare. [104]
>
> I have always archived everything, truly everything: articles, photographs, stage designs, clippings, press, scripts, first drafts,

[99] Ibid.
[100] D. Fo and Franca Rame, *La Bibbia dei Villani* (Parma: Guanda, 2010); D. Fo, F. Rame, J. Fo, 'Sesso? Grazie! Tanto per Gradire', in D. Fo and Franca Rame, *Le Commedie di Dario Fo e Franca Rame*, (Torino: Einaudi, 1998).
[101] M. Pizza. Interview with the author, May 16, 2022.
[102] https://www.fondazioneforame.org/archivio-rame-fo/.
[103] https://www.archivio.francarame.it/.
[104] Pizza, *Al lavoro con Dario Fo e Franca Rame*, 373.

> second...tenth draft, letters, drawings...everything! I was collecting, archiving, and cataloguing. Then the internet arrived. What a marvel! I harboured within me the desire - perhaps too ambitious for a woman of my age...I was already 67 years old when I started this work - to put our archive online. Everyone thought I was crazy. […] After three years of investigation from 1994 to 1997, I made up my mind. There were eighteen of us working in my office. I chose the documents while the others digitised them.

The documentation covered the entire production process, from the initial research conducted with collaborators to an extensive collection of press reviews, publications, interviews, brochures, photographs, tickets, contracts, permits, texts, scripts, letters, and notes. In addition, costumes, masks, props, and Fo's paintings and drawings, many of which served as theatrical storyboards and backdrops, were also archived as integral components of each production.[105] They still stand as a testament to the collaborative work behind each play and to the contributions of those involved in the *casa-laboratorio*. The archive was therefore an integral part of the daily activities of the company as it was continuously updated, digitised, and catalogued. This approach reflected Rame's communication skills and her commitment to making the company's creative legacy accessible to a broader audience, as well as to posterity. Rame's foresight regarding the importance of preserving and transmitting the entire creative process is particularly significant. This means that her archive, together with oral histories, represent a crucial tool to understand the company's practice, which is not easy to extrapolate only through the analysis of text and performance.[106]

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[105] M. Pizza. Interview with the author, Sept 12, 2023.

[106] The archive is organised into several sectors including: 1. The Documentary Sector: 3,001 units, including theatrical works, family documents, and various thematic collections; 2. The Library Sector: 6,476 units, featuring books by and about Rame and Fo, as well as publications from family members. 3. The Audio-Visual Sector: 4,661 units, comprising recordings from 1965 to 2015, categorized by type and content; 4. The Historical-Artistic Sector: 9,760 units, which include costumes, props, and a substantial collection of drawings and paintings. Additionally, at the Gubbio headquarters, there are approximately 600 hours of digital audio-visual materials and an estimated 1,200 paintings and 3,600 graphic works by Dario Fo. Information courtesy of Mattea Fo and the director of the archive, Stefano Bertea. https://www.fondazioneforame.org/archivio-rame-fo/.

Rame involved many people in her archival project, even extending beyond the *casa-laboratorio* and often employing creative approaches. De Giovanni recalls that in 1997, he invited her to participate as a guest juror in a cabaret competition organised by his cultural association.[107]

> Le dissi: 'Sei la più grande comica italiana vivente. Sarebbe fantastico se potessi far parte della giuria e dare il tuo parere sui nuovi comici che scopriamo' e lei rispose: 'Va bene, vengo, ma dovete aiutare a digitalizzare l'archivio perché abbiamo bisogno di una mano'. Siamo andati con grandi scanner, lenti, era venticinque anni fa, e abbiamo passato settimane a lavorare con lei. C'erano milioni di documenti da digitalizzare. Aveva anche fatto un accordo con le carceri che visitava, dove i detenuti contribuivano alla scansione dei materiali. Marina De Juli fu molto coinvolta in questo processo. Franca conservava tutto, letteralmente tutto, persino un disegno di Dario su un tovagliolo in un ristorante. Diceva: 'Aspetta, fammelo fotografare', e poi lo archiviava. Era una vera collezionista, raccoglieva qualsiasi cosa avesse a che fare con la loro storia. Conservava tutto. [108]

> I said, 'You're the greatest living Italian comedian. It would be great if you could join the jury and give your opinion on the new comedians we discover,' and she replied, 'Ok, I'll come, but you have to help digitise the archive because we need help'. We went with large scanners, slow ones, it was twenty-five years ago and spent weeks working with her. There were millions of documents to digitise. She had also made an agreement with the prisons she used to visit, where inmates helped to scan the materials. Marina De Juli was heavily involved in this process. Franca kept everything, literally everything, even a drawing by Dario on a napkin at a restaurant. She would say, 'Let me take a picture,' and then she would archive it. She was a true

[107] See www.itineraria.it
[108] F. De Giovanni. Interview with the author, June 21, 2022.

collector, gathering anything and everything related to their history. She kept it all.

Rame's leadership was evident in her ability to engage collaborators and others in her archive project, fostering a shared sense of purpose. In 1999 she invited Viganò, to help digitise her archive. When describing her vision, Rame explained that it was to become the largest global collection of living theatre authors. Viganò describes Rame as a complete project manager, as she had a clear understanding of where to start, where she wanted to go, and how to navigate the steps in between.[109] Always driven by innovation, Rame sought out the latest technologies, using advanced tools like cutting-edge computers to address challenges. In the 1990s, the new Apple computers revolutionised her workflow.

> Era ossessionata dai primi computer Apple, che spesso riceveva in regalo. Nonostante l'entusiasmo, a volte creava un po' di caos salvando sessanta copie di ogni file, per paura di perdere anche la più piccola modifica. Per tesi e ricerche, le persone le chiedevano spesso un testo, e lei forniva sessanta versioni per mostrare come si fosse evoluto. Secondo lei, esaminando tutte le modifiche si poteva comprendere molto più a fondo come si fosse arrivati alla versione finale.[110]

> She was obsessed with the early Apple computers, which she often received as gifts. Despite her enthusiasm, she sometimes created chaos by saving sixty copies of every file, fearing she might lose even the smallest modification. For theses and research, people would often ask her for a text, and she would provide sixty versions to show how the text had evolved. By examining all the modifications, she believed one could gain a much deeper understanding of how the final version was achieved.

[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid.

For the first time, she could edit texts directly on the computer instead of making changes manually. She would print scripts, add notes in pen or pencil, and incorporate the changes into the final text. Each version was documented, labelled with the help of her team.[111] This meticulous approach to handling texts reflected the *capacomica*'s precision, foresight, and organisational skill, exemplified by the multiple copies of the same script containing handwritten and typed modifications by both Rame and Fo. Their work was conceived not as fixed texts, but as evolving creations in continual development. Both Viganò and Pizza recall how Rame used to say that on her grave she would have loved to have a sign saying 'Click here to see all the things we have done in our lives'. Consequently, after her death in 2013 Viganò developed this QR code with a link to Rame and Fo's biography page on her online archive.[112] He asked permission from Dario Fo (who died three years after Rame) to attach the QR code (in the bottom left corner of the picture) to Rame's grave in Milan.[113]



Figure 3.1 Courtesy of Giovanni Viganò and Fondazione Fo Rame

[111] Ibid.
[112] G. Viganò. Interview with the author, August 23, 2022.
[113] Ibid.

The archive stands as Rame's enduring legacy. A thorough exploration is essential to fully appreciate the significance and scope of her contributions to the theatrical work developed with the *Compagnia Teatrale Fo Rame* (CTFR). It embodies a symbiotic relationship between the creative theatre-making process and the authors' archive, serving both as a generative source and a valuable resource for contemporary scholars and theatre practitioners.[114] I argue that both the archive and the lived practices within the *casa-laboratorio* exemplify what Diana Taylor defines as 'embodied practice as an episteme and a praxis': a system of knowing, doing, and transmitting identity and cultural memory.[115] Rame consciously curated her archive as a parallel mode of cultural transmission, a material legacy designed for posterity. In this sense, her archive operates not merely as a static repository, but as what Taylor might describe as a *performative archive,* one that interacts with and complements the repertoire.[116] From this lens, the transmission of knowledge and skills within the *casa-laboratorio*, through the shared experience of working and living together, constitutes a form of embodied practice, as reflected in the testimonies of Rame's collaborators. This environment functioned as a space where cultural knowledge was not only produced but also transmitted through daily interactions, creative labour, social reproduction, and relational dynamics. Drawing on Taylor's distinction between the *archive* and the *repertoire*, this mode of knowledge transmission can be understood as repertoire: an embodied, ephemeral, and performative way of knowing that resists fixation in written form. By integrating these two modes of transmission, archival and embodied practice at *casa-laboratorio* (including performance), Rame created a multifaceted legacy that offers both historical continuity and performative vitality. I argue that this approach contributes today to rethinking methodologies in theatre studies by moving beyond textual analysis toward approaches that reconstruct the lived processes of Rame's creative work. This is the reason why this embodied dimension of her work is further explored through practice research in the

[114] M. Pizza. Interview with the author, Sept 12, 2023.
[115] D. Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 16-33.
[116] Ibid.

final chapter. The company's archival work formed part of a broader set of activities through which the *casa-laboratorio* was connected to the outside world. Beyond artistic practice, Rame's political activism and charitable initiatives were central to this process, drawing those within the *casa-laboratorio* into a wider network of socially and politically engaged practices.

3.4 Political Activism and Solidarity at *Casa-Laboratorio*

Testimonies reveal that the *casa-laboratorio* functioned as a space where creativity and solidarity were deeply intertwined.[117] Beyond its artistic mission, which included archival work, the space was shaped by Rame's ongoing commitment to political activism and charitable work, which became integral to the daily life and ethos of its community. For example, after Fo won the Nobel Prize in 1997, Rame founded and directed the *Nobel per i Disabili* foundation, dedicating the prize money to support people with disabilities through practical aid and accessible transport initiatives.[118] Another powerful example of how the company used theatre as a tool for civic engagement is the 1999 performance-demonstration *Il Treno della Memoria* (The Train of Memory).[119] This project commemorated victims of state and terrorist violence through a symbolic train journey across Italy, departing from Brescia and concluding in Rome, with stops in various cities scarred by unpunished attacks.[120] Involving students, artists, and local communities, the project transformed remembrance into a participatory, performative protest, reflecting the company's commitment to exposing injustice and engaging the public in collective reflection.[121] These activities were not peripheral but embedded in the company's operations, influencing both its internal dynamics and theatrical output. Furthermore, Rame's attention to marginalised groups, such as inmates, drug users, people living with AIDS, and women escaping domestic violence, left a tangible mark on

[117] M. De Juli. Interview with the author, June 30, 2022.
[118] See: https://www.archivio.francarame.it/scheda.aspx?IDOpera=18&IDSchedaLocandina=6514
[119] M. Pizza. Interview with the author, Sept 12, 2023.
[120] J. Fo. Interview with the author
[121] https://archivio.francarame.it/galleria.aspx?IDOpera=180&IDTipologia=20&IDPagina=1

the company's productions. For example, the play *L'eroina* (The Heroine), which was part of the collection *Parliamo di Donne* (Let's Talk About Women), was inspired in part by a family tragedy and mobilised a collective sense of purpose among collaborators.[122] One emblematic act of solidarity, recounted by De Juli, occurred in the early 2000s, when Rame, upon seeing a televised news report, offered her home to a Brazilian waitress who had lost her children in a fire. The woman lived with Rame, Fo, and other collaborators at the *casa-laboratorio* for six months.[123] Despite the emotional strain, Rame's generosity left a lasting impression. As De Juli reflected, Rame was 'instinctive and practical, a person with flaws but also moments of immense generosity that overshadowed any shortcomings'.[124] Her solidarity extended beyond symbolic gestures. Actor Giorgio Biavati, who performed and toured with Rame in the 1984 play *Coppia Aperta, Quasi Spalancata* (The Open Couple, Almost Wide Open),[125] recalls her visit to the AIDS ward at Milan's Sacco Hospital in 1990.[126] Appalled by the fact that patients shared a single refrigerator, Rame arranged for sixteen new refrigerators to be delivered the very next day.[127] Such actions illustrate how her advocacy was inseparable from her artistic and personal leadership at the *casa-laboratorio*. Jacopo Fo interprets his mother's activism as grounded in a drive to help those in need; an ethos rooted in the *capocomicato* principles of shared responsibility and lived participation.[128] As Pizza observes, for both Rame and Fo, struggle meant 'presence, participation, and involvement at all costs'.[129] This participatory model extended into the political sphere when, in the mid-2000s, Rame and Fo launched electoral campaigns, Fo for mayor of Milan and Rame for the Italian Senate. The *casa-laboratorio* team became heavily involved in these campaigns, applying their theatre skills to political communication. Campaign speeches were written as monologues, and

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[122] M. Pizza. Interview with the author, Sept 12, 2023.
[123] M. De Juli. Interview with the author, June 30, 2022.
[124] Ibid.
[125] D. Fo and F. Rame, *Le commedie.* Vol. IX: (Torino: Einaudi, 1997). See also: D. Fo and F. Rame, *The Open Couple and An Ordinary Day*, Tr. S. Hall and J. Farrell (London: Methuen Drama, 1990).
[126] G. Biavati. Interview with the author, May 23, 2022.
[127] See https://www.archivio.francarame.it/scheda.aspx?IDScheda=4738&IDOpera=168
[128] J. Fo. Interview with the author, May 13, 2022.
[129] M. Pizza. Interview with the author, Sept 12, 2023.

collaborators supported events, managed logistics, and even fed lines through earpieces during live appearances.[130] This seamless integration of theatre and activism underscored their belief that performance and political life were fundamentally connected. Fo did not win the mayoral primary elections, while Rame was elected to the Italian Senate in 2006.[131] Her new role required relocating to Rome, separating her from the *casa-laboratorio* and from daily artistic activity. Despite this, she remained engaged with the company's work, devising alternative ways to connect also with her audience, including launching a blog (francarame.it), with the help of her team, becoming one of the first Italian politicians to use digital media for direct public communication.[132] However, Rame found institutional politics isolating and disheartening.[133] She developed a close friendship with left-wing fellow senator Olimpia Vano and even invited her to live with her, seeking the communal support she had known at the *casa-laboratorio*, though Vano was unable to accept.[134]

The absence of her collaborative environment weighed heavily on Rame. Nevertheless, she remained artistically involved, regularly discussing productions with Fo over the phone and approving scripts from afar.[135] Ultimately, her experience in the Senate proved disappointing. Although she continued to coordinate charitable efforts, she found her political influence limited. Her dissenting votes drew party backlash, and she was eventually pressured to retract a position to avoid damaging the group. Disillusioned, she resigned after nineteen months, describing the Senate as *il frigorifero dei sentimenti* (the refrigerator of emotions).[136] Upon her return to Milan, Rame

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[130] F. De Giovanni. Interview with the author, June 21, 2022.
[131] See D. Fo, *Io non sono un moderato*, directed by Andrea Nobile (Milan: Dolmen Home Video, 2007), DVD, 70 min.
[132] M. Pizza. Interview with the author, Sept 12, 2023.
[133] One example of her many campaigns in her role as a senator, was her struggle against Italy's involvement in so called 'peace missions' as well as against the use of depleted uranium in military operations, highlighting health concerns for soldiers exposed to this substance. She collected evidence about its devastating health effects on Italian soldiers, who were inadequately informed and protected, leading to severe illnesses and deaths. See F. Rame, *In fuga dal Senato* (Parma: Chiarelettere, 2013).
[134] Olimpia Vano is a senator from the left-wing party *Rifondazione Comunista*. Her connection with Rame stemmed from their shared critical perspective on politics and their concerns about the systemic marginalisation of women in the political sphere. Olimpia Vano, interview with the author, June 29, 2022.
[135] O. Vano. Interview with the author, June 29, 2022.
[136] F. Rame, *In fuga dal Senato* (Parma: Chiarelettere, 2013).

transformed this experience into theatre. Her posthumous book *In Fuga dal Senato* (Escape from the Senate), structured as a theatrical script, was later staged by Fo with the support and participation of several *casa-laboratorio* collaborators, including Maria Chiara De Marco, who collaborated with the company from 2005 as technical director and scenographer/painter, and actress.[137] Rame consistently fused political life with artistic creation, reaffirming the *casa-laboratorio* as both a site of performance and a political laboratory.

3.5 Collaborative Practice and Artistic Autonomy

While testimonies have thus far illuminated Rame's role in the multifaceted aspects of the company's theatre-making process, they also underscore her increasing turn toward solo performance, where her voice and authorship became more explicitly recognised. They, in fact, expose the inherent tension between a commitment to collective creation and the growing visibility of her individual artistic voice.

Caroline van Gastel, a Belgian actress and translator who frequently collaborated with Rame and Fo and shared their domestic-creative space, identifies the *casa-laboratorio* as instrumental to this process.[138] She notes that the collaborative environment enabled Rame to develop works that fully expressed her artistic voice. This shift is exemplified in *Settimo, Ruba un po' Meno 2* (Seventh, Steal a Little Less 2 (1992), which critiqued the *Mani Pulite* (Clean Hands) scandal mentioned earlier, and especially in the 1994 autobiographical monologue *Sesso? Grazie. Tanto per Gradire!* (Sex? Thanks! Don't Mind if I Do!). As previously discussed, this piece marked a turning point in her trajectory toward artistic autonomy, an evolution rooted in her engagement with feminism that began in the 1970s. Though autobiographical, she developed it in collaboration with her son Jacopo Fo and Dario Fo, underscoring how her creative process remained deeply

[137] M. Di Marco. Interview with the author, June 21, 2022.
[138] C. van Gastel. interview with the author, June 29, 2022.

collective, even in her monologues. This collective dramaturgical approach demonstrates that her emergence as a fully expressive artist was less about adopting a traditionally masculine model of solo authorship and more about forging a collaborative platform that enabled her to fully articulate her style and artistic voice. Furthermore, these monologues drew on earlier material, reflecting the group's archival and adaptive approach. Rame's solo works therefore were not a departure from her collective ethos. Rather, they carried forward the organisational, political, and dramaturgical practices honed within an ensemble framework. Rame's artistic liberation, therefore, is not defined solely by the claim of individual authorship, but by a consistent commitment to collaborative creation. By this stage in her career, I argue that Rame emerges as a feminist *capacomica*, reshaping the tradition to foreground female authorship, embodiment, and political voice. A leadership role she had gradually assumed but could now fully inhabit, free from earlier institutional and gendered constraints.

3.6 The Potential and the Contradictions of a Feminist *Capacomica*

Rame's evolution from radical *capacomica* to what I define as a feminist *capacomica* was not linear but involved a continuous reconfiguration of roles. Drawing on her experiences with the Famiglia Rame, the theatre collectives, and her engagement with Italian feminisms of the 1970s, working with CTFR she shaped a model of leadership that challenged conventional theatrical authority. Her leadership fostered a collaborative and affective environment, where creative practices intersected with archival work, political activism, charitable initiatives, and social reproduction. This hybrid space was sustained by a dynamic blend of discipline and spontaneity, hard work and play, nurturing long-term collaboration and mutual interdependence among members. The *casa-laboratorio* enabled Rame to explore the feminist potential to reclaim domestic spaces, transforming the home from a private

domain into a creative site for social change and liberation.[139] Her approach involved empowering collaborators both in the research and development of theatre pieces. Their work often took the form of investigations and campaigns addressing political figures and scandals.[140] As a result, the *Compagnia Teatrale Fo Rame* emerged as a voice of resistance within the Italian political landscape, a persistent thorn in the side of the establishment. The interviews show how Rame's feminist ethics of care and collective creativity aligns with the frameworks of *joyous militancy* (Federici) and *affirmation* (Braidotti), understood as the capacity to generate hope and transformation in the face of structural limitations.[141] Furthermore, I argue that the company's *joyous militancy*, rooted in Rame's lived socialism, was anchored in political education and collective purpose. This resonates with Federici's concept of *commoning*, where care, creative labour, and resistance form the basis for communal life: 'Reclaiming the commons and creating spaces of cooperation and collective reproduction can empower creativity, nurture solidarity, and sustain struggles that seek to transform life beyond capitalism'.[142] The *casa-laboratorio* thus echoes and evolves some of the principles of the 1970s theatre collective *La Comune,* this time transposed into the domestic space in response to the historical shift of the *riflusso* period.[143] Rame's leadership, while maintaining an element of discipline and control, relied primarily on relational rather than hierarchical authority. These relationships extended beyond familial bonds, forming a chosen kinship rooted in shared values, artistic purpose, and political vision. This resonates with Braidotti's interpretation of Murgia's theorisation of queer family, where kinship is elective, affective, and political.[144] Rather than reinforcing the patriarchal view of Rame as a maternal figure within a traditional theatre-family, I draw on Mimi Marinucci's definition of queering as

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[139] L. Cavallero, V. Gago, and L. Mason-Deese, *The Home as Laboratory: Finance, Housing, and Feminist Struggle* (Common Notions, 2024).
[140] These included *Mani Pulite* (Clean hands), and Silvio Berlusconi, Italian media tycoon and four-times prime minister. See J. Farrell, Dario Fo and Franca Rame, 320.
[141] R. Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), 45.
[142] S. Federici*, Re-enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons*, (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2018).
[143] J. Farrell, *Dario Fo and Franca Rame*, 249.
[144] M. Murgia, *God Save the Queer. Catechismo femminista* (Torino: Einaudi Stile Libero, 2022).

'the process of complicating something', beyond strictly sexual contexts, to queer the concept of Rame's *casa-laboratorio,* as an elective and affective community that challenged normative and hierarchical power structures.[145] This approach further resonates with Geraldine Harris's argument that collaborative theatre-making can destabilise traditional hierarchies through feminist ethics of participation.[146] For this reason, I read Rame's *casa-laboratorio* as an alternative to theatre family: the potential of a theatre community that reimagined belonging.

Yet this feminist collective project remained unfinished. Her leadership still bore traces of the structures it sought to transform. Her lifelong loyalty to her artistic collaboration with Fo underscores the persistent tension within her leadership, a tension rooted in her inability or unwillingness to fully break from the patriarchal structure of the *capocomico* model. Despite her vital contributions, she was often selectively included or excluded from specific tasks at *casa-laboratorio*, and she frequently juggled multiple roles to allow Fo to focus on the creative aspects of their work, reinforcing traditional gendered dynamics even as she sought to challenge them. The concept of the feminist *capacòmica* emerges therefore as both a model and a contradiction: a figure that disrupts patriarchal norms while remaining at times entangled in them. Drawing on Jill Dolan's conception of performance as a *utopian performative* that can prefigure more equitable futures,[147] I argue that the *casa-laboratorio* emerges as a prefigurative space, one that rehearsed and partially realised alternative ways of living and working as a theatre community. As Federici notes, disappointment arises when idealistic expectations clash with the realities of power imbalances and contradictions within political movements, 'a phenomenon it is essential to learn to identify in order not to be destroyed by them and to recognize for sustained political

[145] M. Marinucci, *Feminism Is Queer: The Intimate Connection Between Queer and Feminist Theory* (London & New York: Zed Books, 2010).
[146] G. Harris, *Feminist Futures? Theatre, Performance, Theory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).
[147] J. Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

development'.[148] Moreover, Braidotti reminds us that 'contradictions are not a tragedy, on the contrary, if shared, they often make us laugh'.[149]

Ultimately, the creative and collaborative environment of the *casa-laboratorio* enabled Rame to achieve artistic and expressive liberation, while also allowing her to pursue her own 'project': the development of the archive. I interpret both Rame's archive and the everyday practices of the *casa-laboratorio* as her dual legacy of material and embodied knowledge. Grounded in Taylor's concepts of the archive and the repertoire, this model illustrates how Rame's integration of documentation and embodied experience exemplifies the dynamic interplay between archival and body-to-body modes of transmitting cultural memory, reinforcing Taylor's call to attend to embodied knowledge as a form of historical and epistemic transmission within theatre and performance studies. While this chapter has focused on the embodied practices within the *casa-laboratorio*, the next will turn to archival research to examine Rame's artistry as a feminist *capacòmica*.

[148] S. Federici, *Beyond the periphery of the skin*, (Oakland: PM Press, 2020).
[149] R. Braidotti, *Per una politica affermativa (*Milano: Mimesis, 2017).

Chapter 4. The Artistry of a Feminist *Capacomica*: Rame's *Scrittura Scenica*

This chapter delves into Franca Rame's creative practices of *scrittura scenica* (scenic writing), highlighting her methods and aesthetics with *Compagnia Teatrale Fo Rame* from the 1980s until the end of her career. Drawing on oral histories and archival research, my analysis uncovers Rame's distinct approach to scenic writing, which she developed within the creative and collaborative space of her *casa-laboratorio* (home-laboratory), analysed in the previous chapter. In this setting, Rame's practice expanded to encompass a wide variety of roles, which were combined in her approach to *scrittura scenica.*

Traditional interpretations of scenic writing often rely on a hierarchical conception of the creative process, emphasising the authority, or imprimatur, of the (typically male) artist. For example, in the early 20th century, Silvio D'Amico marked a shift from the tradition of the *capocomicato* to a director-centred model, asserting that the *grandi attori* (great actors) and *capocomici* of the Romantic era lacked formal training and were often overly self-indulgent.[1] In contrast, he envisioned a new generation of actors who would be technically proficient and respectful of both the playwright's and director's intentions.[2] Therefore he not only introduced the term *regista* (theatre director) into the context of Italian theatre during the fascist era in the 1930s, but also played a key role in solidifying the importance of this role as the figure responsible for translating the author's text into the concrete reality of the stage.[3] In doing so, he reinforced a patriarchal model of theatrical authorship and stage language. Building on the previous chapter, here I challenge the limitations of such interpretations by revealing the multifaceted nature of Rame's work, and her redefinition of authorship through collaborative, embodied, and feminist practices. By employing the Italian

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[1] Irene Scaturro highlights how the Italian terms *grande attore* and *grande attrice* describe Romantic-era actors and actresses renowned for their histrionic talent and naturalistic styles, often serving as both leading performers and *capocomici* with highly developed acting techniques. See Irene Scaturro, "Naturalism's legacy in the mid-twentieth-century Italian actor" in A. Sica*, The Italian Method of La Drammatica: Its legacy and Reception* (Milano: Mimesis, 2014).
[2] S. D'Amico, *La regia teatrale* (Roma: Belardetti, 1947).
[3] Ibid.

term *scrittura scenica* I differentiate Rame's practice from conventional understandings of scenic writing emphasising her development of a continuous creative process that brought together multiple theatrical roles. I explore how she developed her innovative approach examining testimonies from her former collaborators and analysing documents and stage scripts from both her digital and physical archive in Verona.[4]

Moving beyond traditional analyses of stage writing, I turn to concepts of musicality to examine Rame's *scrittura scenica* and the unique system of notation she articulated in her stage scripts. This analysis draws on David Roesner's application of musical categories to theatre, as well as Anna Sica's study of *La Drammatica*, a declamatory system rooted in the Italian theatre tradition.[5] Through my analysis and decoding of signs and punctuation, which functioned as a kind of *partitura* (score) in her promptbooks, I uncover a method shaped and adapted by her experience with the *Famiglia Rame*.[6] This discovery offers fresh insights into Rame's innovative contributions to scenic writing and theatre-making.

4.1 Scenic Writing Reconsidered: Theoretical Foundations and Divergences from Rame's *Scrittura Scenica*

Before analysing Rame's practice, it is essential to first explore the concept of scenic writing, to situate her *scrittura scenica* within this framework and distinguish its unique features.

In his extensive analysis of the theoretical foundations of scenic writing, Italian theatre historian Lorenzo Mango defines it as 'an operational strategy, a way of thinking about the organization of the linguistic materials of theatre from the perspective of staging'.[7] His analysis builds on theatre semiotician Patrice Pavis' definition of scenic writing, or scenic art, which

[4] www.archivio.francarame.it
[5] D. Roesner, *Musicality in Theatre*, (London: Routledge, 2016); A. Sica*, The Italian Method of La Drammatica: Its Legacy and Reception,* (Milano: Mimesis,2015).
[6] A. Arena, *La Famiglia Rame*, (Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 2024).
[7] L. Mango, *La Scrittura Scenica*, (Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 2003).

revolves around the way in which the scenic apparatus is used to stage concrete images, with a focus on characters, place, and action.[8] Pavis' definition traces back to Roger Planchon (1931-2009), the French playwright and director who coined the term *écriture scénique*, or scenic writing, in 1961 during a debate on Bertolt Brecht.[9] According to theatre scholar David Bradby, Planchon developed a theory that positioned scenic writing as the director's creative contribution, to be considered on a par with the playwright's dramatic writing.[10] This theory emphasises the director's creative vision and interpretation of the text, rather than strictly following the author's script. Planchon claims that theatre possesses a unique language that creatively bridges textual and scenic elements.[11] He traces this duality of theatre language through various historical periods, noting that some, such as Commedia dell'arte and medieval theatre, emphasise the scenic aspects, while others prioritise the dramatic text. Planchon celebrates, therefore, the creative authority of both author and director, portraying scenic writing as a feature of directing and an integral part of the dual nature of a dramatic text, a project in progress destined for the stage.[12] According to Mango, Planchon views Bertolt Brecht as a trailblazer in establishing scriptwriting as dual writing, where the scenic elements hold equal importance to the dramatic content[13] The story and dialogues are complemented by indications of action and scenic construction. Stage codes independently contribute to constructing the dramatic machine, with scenic elements already embedded in the script, developing what I read as a linear process, shifting the theatrical action's reference horizon from the page to the stage.[14]

Mango's analysis of scenic writing then moves on to present an alternative perspective by disentangling scenic writing from being solely the director's domain, looking for example from the perspectives by Italian

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[8] P. Pavis, *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts and Analysis* (University of Toronto Press, 1999)
[9] Mango, *La Scrittura Scenica*, 21- 25.
[10] D. Bradby, D. Williams, 'Roger Planchon'. In: *Directors' Theatre*. *Modern Dramatists*. (London: Palgrave, 1988), 51-83 https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-19478-0_3.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Mango, *La Scrittura Scenica*, 24-25.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.

theatre critics and theorists Maurizio Grande and Giuseppe Bartolucci.[15] This shift, which gained traction in the 1970s, redefines directing by moving away from traditional illustrative or interpretative approaches. Grande and Bartolucci argue for a clear distinction between directing and scenic writing, challenging the idea that a performance simply translates or reinterprets the text. Instead, they propose that theatre should be seen as a distinct system of signs, with the performance itself functioning as a form of writing, establishing a convergence between scenic and dramaturgical actions, thereby transforming the conceptualisation of theatrical performance, which cannot be adequately rooted in the sole playwright's creative act. According to Mango, in this different scenario, scenic writing is reconceptualised as a direct and creative operational process, where stage action takes precedence and self-references, and the performance becomes a direct creative act.[16]

In what follows, I illustrate how and why Rame's *scrittura scenica* differs from both these methods, and the way she developed a continuous creative process that seamlessly combined writing, editing, directing, and acting. This approach, which stemmed from her experience working with her original theatre family, contrasts sharply both with the linear process of scenic writing defined by Planchon and with Grande and Maurizio's theory of performance as a system of signs independent of a text.

4.2 Rame's Practice of *Scrittura Scenica*

Rame's *scrittura scenica* was a dynamic and collaborative form of authorship that integrated and combined multiple roles, including those as performer, author, co-author, dramaturg, director, prompter, and editor. Centred on the live dynamics of performance, this approach was crucial for shaping and refining the text in response to audience reaction. This process involved

[15] M. Grande, 'La regia come scrittura di scena', in *Gli anni di Peter Brook,* G. Banu, A. Martinez Ed. (Milano: Ubulibri, 1990); G. Bartolucci, *Teatro/Corpo. Teatro/immagine* (Padova: Marsilio, 1970).
[16] Mango, *La Scrittura Scenica*, 30-31.

several stages: an initial compositional phase, a continuous process of refinement while on tour, and finally the script's publication.

Interviews with former collaborators from *Compagnia Teatrale Fo Rame* reveal a consistent pattern. As most works were composed during the summer, when the company was not touring, Rame and Fo's summer house in Sala di Cesenatico, often represented, as analysed in the previous chapter, the space where the initial writing took place.[17] Many of my interviewees witnessed this process. Valeri, for example, recounts how Rame and Fo first discussed a plot or an idea together.[18] After a first round of feedback and edits, a draft was written and then presented *a soggetto*, improvised, and discussed with their close collaborators. Then this process could be extended to friends and artists who visited them, and who became immediately involved in the creative process and shared their feedback with them.[19] The company, friends, and visitors therefore represented the first audience of a draft, which means that the initial moment of writing was not a lonely activity, whoever did it, but required an invited audience, their reactions and feedback. This was a crucial initial process of consultation allowing Rame and Fo to move on and develop the first drafts into a script. In this way, collaboration was not an afterthought or revision tool, but an integral part of the script's initial composition. Following this initial phase, when they started touring, either together, with the company, or alone with their monologues, they developed a method of recording each live performance, including the audience's reactions.[20] Initially, they used audio recordings and later included video, positioning microphones both on stage and in the audience.[21] This method allowed them to precisely calculate if and how an improvisation or a line worked, and exactly when the audience's laughter occurred. Shifting the focus onto Rame's contribution, her *scrittura scenica* emerges as a performance-centred process, essential for shaping and refining the text through audience response, marking a distinct aspect of

[17] Sala Di Cesenatico is located on the coast in the northeastern Italian region of Emilia Romagna.
[18] W. Valeri. Interview with the author, May 25, 2024.
[19] Ibid.
[20] M. Pizza. Interview with the author, September 12, 2023.
[21] G. Viganò. Interview with the author, August 23, 2022.

her authorship. Actor Giorgio Biavati recalls that during the 1980s tour of *Coppia aperta, quasi spalancata* (*The Open Couple, Almost Wide Open*), Rame would listen to recordings of each performance the following morning and revise the script in response to audience reactions to new lines or improvisations.[22] She would then transcribe the parts that resonated well with the audience. If new sections needed to be added, she would call the company together thirty minutes to an hour earlier than usual to rehearse the updated lines. In other cases, she would hand the revised script to the prompter or directly to the other actors before going on stage. In this way, a specific line, joke, or improvisation, or simply a pause, or specific tone or phrasing, was integrated both into the script and into that evening's performance, which would again be recorded, listened to, and edited the next morning, and so on, in a continuous process that would last for the whole tour.[23] The effectiveness of this procedure is evidenced by the global success of *Coppia Aperta, Quasi Spalancata* (Open Couple, Almost Wide Open), which, as Fo declared during Rame's funeral, was performed in over 700 productions worldwide.[24]

My analysis of Rame's multiple copies of her edited texts, preserved in her archive in Verona, reveals that this procedure was applied both to her monologues and to the plays performed with the company. The handwritten notes on the stage scripts demonstrate how both Rame and Fo were consistently involved in this process. These documents contain marks, edits, and occasionally notes, questions, and feedback exchanged between the two, suggesting further revisions and collaborative editing. This happened for

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[22] G. Biavati. Interview with the author, May 23, 2022.
See D. Fo, F. Rame, *Coppia Aperta, Quasi spalancata,* (the Open Couple), (Milano: Einaudi, 1984).
The plot of the play is about Antonia, performed by Rame, stuck in a long marriage with a husband, played by Giorgio Biavati, who no longer loves her and insists on an open relationship. Overcoming an initial moment of despair and suicidal thoughts, she soon realises that she is still young and ready for a fresh start. Just as she begins a new relationship with a Nobel Prize-nominated physicist and talented musician, her husband becomes jealous and tries to stop her. The play ends with her husband's accidental suicide.
[23] G. Biavati. Interview with the author, May 23, 2022.
[24] Dario Fo's discourse at Franca Rame's funeral in Milan on May 31st, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d0ICkK519MI.
In 2024 *Coppia aperta, quasi spalancata* was adapted into a film in 2024, directed by Federica Di Giacomo and based on the original play by Franca Rame and Dario Fo. See https://www.imdb.com/title/tt33055649/.

example for their 1997 play *Il Diavolo con Le Zinne* (The Devil with Boobs), written and directed by Fo, with Franca Rame and actor Giorgio Albertazzi as protagonists.[25] At Rame's archive I examined some of the folders dedicated to the play, one of which contains revisions made by Rame and Fo at Sala di Cesenatico during the compositional phase in August 1997.[26] A handwritten note by Rame on the cover of the folder reads *'pensarci su*' ('to think about it'), possibly indicating her intention to revisit and reconsider specific corrections and variations in the drafts. The materials reveal that Rame posed in fact numerous questions and offered feedback to Fo regarding the text. Her notes include observations such as 'you're complicating the story', or suggestions to use alternative wording, and instructions to emphasise new lines, which highlights her active editorial role in shaping the script.[27] In Figure 4.1, Rame's notes are a series of suggestions and direct questions to Fo, proposing various interventions on the script about her character, Pizzocca. For example, she notes that it is strange that Pizzocca does not know something she should ('è strano che io non lo sappia') and suggests that some of the lines told by others should belong instead to her character ('ci sono battute che dovrei dire io').

[25] D. Fo, F. Rame, *Il diavolo con le Zinne,* (Torino: Einaudi, 1996).
The play is about an incorruptible magistrate, Alfonso Ferdinando de Tristano (performed by Giorgio Albertazzi), who disapproves of torture as a means of persuasion, and is investigating a cathedral fire. Upset by the investigation, the city's elite hire two devils to discredit him. One of the two devils, Barlocca, is tasked with possessing Alfonso's body, turning him into a corrupt and immoral man. However, Barlocca mistakenly enters the body of Alfonso's maid, Pizzocca, played by Rame, transforming her into a beautiful, voluptuous woman. Alfonso, captivated by her, is dragged into a scandal. Although this saves him in court, he is ultimately sentenced in a later trial and becomes a convict.
[26] The play premiered on August 7th, 1997, in Sicily.
[27] Further revisions are available on the online archive:
https://www.archivio.francarame.it/elenco.aspx?IDOpera=56&IDTipologia=15&IDPagina=1

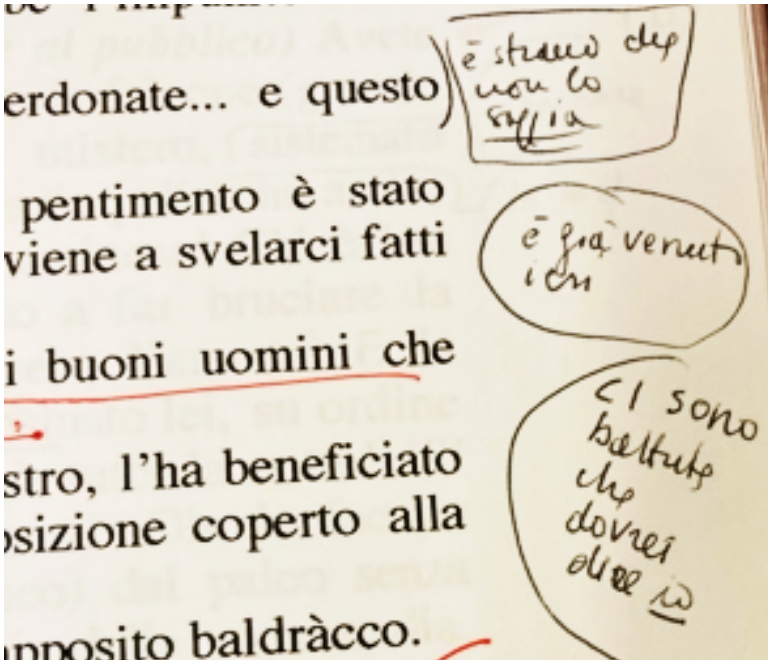


Figure 4.1 *Il Diavolo con le Zinne* File folder, with Rame's handwritten notes. Archivio Franca Rame Dario Fo, Verona (Photo taken by the author). Courtesy of Fondazione Fo Rame.

This collaborative process, captured in Rame's notes and the various script iterations, highlights the dynamic interplay between text and performance in their creative partnership. The exchange of questions and suggestions, such as Rame's proposal to adjust Pizzocca's lines, underscores Rame and Fo's shared commitment to refining the script not just as a static text but as a living document shaped by dialogue and mutual input.

While touring her works, whether performing solo or with the company, as in *Coppia Aperta, Quasi Spalancata* (Open Couple, Almost Wide Open) or *Parliamo di donne (Let's Talk About Women)*, Rame continuously edited and rewrote the text daily until she had at her disposal three to five hundred tape recordings and transcriptions of the same show.[28] Of all the tapes, Rame would then select the last three recordings and used them to create a final version of the text, which she personally edited and published.[29] For example, the script of Rame's monologue *Sesso? Grazie. Tanto per gradire!* (Sex? Thanks! Don't Mind if I Do!), performed for the first time in 1994, was updated for publication following the latest performance of

[28] Marisa Pizza. Interview with the author, September 12, 2023.
[29] Ibid.

the tour in Parma in 1998.[30] It included Rame's stage directions, and her translations of the parts of the scripts written in dialect. In the appendix of the publication, she added reviews, copies of press articles, short monologues written to complement the performance but never staged, together with other sources and information she used in the play.[31]



Figure 4.2 Franca Rame in *Sesso? Grazie. Tanto per Gradire!*
Archive Franca Rame Dario Fo. Courtesy of Fondazione Fo Rame.

In the introduction to the play, Fo underlines the difficulty of transcribing a text performed by Rame *a soggetto*, using improvisation:

> Il linguaggio parlato, infatti, è sempre accompagnato da gesti e dal tono della voce. Questo vale ancor di più per una chiacchierata autobiografica come questa, dove toni e pause sono essenziali. La lettura risulterà così più fluida se vi immaginerete Franca che narra, il pubblico che ride, i silenzi di emozione, attenzione o gli applausi. [32]

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[31] F. Rame, D. Fo, J. Fo, 'Sesso? Grazie. Tanto per gradire!' in D. Fo, F. Rame, *Le Commedie di Dario Fo e Franca Rame,* Vol. XIII, (Torino: Einaudi, 1998)
[32] D. Fo, F. Rame, *Le Commedie di Dario Fo e Franca Rame,* Vol. XIII, (Torino: Einaudi, 1998), 79.

> Spoken language is always accompanied by gestures and vocal tone. This is even more crucial for an autobiographical conversation like this one, where tones and pauses are essential. The reading will be more fluid if you imagine Franca narrating, the audience laughing, the silences of emotion and attention, and the applause.

Once the text was published, it did not mean that the text was definitive at that time. If the company decided years later to stage the play again, as they did in 2008 when Rame restaged her monologue alongside Fo's *Mistero Buffo,* the script would once again serve as a starting point for further developments, edits, and adaptations. In this way, the performance would not be a precise reproduction of its previous stagings or the published script, especially considering elements like the prologue, which often referenced current events and therefore needed regular updates. Rame meticulously preserved in her archive multiple versions of edited scripts, which document her process of *scrittura scenica*. As all the other plays, *Sesso? Grazie. Tanto per gradire!* are stored in folders containing various versions of the script along with related materials, such as research sources, articles, reviews, photos, letters, contracts, and books.[33] As discussed in the previous chapter, both her physical and digital archives thus became invaluable resources for the company, offering reference material for restaging plays and preserving their work for others to stage.[34] In his introduction to the 1998 Einaudi collection which includes *Sesso? Grazie. Tanto per gradire!,* Fo, for instance, offers some advice to companies interested in staging their works:

> Se confrontiamo la prima stesura di ogni lavoro con il testo finale noteremo una grande differenza. In alcuni casi essi risultano quasi irriconoscibili. Queste varianti nascono anche dall'obbligo che sentiamo di adattare l'azione alle continue sollecitazioni dei fatti di cronaca, degli scandali, delle nuove situazioni politiche. Il regista e la compagnia che decideranno di portare questi testi in teatro dovranno

[33] Rame's digital archive is available online, and it is curated by *Fondazione Fo Rame* www.fondazioneforame.org
[34] https://www.archivio.francarame.it/

> forzatamente adattarli alle necessità sceniche, al gusto e alle capacità dei vari attori. Soprattutto dovranno inserire il testo nella realtà del tempo e del luogo in cui viene presentato. Ognuno, quindi, deve cercare di leggere e interpretare il testo tenendo presente che si tratta di una proposta teatrale che deve ancora subire quella trasformazione obbligata e determinante al levitare di ogni opera.[35]
>
> If we compare the initial draft of each work with the final text, we will notice a significant difference. In some cases, they appear almost unrecognisable. These variations also arise from the need to adapt the action to the constant demands of current events, scandals, and new political situations. The director and the company that choose to stage these texts will necessarily have to adapt them to the scenic needs, the taste, and the abilities of the various actors. Above all, they will need to integrate the text into the reality of the time and place where it is presented. Therefore, everyone should read and interpret the text with the understanding that it is a theatrical proposal that must undergo the inevitable and decisive transformation that every work undergoes in its staging.

Both Rame and Fo urged other companies to adapt their work with a constant awareness of the contemporary political and social context. The emphasis on the text as a 'theatrical proposal' implies a dialogic and collaborative blueprint to be shaped in response to specific time and place. One recent example is the play *Accidental Death of an Anarchist,* adapted at the Lyric Hammersmith in London in 2023 by Sheffield Theatres.[36] It was the last copyright permission that Dario Fo agreed to a company before he died in 2016.[37] The British company successfully reworked the story to reflect

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[35] D. Fo, F. Rame, *Le Commedie di Dario Fo e Franca Rame XIII*, (Torino: Einaudi, 1998), Introduction, V, VI.
[36] Adapted by Tom Basden, and directed by Daniel Raggett, the play first opened in the Tanya Moiseiwitsch Playhouse in 2022, before transferring to the Lyric Hammersmith (12 Jun - 09 Sep 2023), and then moving to the West End. It was nominated for an Olivier Award.
[37] M. Fo. Interview with the author, October 16, 2023.

recent real-life scandals involving the police at Scotland Yard.[38] Furthermore, Rame was determined for some of her plays, in particular *Sesso? Grazie. Tanto per gradire!* to be widely performed and read, including in schools, due to its significance as a tool for sexual education for young people and as part of her campaign against sexual violence.[39] This meant that the final editing phase of Rame's *scrittura scenica* extended beyond the creation of a performance-ready script; it became a conscious act of legacy-making. By preserving tools, drafts, annotations, and materials in her archive, Rame offered future generations not a static text, but a living, adaptable process, an open-ended methodology designed to be reactivated, reinterpreted, and kept alive.

Building on the examples above, I argue that Rame's approach stood in contrast to the idea of scenic writing as a linear progression from the author's text to the director's staging, as analysed in the previous section. Rame's *scrittura scenica* always maintained an ongoing dialogue between stage and the written page, where she crystallised creative inventions on the page through her constant process of recording, listening, and ongoing editing. I interpret this process as a circular methodology in which stage and text mutually inform and transform each other. To better unpack this dynamic and to understand Rame's aesthetic priorities and sensibilities in her *scrittura scenica*, whether she aimed for specific structures or effects, and how she achieved them in practice, I draw on testimonies from her collaborators. These accounts reveal that, as part of her *process,* Rame's authorship in her *scrittura scenica* was entangled with the functions of the dramaturg, director, prompter, and editor.

Felice Cappa, for example, defines Rame as the dramaturg of the company, whose embodied theatre knowledge was not simply the result of instinct, intuition, or improvisation: 'The entire layering of the texts was due to Franca's continuous work. From the first to the last performance, the text was

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[38] Companies interested in staging their work today can ask copyright permission to Fondazione Fo Rame: info@fondazioneforame.org.
[39] See Anna Bandettini's review on La Repubblica: https://www.archivio.francarame.it/scheda.aspx?IDScheda=11857&IDOpera=159
The play's exploration of topics such as sexual health led to censorship, as it was deemed controversial and inappropriate for certain audiences.

something plastic, constantly changing'.[40] Cappa describes how Rame's *scrittura scenica* was a meticulously constructed process that involved organising the comedic elements and poetic inventions, leaving her imprimatur on the structure of the piece, thereby harnessing the most creative aspects of their work.[41] Building on this, Valeri defines Rame's method as 'Euclidean' and 'geometric', meaning that her approach was highly structured in terms of clarity and proportion, ensuring there were no issues for the technical staff during live performances.[42] By the time Rame performed, every detail had been thoroughly rehearsed and finalised, reflecting her highly organised approach. Interestingly, this meticulous preparation was intricately intertwined with her exceptional improvisational skills, creating an apparent and unresolved paradox. This interplay between precision and spontaneity is a defining feature of her *scrittura scenica*, to which I will return later in this chapter.

Other collaborators confirm how Rame worked substantially on the structure of the plays. Fabrizio De Giovanni recalls how many in the company referred to Rame as *la sforbiciatrice* (the trimmer) or *la regina dei tagli* (the queen of edits/cuts).[43] He recounts how thanks to the methodical application of her technique she never missed a laugh from the audience, enabling her to achieve the expected effect at the precise moment she intended within the play. Furthermore, he tells an anecdote about actors and technicians who from backstage bet on whether Rame or Fo would get more laughs from the audience, and how Rame always won. According to De Giovanni, while Fo sometimes sought shortcuts for quick laughs, Rame was methodical in her editing of the text. 'She managed to condense a 40-page script into a 28-page one', De Giovanni notes, adding that Rame often said, 'It's beautiful, but if you take something away, it becomes even more beautiful'.[44] This was notably the case around a play written in 1984 by Fo, *Quasi per caso una donna: Elisabetta* (Almost by Chance a Woman,

[40] F. Cappa. Interview with the author, June 20, 2022.
[41] Ibid.
[42] W. Valeri. Interview with the author, May 24, 2024.
[43] F. De Giovanni. Interview with the author, June 21, 2022.
[44] Ibid.

Elizabeth), centred on Queen Elizabeth I.[45] A letter from the archive (Figure 4.3), followed below by my translation, shows Rame's suggestions for editing his script.[46] Jacopo Fo recalls his mother remarking, 'Dario, these are beautiful words all in a row'.[47] She implied that at times, the text lacked political or comedic depth, serving more as a literary exercise or a well-written essay rather than material suited for the stage. [48] As a result, she often proposed significant cuts and revisions, which became a point of contention between the couple.[49]

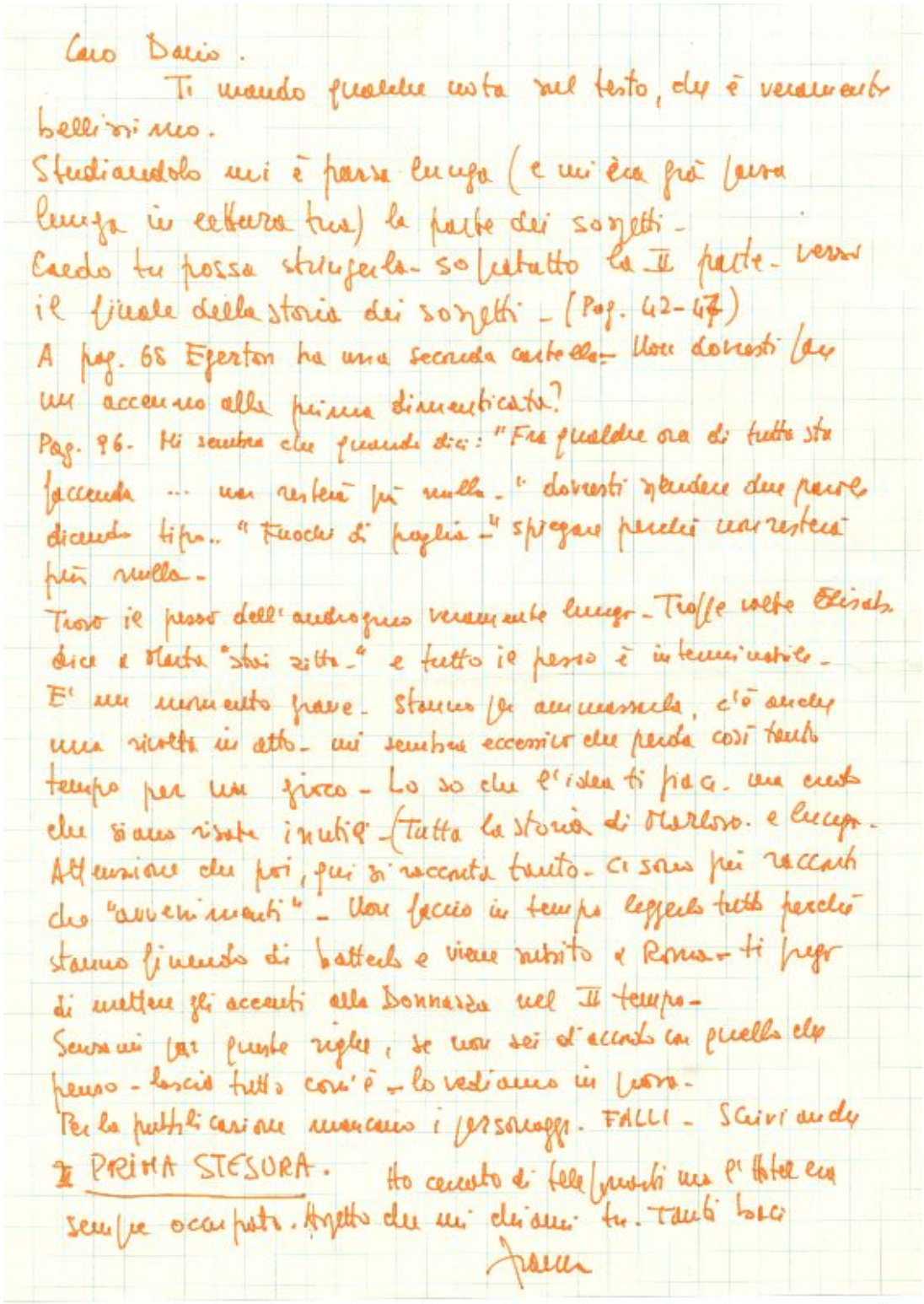
[45] D. Fo, F. Rame, *Le Commedie di Dario Fo,* Vol. XI, (Torino: Einaudi, 1997). Set in 1601, the play portrays Queen Elizabeth I facing personal and political challenges as she tries to reclaim the affection of her lover, the Earl of Essex, who is conspiring to stage a coup with the help of the Earl of Southampton, Shakespeare's patron. See also D. Fo, *Elizabeth*, translated by Gillian Hanna, edited by Stuart Hood, (London: Methuen,1987).

[46] "Caro D. Ti mando qualche nota su testo, che è veramente bellissimo. Studiandolo mi è parso lungo (e mi era già parsa lunga la lettura tua) la parte dei sospetti. Credo che tu possa stringerla, soprattutto la seconda parte, verso il finale della storia dei sospetti (p.42-47). A pag. 68 Egerton ha una seconda cartella. non dovresti fare un accenno alla prima dimenticata? P.96 Mi sembra che quando dici: 'Fra qualche ora di tutta sta faccenda...non resterà più nulla'. Dovresti spendere due parole dicendo tipo …'Fuochi di paglia', spiegare perché' non resterà più nulla. Trovo il pezzo dell'androgino veramente lungo. Troppe volte Elisabetta dice 'Marta stai zitta' e tutto il pezzo è interminabile. È un momento grave. Stanno per ammazzarla, c'è anche una rivolta in atto. Mi sembra eccessivo che perda così tanto tempo per un gioco. Lo so che l'idea ti piace ma credo che siano risate inutili. (tutta la storia di Marlow è lunga). Attenzione che poi qui si racconta tanto. Ci sono più racconti che 'avvenimenti'. non faccio in tempo a leggerlo tutto perché' stanno finendo di batterlo e viene subito a Roma. Ti prego di mettere gli accenti alla Donnazza nel secondo tempo. Semmai per queste righe, se non sei d'accordo con quello che penso, lascia tutto così com'è, lo vediamo in prova. Per la pubblicazione mancano i personaggi. FALLI. Scrivi anche 'PRIMA STESURA'. Ho cercato di telefonarti ma l'hotel era sempre occupato. Aspetto che mi chiami tu. Tanti baci. Franca"
https://www.archivio.francarame.it/scheda.aspx?IDScheda=3179&IDOpera=145
Archivio Franca Rame Dario Fo.

[47] J. Fo. Interview with the author, May 13, 2022.

[48] Ibid.

[49] J. Farrell. Interview with the author, May 17, 2022.



Caro Dario.

Ti mando qualche cosa nel testo, che è veramente bellissimo.

Studiandolo mi è parsa lunga (e mi è già parsa lunga in lettura tua) la parte dei sonetti.

Credo tu possa stringerla - soprattutto la II parte - verso il finale della storia dei sonetti. (Pag. 42-47)

A pag. 68 Egerton ha una seconda entrata - Non dovresti dar un accenno alla prima dimenticata?

Pag. 96. Mi sembra che quando dici: "Fra qualche ora di tutta sta faccenda ... non resterà più nulla." dovresti rendere due parole dicendo tipo.. "Fuochi di paglia" spiegare perché non resterà più nulla.

Tutto il passo dell'andirivieni veramente lungo. Tre/sei volte Elisab. dice a Maria "Stai zitta." e tutto il passo è in terza inutile.

E' un momento grave. Stanno per ammazzarla, c'è anche una rivolta in atto. Mi sembra eccessivo che perda così tanto tempo per un fiasco. Lo so che l'idea ti piace. Ma questo che si sono visti inutile (tutta la storia di Marlowe e Lucy). Affermare che poi, qui si racconta tutto. Ci sono poi racconti dei "avvenimenti". Non faccio in tempo leggere tutto perché stanno finendo di battere e viene subito a Roma. Ti prego di mettere gli accenti alla Donnarza nel II tempo.

Senza mi dai qualche riga, se non sei d'accordo con quello che penso. Lascio tutto così è. Lo vedremo in lettura.

Per la pubblicazione mancano i personaggi. FALLI. Scrivendo la PRIMA STESURA. Ho cercato di fare presto ma l'hotel era sempre occupato. Spetto che mi dici tu. Tanti baci

Franca

Figure 4.3 Letter by Franca Rame to Dario Fo.
Archive Franca Rame Dario Fo, courtesy of Fondazione Fo Rame.

Dear Dario,

I'm sending you some notes on the text, which is truly beautiful. While studying it, the part about the suspicions seemed quite long to me (and during your reading already felt long). I think you could tighten it up, especially the second part, towards the end of the suspicions story (p. 42-47). On page 68, Egerton has a second folder. Shouldn't you mention the first one that was forgotten?

On p. 96, when you say: 'In a few hours, nothing will be left of this whole affair', I think you should add a few words explaining why nothing will remain, maybe something like 'flashes in the pan'. I find the section about the androgynous figure is really long. Elisabeth says 'Marta, be quiet' too many times, and the whole section feels endless. It is a serious moment, they're about to kill her, and there's also a revolt going on. It seems excessive that so much time is spent on a game. I know you like the idea, but I think the laughter here is unnecessary. (The whole Marlow story is long.) Also, keep in mind that there's a lot of storytelling here. There are more stories than actual events.

I don't have time to read through it all because they're finishing typing it up, and it will soon be sent to Rome. Please remember to add the accents for Donnazza in the second half. If you disagree with what I think about these lines, feel free to leave everything as it is, and we'll review it during rehearsals.

For publication, the characters are missing. MAKE THEM. Also, write 'FIRST DRAFT'. I tried to call you, but the hotel line was always busy. I'm waiting for you to call me. Many kisses.

Franca.[50]

[50] My translation of Rame's letter to Fo.

This letter illustrates Rame's 'Euclidean approach' and editorial precision as described by her collaborators, particularly in her dramaturgical suggestions to Fo's text. In this case, she critiques the imbalance between narrative and action, noting, for example, that there are more stories than actual events. Initially, Fo did not accept her feedback, but Rame insisted, explaining how hard it would have been for her to perform the play in that way as protagonist. It took many animated discussions before Fo gave in and accepted Rame's editing.[51]

> He went into a sulk, but did eventually re-write the work. Even then, Franca was never happy with the part of Queen Elizabeth, which she described as requiring the strength of an ox.[52]

This example highlights the complex personal and professional dynamics within the Fo–Rame partnership, particularly around questions of authorship. Rame's dramaturgical interventions were not always welcomed by Fo, whose public image was normalised as the sole author of their work. However, on many occasions, Fo acknowledged Rame's crucial contributions and interventions in selecting variants, cutting and refining the development of scenes, structuring the sequence of events, shaping the dialectical evolution of the characters, and crafting the comic-satirical mechanisms that gave the work its effectiveness.[53] This dynamic reveals that their work was not conducted on equal footing. Rame often had to navigate more traditionally accepted roles in order to assert her creative authority, ultimately contributing significantly to the final outcomes that strengthened their plays and artistic legacy.

The analysis of *Quasi per caso una donna: Elisabetta* illustrates another important aspect or Rame's *scrittura scenica*, referring to how improvisations were incorporated into the script. In fact, when Rame and Fo shared the stage, the degree of improvisation was greater than in scenes involving the entire company, as they drew upon and played off each other's

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[51] J. Farrell. Interview with the author, May 17, 2022.
[52] J. Farrell, *Dario Fo Franca Rame Theatre, Life, Politics,* (London: Methuen, 2019), 294.
[53] R. Brusegan, Ed. *La Scienza del Teatro* (Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 2013), 22.

talent.[54] In the introduction to his English translation of the play, Ron Jenkins explained how the play explores themes of sexual identity and power reversal, amplified by Fo's drag portrayal of the Queen's comic maidservant. At times, they broke character and improvised dialogues that later became part of the official script.

> At one point, as Elizabeth changes her gown behind a screen, Fo jokes that the people in the balcony are getting a view of her underwear. When Rame senses her husband's improvisation going on too long, she chastises both Fo and his character: 'Stay in your place and try to be quiet,' she admonishes, as the monarch, 'because now I'm the Queen and for once, at last, you are the Servant. So shut up. Is that clear?' Fo responds with a mock threat to assert his authorial authority: 'Dario Fo wrote this play, and he wouldn't like to see you treating me like this,' he quips. 'One word from me and he'll cross out 'Queen' next to your lines and write in 'The Maid'. Fo then steps completely out of character to address the audience directly: 'She's really been immersing herself in the role. At home she answers the telephone: 'Hello, this is the queen speaking'.[55]

In this scene, the interaction between the Queen and her servant reflects the real-life dynamic and creative tensions between Rame and Fo and husband and wife, a technique the couple frequently employed in their performances. Rame's decision to incorporate this improvised moment into the final version of the script exemplifies her practice of *scrittura scenica* as a method of composition that privileges the stage as a site of authorship, where text is developed through live performance, actor improvisation, and audience response.

Rame's approach differs from other methods of improvisation in theatre. At Odin Teatret, for instance, while the actors' improvisations were

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[54] M. Pizza. Interview with the author, May 16, 2022.
[55] R. Jenkins in D. Fo, *We won't pay! We won't pay! And other plays. The collected plays Volume One,* Translated by Ron Jenkins. (New York, Theatre Communications Group, 2001) 143-144.

always the starting point of any project, scenes were developed in collaboration with director Eugenio Barba. This process involved creating a final score and sub-score composed of words, sounds, movements, and intentions, which were then blocked, memorised, internalised, and performed consistently in the same way, even years later.[56]

Rame's ability to integrate improvisational elements in her monologues as well as in her work with Fo and the company, represented her embodied primary mode of work, that she then articulated in her *scrittura scenica*. It represented an essential element for creating new material and mediating between individual expression and collective creativity, especially in front of her audience. Spectators and their reactions became necessary partners that nurtured the artists' creativity on stage. Rather than treating the script as a fixed text, Rame therefore used performance as a testing ground for revision, integrating spontaneous exchanges into the written structure.

This broader process of improvisation and re-writing, highlighting the significance of Rame's *scrittura scenica*, occurred during a 1997 performance of *Il Diavolo con le Zinne (The Devil with Boobs).* Rame's character, Pizzocca, unaware that she has been possessed by the devil, suddenly realises that her breasts are visibly inflating. However, one evening Pizza witnessed that the assistants helping Rame backstage were unable to locate the tube needed to inflate the fake breasts, and Rame candidly revealed this mishap to the audience.[57] In response to the audience's enthusiastic reaction, Rame integrated the improvised moment into the final version of the text, adding specific stage directions to capture the unscripted elements of the performance.

> Pizzocca: (Inizia ad aprire la camicetta. Dal momento che non succede niente, si blocca e con tono elevato ripete la battuta). Me se gonfiano le tete! (Un secondo d'attesa, sul tono precedente) Non me se gonfiano le tete! (Rivolgendosi alla ragazza che le sta alle spalle e uscendo dal personaggio) Cosa succede?

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[56] R. Carreri, *On Training and Performance: Traces of an Odin Teatret Actress* (London: Routledge, 2014).
[57] M. Pizza, *Al lavoro con Dario Fo e Franca Rame*, 265-267.

> Ragazza del coro: (sottovoce) non troviamo il tubo!
> Pizzocca: No trovate il tubo? (I seni iniziano a gonfiarsi). Se gonfiano… Se gonfiano! (Si spalanca la camicetta e mostra due zinne che si gonfiano a vista).[58]
>
> Pizzocca: (She begins to unbutton her blouse. Since nothing happens, she pauses and, in a louder tone, repeats the line.) My breasts are inflating! (A brief pause, continuing in the same tone.) My breasts aren't inflating! (Turning to the girl behind her and stepping out of character.) What's going on?
> Chorus Girl: (whispering) We can't find the tube!
> Pizzocca: You can't find the tube? (The breasts begin to inflate.) They're inflating… They're inflating! (She throws open her blouse, revealing two visibly inflating breasts.)

Rame masterfully balanced her improvisation skills with fidelity to the script, all while maintaining the rhythm and flow of the on-stage action. As Pizza observes:

> Non c'è giorno in cui, volutamente, o per trasformare in imprevisto, non provi una situazione nuova o battuta diversa. Franca gestisce le battute, il personaggio e le situazioni con una tecnica di straniamento tale che le permette non solo di guidare gli attori nel giusto ritmo ma di intervenire quando capita che qualcuno ritardi la battuta, allora ovunque si trovi interviene perché non scivoli il ritmo dell'azione in scena lanciando la battuta come domanda.[59]
>
> There isn't a single day when, either deliberately or by turning an unforeseen event into an opportunity, she doesn't try out a new situation or a different line. Franca manages the lines, the character, and the situations with such a technique of estrangement that it allows

[58] D. Fo, Ed. F. Rame, *Il diavolo con le zinne* (Torino: Einaudi, 1998), 116.
[59] Pizza, *Al lavoro con Dario Fo e Franca Rame*, 266.

her not only to guide the actors in maintaining the correct rhythm but also to step in when someone delays delivering a line. Wherever she is, she intervenes to ensure the rhythm of the on-stage action doesn't falter, often by delivering the line as a question.

The ability to step away from the script to improvise, while masterfully maintaining control of the performance and seamlessly returning to character, demonstrates Rame's exceptional skill in managing the play's rhythm and in reworking the script in real time on stage. Furthermore, Valeri and Pizza underline how Rame managed the performance's dynamics both on stage and backstage, employing various methods to communicate with Fo, the company, and the technicians.

> Franca è sempre stata una suggeritrice dietro le quinte in vari modi, anche con Dario e durante i loro monologhi. Avevano un loro modo di comunicare, tanto che lei poteva dirgli apertamente 'Abbassa la voce' oppure usare segnali specifici. Batteva il piede per farsi sentire da dietro le quinte oppure si faceva vedere, attirando la sua attenzione. Suggeriva delle soluzioni, e Dario le assecondava seguendo la sua guida. Franca capiva i desideri del pubblico e modellava la dinamica della performance di conseguenza, un aspetto che ha definito il suo approccio alla scrittura scenica. [60]

> Franca was always a prompter from behind the scenes in various ways, even with Dario, and during their monologues. They had their own way of communicating, so she could openly tell him 'Lower your voice' or had specific methods. She would either stomp her foot, making herself heard by Dario from behind the scenes, or make herself visible to him from behind the scenes. She would suggest ways, and Dario would play along and follow her lead. She understood the audience's desires and crafted the dynamics of the

[60] W. Valeri. Interview with the author, May 25, 2024.

performance accordingly, which defined her approach to scenic writing.

When Fo improvised, Rame guided him with rhythm and timing from backstage, instructing him to slow down, speed up, speak louder, or cut parts of the text if he went on too long. She used methods like sneezing, coughing, tapping her microphone, or signalling with a look at a light or speaker to communicate technical issues to the team.[61] This was how she coordinated the play's pace and volume, both on stage and backstage. Valeri describes this process as *regia in diretta* (directing in the moment), a fundamental aspect of Rame's *scrittura scenica,* which she was able to apply even to herself in performance. I refer specifically to the technique she used to cue herself while performing. As Pizza recalls, during rehearsal periods, she would read and record her lines alone as part of her preparation. This practice was essential during the open rehearsals, when she and Fo would test a newly written draft on stage with an audience, often as soon as the day after writing it.[62] This method was used especially when they were both together on stage or when they performed their monologues.[63] In these situations, Rame used audio recordings of the entire piece. During the open rehearsal of *La Bibbia dei Villani* (The Peasants' Bible) in Rimini in 1996, she hid a Walkman under her poncho to prompt herself. [64] This would allow her to adopt a different stage presence without holding the script, enabling her to engage more directly with the audience and test the material rather than just reading it.[65] In the 1990s, Rame began using a lectern on stage, referencing her script or key points of her text as a prompter, which ultimately became a fixed element of her set in her monologues *Settimo Ruba un po' meno 2*

[61] M. Pizza. Interview with the author, May 16, 2022.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.
[64] D. Fo, *La Bibbia dei Villani* (Parma, Guanda, 2010).
La Bibbia dei Villani (The Bible of the Villains) collects and preserves oral tales from various Italian regions, linked to biblical and religious figures. Through their extensive research on popular traditions, Fo and Rame have reimagined these stories, presenting them both on stage and in a book, edited by Franca Rame.
[65] M. Pizza. Interview with the author, May 16, 2022.

(Seventh Steal a Little Less 2) and *Sesso? Grazie. Tanto per Gradire.*[66] In the final decades of *Compagnia Fo Rame*, Rame and Fo relied on ear monitors as prompts. This technique became so integral to their performances that collaborators, such as De Giovanni, would cue their monologues on stage, even in extraordinary circumstances. One notable example is when Dario Fo delivered his eulogy and performed a monologue in honour of Franca Rame during her funeral.[67] Finally, Rame's role also encompassed the editorial phase of her *scrittura scenica*, where she personally oversaw the preparation of the company's works for publication. This included transcribing, revising, and editing the texts, incorporating and refining improvisations, cutting or restructuring scenes, translating dialect passages, and writing stage directions, a process that constituted a form of indirect direction.

My analysis of the various techniques and practices shows how Rame's *scrittura scenica* was a practice rooted not in dominant authorship but in a multi-faceted, collaborative approach, which allowed her to generate and revise material live on stage, through interaction, improvisation, attentive listening, and a responsive engagement with audience reactions. At the same time, it also highlights how *scrittura scenica* was a site of complex negotiation for Rame. While she often appeared to occupy a subordinate position alongside Fo, juggling multiple, traditionally lower-status creative roles, she did not abandon these roles when taking on authorship herself. Instead, she elevated practices such as editing, prompting, and dramaturgy, making them central to her creative process and artistic identity. My aim here is not to determine 'who wrote what,' but rather to analyse how Rame's authorship was shaped through an integrated approach to theatre-making, an approach she developed from her early experience in *Famiglia Rame*, where mastering every aspect of theatrical production was essential. Building on the findings of the previous chapter, my definition of Rame as a feminist *capacomica* is here refined to encompass her artistic practice, which involved multiple creative roles and remained consistently grounded in

[66] F. Rame, D. Fo, J. Fo, 'Sesso? Grazie! Tanto per gradire!' in D. Fo, F. Rame, *Le Commedie di Dario Fo e Franca Rame,* Vol. XIII, (Torino: Einaudi, 1998).
[67] F. De Giovanni. Interview with the author, June 21, 2022.

collaboration rather than in the assertion of individual authorship. Moreover, the testimonies examined reveal that Rame's *scrittura scenica* was deeply informed by her ability to listen and respond to the audience in real time, making interaction a cornerstone of her artistic method. This approach becomes even clearer when considering further testimonies from collaborators and archival materials, alongside David Roesner's concept of musicality in theatre.

4.3 The Musicality of Rame's *Scrittura Scenica*

In this section, I draw on musicality as a productive framework to further investigate Rame's *scrittura scenica*, examining how she applied her methods in different contexts, for example while touring abroad, and in actor training. Certain definitions of musicality emerge from my interviews with Rame's collaborators, highlighting for example her sense of rhythm, timing, and precision. These insights help to further illuminate Rame's creative process, particularly when viewed through the lens of David Roesner's concept of musicality in theatre and the application of jazz aesthetics to performance.[68]

Roesner's study of musicality in theatre explores the relationship between music and theatre-making, treating music as a model, method, and metaphor.[69] Musicality functions as an aesthetic *dispositif*, a theoretical framework for understanding how music shapes the vocabulary and processes of theatre-making, for example by drawing attention to the sonic qualities of language, rhythm, and timing.[70] My analysis aligns with the idea of jazz musicality and improvisation as models for creating and staging theatre, looking at jazz characteristics such as timbre, phrasing, rhythm, and improvisation.[71] In this context, musicality becomes a central connecting factor in collaboration, a shared principle at the heart of Rame's *scrittura*

[68] D. Roesner, *Musicality in Theatre*, (London: Routledge, 2016).
[69] Ibid.
[70] Roesner, *Musicality in Theatre*, 13.
[71] Roesner, *Musicality in Theatre*, 171-206.

scenica, guiding the development of writing, directing, and performing. Moreover, jazz musicality offers a lens with which to unpack her hybrid working process and performance aesthetic, constantly oscillating between dramatic text and live improvisation. Much like jazz musicians who treat the score as a precise yet flexible structure for collective improvisation, Rame approached *scrittura scenica* as a fluid, collaborative, and rhythmically driven process of theatrical composition. This perspective moves away from viewing performers as mere interpreters or executors of the work created by a composer, author, or director.

I compare Rame's *scrittura scenica* to jazz practices that 'liberate and stimulate the performer to make something unpredictable and unique'.[72] Uniqueness in jazz can be recognised through the sound, style, and phrasing of each performer.[73] While Fo often improvised extensively during acts, requiring flexibility from both the other actors on stage and the technical team, Rame possessed the remarkable ability to improvise freely while meticulously preparing her work in advance.[74] These seemingly contradictory skills are what defined her unique style and technique. This dialectical relation becomes clearer when viewed through the lens of jazz, where structured preparation and spontaneous inventions coexist while performing. I look for example at how Rame, while performing on stage, was able to control the dynamics of the piece like a band leader in a jazz ensemble, who, with specific, minimal signs, orchestrates the ensemble's work and timing. As in the examples above, Rame integrated improvisations into the text once she succeeded in eliciting the desired reaction from the audience. In this extract from her personal notes, she articulates specific steps of her practice:

> If the audience, who must always be listened to, does not respond, does not laugh at the right moments, then you have to tighten, cut, run, even directly on stage because that is where the text and its effectiveness are measured every time.[75]

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[72] Roesner, *Musicality in Theatre*, 179.
[73] Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz* (University of Chicago Press: 1994).
[74] F. De Giovanni. Interview with the author, June 21, 2022.
[75] F. Rame in Marisa Pizza, *Al lavoro con Dario Fo e Franca Rame*, 48.

Rame's understanding of timing and the importance of listening to the audience's response, reflect the dynamics of her *scrittura scenica* at the intersection between the freedom of expression and the structure and rhythms of the play. Interactive creativity on stage in the jazz idiom is commonly defined as 'interplay', indicating the dynamic, spontaneous, and interactive communication between musicians and, often, between the musicians and the audience.[76] It involves real-time responses to each other's musical ideas, such as call-and-response patterns, shared improvisation, and subtle shifts in rhythm, harmony, or melody.[77] Applying this idea to Rame's *scrittura scenica,* interplay extends to how musicians or actors adapt their performance based on the energy, reactions, or mood of both the ensemble and the audience, creating a fluid and collaborative experience that makes each performance unique and deeply connected to the present moment.

Key questions arise when considering for example Rame's international performances. How did she connect with her audience, and in what ways did she adapt her *scrittura scenica* to engage foreign spectators while performing in Italian? And crucially, what role did musicality play in this process? Touring abroad presented unique challenges, requiring Rame to find new strategies and creative solutions to maintain the interactive and dynamic nature of her practice. She employed two methods that she adapted to her *scrittura scenica:* the first involved performing alongside a translator or interpreter on stage, the second relied on a form of surtitles she personally devised.

Musicality is a recurrent term in my interview with Ron Jenkins.[78] He met Rame and Fo in the early 1980s when they performed in London, where Jenkins was studying clown performance. In 1985 he spent a whole year with them in Italy, becoming their interpreter on stage when they were touring abroad, and translating many of their plays into English.[79] In our interview,

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[76] R. Hodson, *Interaction, Improvisation, and Interplay in Jazz* (London: Routledge, 2007).
[77] Ibid.
[78] R. Jenkins. Interview with the author, New York, May 17, 2024.
[79] R. Jenkins, *Dario Fo & Franca Rame, Artful Laughter* (New York, Aperture: 2001).

Jenkins emphasises the importance of Rame's sense of rhythm and musicality in her *scrittura scenica*.[80] Acting as her translator on stage made him inevitably aware of Rame's precise sense of timing. The only way to make it work was following her rhythm more than the exact meaning of the words, developing a strong interplay with what he describes as Rame's unusual way of delivering her text, which sometimes left him out of breath: 'I had to mirror her pauses, breaths, and changes in pace. Eventually, it felt as though her spirit had taken over me, I breathed and moved with her rhythm. By the end of the performance, I was so consumed by this energy that I felt like I might faint'.[81] Having the opportunity to experience Rame's musicality first-hand while on stage with her, gave Jenkins the foundation to then translate and publish some of Rame and Fo's plays in English. The experience of having been on stage with both her and Fo, gave him the advantage of being able to translate and capture their rhythms in English words. He felt this experience gave him an edge that no one else had had. For example, Rame's interaction with her audience was intertwined with Jenkins' real-time translation, which was neither ignored nor viewed as a neutral presence on stage. Instead, it often became part of her improvisations and *scrittura scenica*. She would make a joke when he translated a long Italian phrase with a very short sentence or look at him or make fun of him when he used the wrong word, thus engaging him in the performance and making him an active and comic part of the show and their interaction with the audience.[82]

[80] R. Jenkins, interview with the author, New York, May 17, 2024.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Video of Rame at ISTA, Odin Teatret, Franca Rame interview with Eugenio Barba and Rame performing *Medea,* translated on stage by with Ron Jenkins. Courtesy of Eugenio Barba and Odin Teatret Archive.

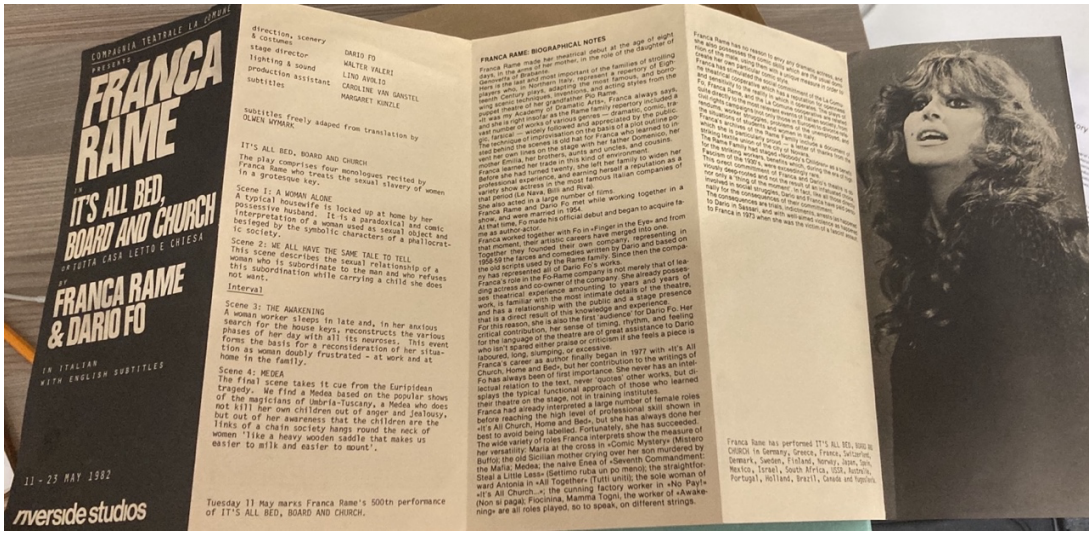


Figure 4.4 - Flyer of Franca Rame at the Riverside Studios in 1982. Courtesy of Riverside Studios Archive.

Rame became well known in London after her collection of monologues *Tutta Casa, Letto e Chiesa*, translated as *Female Parts*, was successfully staged at the National Theatre in 1981. Performed by South African actress Yvonne Bryceland and directed by Michael Bogdanov, the production brought significant attention to Rame's work. [83] As a result, in May 1982, David Gothard, then artistic director of the Riverside Studios, invited Rame to London to present *Tutta Casa, Letto e Chiesa* under the English title *It's All Bed, Board and Church*.[84] Rame performed her monologues in Italian, using an interpreter for improvised sections like the prologue.[85] For the other parts, Rame invented a system which allowed her to maintain her communication with the audience while working on her *scrittura scenica*.

A year later, Gothard invited both Rame and Fo to again perform their monologues and conduct workshops.[86] Valeri, who was stage manager in those productions, describes how Rame came up with the idea of using the *rulli* (scrolls or surtitles). They were transparencies, acetate films initially glued together with tape, and projected with an overhead projector, like those

[84] Research at the Riverside Studios Archive, London, April 4, 2024.
[85] C. van Gastel. interview with the author, June 29, 2022.
[86] Dario Fo and Franca Rame: *The Theatre Workshops at Riverside Studios*, (London: Paperback, 1983).

once used in university lectures.[87] Rame usually composed them manually, and the text was shortened compared to the original version. While Fo's monologues, such as *Mistero Buffo*, relied more on gestures and mimicry, Rame's texts, however, were more complex and layered, requiring the audience to read longer passages of surtitles.[88] To help them follow her delivery in real time, she used the *rulli* to emphasise key words and concepts, imitating the graphic style of comic strips through the use of capital letters, exclamation marks, and other visual cues.[89] Here are some examples of Rame's handwritten *rulli* from her archive, created for the monologue *Abbiamo tutte la stessa storia* (We All Have the Same Story) from *Tutta Casa Letto e Chiesa,* with Spanish translation.[90]

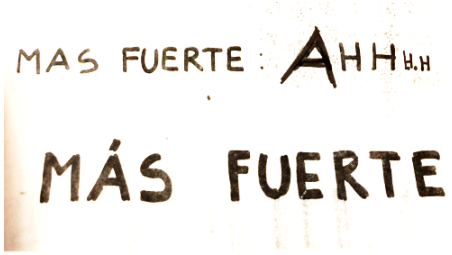


Fig. 4.5

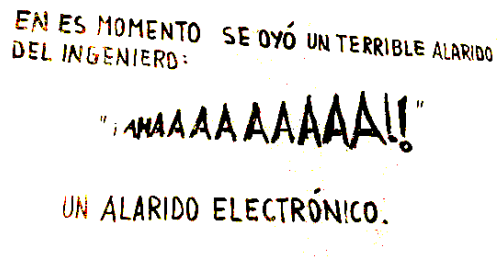


Fig 4.6

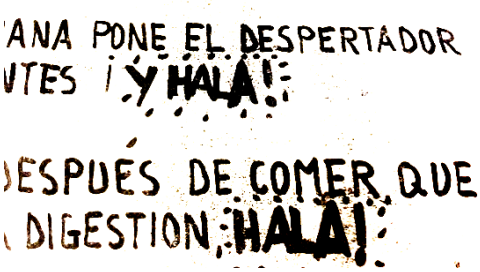


Fig 4.7

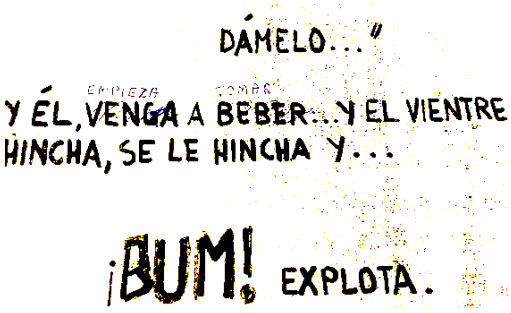


Fig 4.8

Figures 4.5 - 4.8 Extracts from Rame's handwritten *rulli* (surtitles) from the monologue *Abbiamo tutte la stessa storia (Tutta Casa, Letto e Chiesa*), 1977. Archivio Franca Rame Dario Fo, Verona. Courtesy of Fondazione Fo Rame.

[87] W. Valeri, interview with the author, May 25, 2024. See also W. Valeri, Ed., *Franca Rame. A Woman on Stage* (Bordighera Press: 2000).
[88] W. Valeri, interview with the author, May 25, 2024.
[89] See C. Eugeni, 'Franca Rame and the Nobel origins of surtitling', in *Franca Rame. One Life, A Thousand Adventures*, ed. D. Gavrilovich, M. Pizza, D. Santermao, (Roma: Universitalia 2016).
[90] The delicate acetate sheets had been stored rolled up and show signs of deterioration. In fact, Fondazione Fo Rame has now placed Rame's *rulli* under protective preservation and they are temporarily not accessible at the archive.

In the monologue, analysed in Chapter Two, Rame tells the surreal story of an outspoken talking doll who liberates a little girl from an abusive male engineer, ultimately causing him to explode. The capital letters, varying text size, and small drawings around certain words in the scrolls, emphasise Rame's delivery of the text on stage in Italian, crucially facilitating the audience's comprehension of the comic dynamics. Valeri explains how the blocks of text appeared reversed on the overhead projector he operated. Initially, a border was added on the side that the audience could not see, where he wrote additional words to help him understand where he was in the script. They attempted using a mirror to correct the reversal, but it distracted them from keeping up with Rame's timing on stage. Eventually, Valeri called the supplier and asked them not to cut the acetate film, so that they could use it whole, without tape in between pages, and where the edges were no longer visible.[91] I asked Valeri why they did not simply adopt digital subtitles, and he explained that LED surtitle systems, which originated from the ones used in opera, did not work for Rame and Fo's theatre.[92] He explained that the bright light of LED displays could distract the audience, creating a conflict between the live performance and the projections, ultimately reducing the audience's immersion in the live actor's performance. This would have disrupted 'Rame's extraordinary relationship with the audience', while her surtitles provided a much more discrete way of helping the audience with the translation.[93] Furthermore, it was a system that required close synchronisation with her collaborators, who knew the text, and above all, were very familiar with Rame's rhythms and musicality. This procedure was also used when working with Fo on stage. It was not an easy task for the collaborators, as they couldn't see the performance directly but had to follow it through a monitor, as Valeri explains:

> Ero dietro le quinte a proiettarlo, in uno stato di adrenalina pura. Era stressante; era fondamentale non essere né in anticipo né in ritardo,

[91] Ibid.
[92] LED (Light Emitting Diode) displays are used in theatres for subtitling, offering bright, clear text translations or transcriptions to improve audience understanding.
[93] W. Valeri. Interview with the author, May 25, 2024.

> avere nelle orecchie il ritmo di Franca e Dario, respirare con loro. […] Avevo un monitor di ritorno. Loro recitavano con un microfono Sennheiser. Non potevo vederli, ma conoscevo molto bene il testo e, dal tono delle loro voci, capivo dove si trovavano. Tutto avveniva in una frazione di secondo. Perciò, un monitor video non era l'ideale. Tutto si basava sulla conoscenza del ritmo e del testo.[94]
>
> I was backstage projecting it, in such an adrenaline-fueled state. It was stressful; it was important not to be early or late, to have the rhythm of Franca and Dario in your ears, to breathe with them. […] I had a feedback monitor. They performed with a Sennheiser microphone. I couldn't see them, but I knew the text very well, and from the tone of their voices, I understood where they were. Everything happened in a fraction of a second. Therefore, a video monitor was not ideal. It all relied on knowing the rhythm and the text.

Valeri's testimony shows how working with Rame's surtitles required attuning to her musicality in her live performance, fostering an intimate artistic collaboration within the company. This process, once again, can be likened to a jazz ensemble, where musicians develop a deep sense of mutual listening, supporting each other's improvisation and contributing to the dynamic flow of the performance. Importantly, even off-stage collaborators were integral to this theatrical machine. Rame's performance could not succeed without mutual trust and coordinated efforts of every participant, as even the slightest delay turning the surtitles, could disrupt her comic timing and undermine the audience's response.[95] This approach highlights the collaborative nature of Rame's *scrittura scenica,* her need to time her lines with the audience's reactions, and the precision needed to achieve the piece's full impact.

Actress Caroline van Gastel, who was the company's collaborator and interpreter in Rame's performance at the Riverside Studios, assisted Valeri

[94] Ibid.
[95] M. Pirovano. Interview with the author, June 1, 2022.

by tapping his shoulder when it was time to turn the scrolls. She found using the surtitles straightforward because Rame had directed her with the same text, therefore she knew by heart Rame's rhythms and breathing patterns in the piece.[96] She explains that when a line did not get the expected audience reaction, Rame reviewed the recording to determine why and where they were not laughing. With the translators' assistance, she would edit the surtitles by trying a different line in English. This demonstrates how they were essential to Rame's *scrittura scenica* when performing abroad, reflecting the same process she applied when editing her Italian texts. Furthermore, it shows how her approach was collaborative and dialogic, even when performing alone on stage. Achieving the desired effect often depended on an intimate, embodied understanding between Rame and her collaborators, at times as subtle and precise as breathing together, to maintain the musical and performative flow of the piece. This also underscores the crucial role of Rame's musicality in shaping her *scrittura scenica*, particularly the centrality of rhythm and timing in her work.

This attention to musicality also shaped the way Rame trained and directed actresses to perform her monologues: the focus was not solely on conveying the content of the text, but on mastering its musical structure, its pacing, intonation, tonal shifts, and silences. For example, in the 1990s, she directed her monologues from the collection *Tutta Casa, Letto, e Chiesa, (All Home, Bed, and Church)* with Marina De Juli. In our interview, De Juli explained how Rame's method was quite different from what an actor might typically expect from theatre directing. However, once absorbed, her technique seems to have had a significant impact on De Juli. She felt she learned valuable tools that helped her grow as a performer and that she could then apply to any text.[97] Rame taught her to learn through imitation, a method I compare to the way jazz musicians learn to play jazz, by deep listening, imitating the solos of jazz masters, transcribing and repeatedly playing or singing them until they are memorised.[98] This methodology reflects Rame's practice called *bocca a bocca,* mouth to mouth, which I

[96] C. van Gastel. Interview with the author, April 30, 2024.
[97] M. De Juli. Interview with the author, July 1, 2022.
[98] D. Roesner, *Musicality in Theatre,* 189.

mentioned in the first chapter, as it mirrored the way Rame's mother used to teach her the lines word by word when she was a child.[99] Rame trained her actors to learn the lines by heart, also showing them the exact tones of each word and each sentence, and asking to repeat them.[100] No hidden technique, no identification with the character or psychological insight, but a strong focus on how to say the lines, learning the right tones, repeating until off-script. It was not about theories or a specific technique, but an embodied knowledge built with years of experience on stage in front of an audience: 'You copy me, you'll understand later'.[101]

Given the difficulty of approaching and understanding this methodology without direct experience, I engage with it as embodied performance, incorporating it into my practice research in the final chapter. This experiential approach has enabled me to explore its dynamics more effectively and deepen the analysis I present here. A similar process of discovery is reflected in De Juli's experience. What initially seemed like simply parroting Rame's lines eventually revealed itself as a unique opportunity to learn how Rame mastered the delivery of the text on stage. In other words, this process meant that Rame was handing De Juli the final product of her *scrittura scenica*, a text that she had re-elaborated, edited, and rewritten over the course of more than three thousand performances of *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa* in front of live audiences. Once De Juli had learned the text with the exact tones and rhythms, it was then up to her to make the piece her own. De Juli was certainly aware of the risk of becoming a copy of her teacher and she admits that it took time, experience, and commitment to master Rame's monologues with one's own sound, timbre, and style.

> Franca era una donna pratica: 'So cosa voglio dal testo, e ti offro quello che ho raggiunto come mio massimo, tu parti da lì'. Più che regia, la definirei una trasmissione di esperienza, di competenze, di

[99] F. Rame, *Una vita all'improvvisa,* (Parma: Guanda, 2009).
[100] F. Rame, *Una vita all'improvvisa,* (Parma: Guanda, 2009).
[101] M. De Juli. Interview with the author, July 1, 2022.

> espressioni, di ritmi, che è sempre alla base del teatro di Rame e Fo.[102]
>
> Franca was a practical woman: ‘I know what I want from the text, and I give you what I have achieved as my maximum, you start from that step there’. More than directing I would call it transmission of experience, of skills, expressions, rhythms, which is always the basis of Rame and Fo’s theatre.

This form of generosity in transmitting embodied techniques and knowledge, assimilated not through a school but by working alongside Rame, repeating by heart what she did, is indicative of the *modus operandi* of Rame with her actors. Van Gastel had a similar experience to De Juli, at first not understanding why Rame asked her to repeat and learn her tones by heart, but in the end, she mastered Rame’s musicality in her monologues and adapted this skill to other works in her career.[103]

> She gives you 'the tones’. I've adopted the habit, for example, when working on a text, to use symbols: up arrow, down arrow, full stop. I learned this from Franca. She would add symbols to the text to indicate tones, rhythms, up/down. Franca's approach to acting is like a clock; she constructs and then suddenly adds things, even in the moment, on stage.[104]

Van Gastel’s description of how Rame trained her, provides evidence of some of the same markings I found in the stage scripts I examined at Rame’s archive. These scripts feature the very signs van Gastel describes, including up and down arrows, underlined text, and other types of handwritten marks designed to help an actor articulate the text in performance, raising the volume, using pauses or breath, or changing the tone or pitch. However, some of these signs immediately struck me as

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[102] Ibid.
[103] C. van Gastel. Interview with the author, April 30, 2024.
[104] Ibid.

conveying more than just a change of tone or a pause. This prompted me to approach Rame's work from a different perspective, leading to important insights for my research. From this angle, Roesner's concept of musicality in performance resonates even more with my analysis of Rame's method of marking scripts, which transformed them into what I read as a *partitura*, a musical score, incorporating specific signs and codes that guide the actor's delivery, much like sheet music directs musicians. A further examination of Rame's promptbooks, preserved in her archive in Verona, led me back to her work with *Famiglia Rame*, where I discovered the key to fully understanding the significance of musicality as a crucial concept in her development of *scrittura scenica*.

4.4 Rame's Notation System*: Scrittura Scenica* and *La Drammatica*

My analysis from the archive's documents and testimonies from Rame's collaborators show how Rame's signs on her stage scripts were meant not just as a guide for the actor to deliver her text, but were at the same time elaborated and adapted in response to the audience reactions, as part of her *scrittura scenica*.[105] Alessio Arena points out how similar symbols and codes are recognisable in Famiglia Rame's *canovacci* (plots) and scripts, also preserved in Rame's archive in Verona. [106] A closer look at the marks present in their manuscripts shows that they are part of the symbols that Italian theatre scholar Anna Sica discovered and decoded in the texts of Italian nineteenth century actors, such as the famous actress Eleonora Duse (1858-1924). Sica refers to the Italian theatre practice of *La drammatica:*

> La drammatica is a theatrical declamatory system that has been completely neglected since the dawn of the twentieth century. Nevertheless it formed the foundation of Italian national theatre and played a remarkable role in the history of eighteenth-and nineteenth-

[105] Interviews with Pizza, van Gastel, De Juli, Pirovano.
[106] A. Arena, *La famiglia Rame. Storia, tradizione e repertorio di una compagnia di attori tra XIX e XX secolo* (Roma: Bulzoni, 2024).

> century European theatre. It featured a scale of intonations and gestures which were represented by symbols of notation. Some of those symbols are still preserved and readable in actors' promptbooks […]. Drammatica refers to a style of acting that has not an equivalent term in English.[107]

These signs and marks represented tones, pauses, breaths, and sighs, essentially indicating theatrical timing for actors.[108] In other words, they constitute a form of musicality and direction embedded directly in the script through symbols, which Arena, through the lens of Anna Sica's work, helps to decipher.

> Among the most recurring elements, the semicolon, colon, and comma were distinguished, indicating respectively a sigh or pause, three-quarters of a sigh, and a quarter of a sigh; three dots signalled an interruption or suspension; and the dash represented a pause to be emphasised. Graphic devices such as bold text were also used to indicate where a change in tone or voice level was needed, and underlining, which marked words to be pronounced with emphasis.[109]

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[107] A. Sica*, The Italian Method of La Drammatica: Its legacy and Reception* (Milano: Mimesis, 2014).

[108] *La drammatica* was first developed by Luigi Riccoboni (1676-1731) in the early 18th century, who referred to it as *la rappresentativa* and outlined its foundational aspects in his treatise *Dell'Arte Rappresentativa* (1728). Gustavo Modena and his theatre company Reale Compagnia Sarda refined Riccoboni's principles to develop the second phase of *rappresentativa*, which lasted from 1821 to 1859 and later became known as *drammatica*. Starting in 1870, Italian actors revisioned la *drammatica,* marking its final phase.
See A. Sica, ed. *The Italian Method of La Drammatica. Its Legacy and reception (*Milano: Mimesis, 2014).

[109] A. Arena *La Famiglia Rame*, 196.
(…) Tra gli elementi piu' ricorrenti, dunque, furono distinti il punto e virgola, I due punti, e la virgole, per indicare, rispettivamente, il sospiro, o la pausa, tre quarti di sospiro e un quarto di sospiro; I tre puntini che segnalavano un'interruzione o una sospensione; il trattino che rappresentava una pausa da enfatizzare. Vennero anche notati degli espedienti grafici come il grassetto, per indicare dove era necessario un cambio del tono e del grado di voce, e la sottolineatura, che marcava, invece, le parole da pronunciare con enfasi. Si trattava di un sapere condiviso dall'utilità principalmente pratica, ma che si fondava, su una tradizione ben radicata nella pratica teatrale (…).
Arena refers here to Anna Sica, *L'arte Massima,* Vol I, (Milano: Mimesis, 2017), 107.

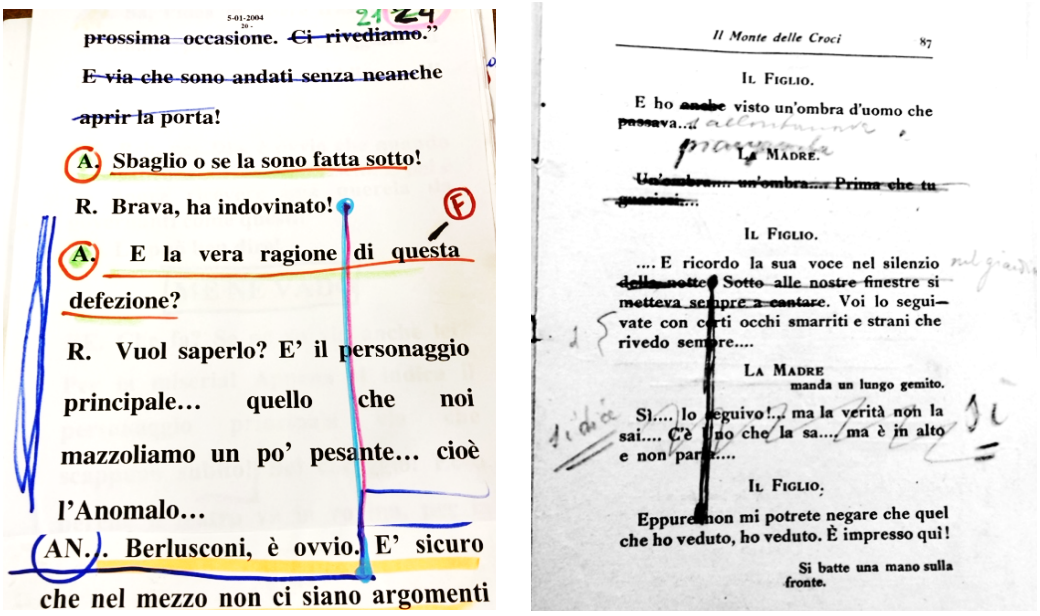
What may initially appear to be simple markings made by Rame on her stage script, reveal themselves to be part of a theatrical code known to actors and *capocomici* who belonged to the Italian theatre tradition. [110] *La drammatica* was in fact a system that intertwined acting with prosody, integrating metrical structure, gestures, and expressiveness.[111] The symbols within this system represented phonological elements such as pitch, intonation, stress, and emphasis, creating an interactive framework of key voices (*voci apposite*) and key gestures (*gesti appositi*). [112] This allowed actors to employ a code of symbols for both declamation and mime. In my analysis, I concentrate solely on declamation, partly because Rame's use of gesture on stage was minimal, and partly because my focus on this chapter is on Rame's *scrittura scenica* and how she developed a system of notation as part of it. In examining documents at Rame's archive in Verona, I came to realise how Rame's precise use of notation reflects not only the symbols found in Famiglia Rame's works, but also more ancient ones. Sica identifies three styles of *la drammatica*, belonging to different historical periods:

> The *drammatica* was called 'classic' (*la classica*) in the eighteenth century, 'romantic' (*la romantica*), in the first half of the nineteenth century, and 'neo-classic' *(la neoclassica),* in the era of Naturalism. […] The most skilful interpreters of the neo-classical drammatica, such as Eleonora Duse, Tommaso Salvini, and Luigi Rasi, managed to achieve the effect of spontaneous acting, but they, nevertheless, were highly practiced in a compound vocal system. An understanding of this is gained from the exposition of the method as it is recorded in the symbols of notation still readable in their promptbooks. [113]

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[110] F. Campus, Review of Alessio Arena's book *La Famiglia Rame* http://sinestesieonline.it/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/42_24_campus.pdf.
[111] A. Sica*, The Italian Method of La Drammatica: Its legacy and Reception* (Milano: Mimesis, 2014).
[112] The term *drammatica*, derived from letters, treatises, and diaries, was known in the 19th century as *drammatica-metodo Italiano*. Sica's discovery of Duse's books in Cambridge and her work with the Murray Edwards Duse Collection were crucial in identifying and comprehending this method.
See A. Sica*, The Italian Method of La Drammatica: Its legacy and Reception* (Milano: Mimesis, 2014).
[113] A. Sica, *The Italian Method of La Dramatica: Its legacy and Reception*, Pos. 389.

By examining these different periods and styles of *la drammatica*, I draw on Sica's approach to analyse a selection of Rame's archival documents, identifying which signs belong to which historical era, in order to show how that this technique was deeply embedded in Rame's notation system. I begin by identifying a particular sign that also appears in Eleonora Duse's prompt books. It is a vertical line delimited by two dots, which crosses through a specific part of the text.[114]

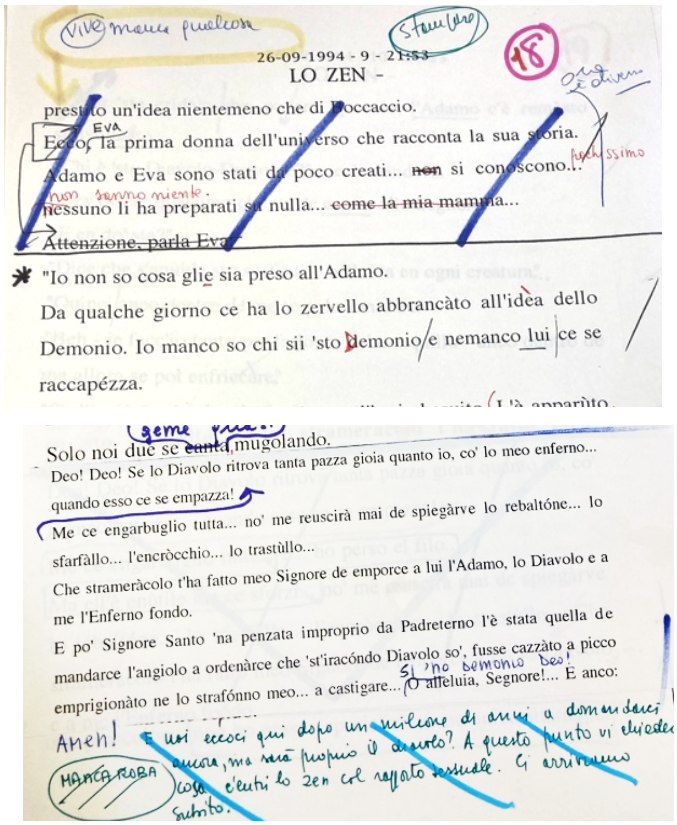


Figures 4.9 - 4.10 Examples of *grappa assimilativa* in promptbooks by Franca Rame (Archivio Franca Rame Dario Fo, Verona. Courtesy of Fondazione Fo Rame, and in Eleonora Duse's promptbook. Courtesy of Anna Sica.

Almost impossible to translate, this is the *grappa assimilativa* (literally: assimilating pitch), a sign indicating a marked tonal shift that applies to the lines enclosed by two dots, guiding the performer to deliver them in a unified tone.[115] At the end of the line with the dot, the performer returns to the tone used immediately before the sign. In this example, in Rame's page on the left, the *grappa assimilativa* is associated with another sign, the blue vertical lines at the left side of Rame's text, indicating that this section of the text is also *a soggetto*, which means that the actor improvises it.[116]

[114] A. Sica. Interview with the author, August 28, 2024.
[115] A. Sica. Interview with the author, August 28, 2024.
[116] Ibid.

Drawing on Sica's work, I have identified several marks in Rame's documents, some of which I traced not only to the more recent neo-classical period, but also to the classical style of the eighteenth century.[117] For example, looking at Rame's monologue of *Adam and Eve*, which is part of her 1994 play *Sesso? Grazie. Tanto per gradire!*, there are three short, oblique, parallel lines both in the first and last page of the scene, which at a first sight might appear as cuts to the stage script.


26-09-1994 - 9 - 21:53
LO ZEN -
presto un'idea nientemeno che di Boccaccio.
Ecco, la prima donna dell'universo che racconta la sua storia.
Adamo e Eva sono stati da poco creati... non si conoscono...
Nessuno li ha preparati su nulla... come la mia mamma...
Attenzione, parla Eva.
"Io non so cosa glie sia preso all'Adamo.
Da qualche giorno ce ha lo zervello abbrancàto all'idèa dello
Demonio. Io manco so chi sii 'sto demonio e nemanco lui ce se
raccapézza.
Solo noi due se mugolando.
Deo! Deo! Se lo Diavolo ritrova tanta pazza gioia quanto io, co' lo meo enferno...
quando esso ce se empazza!
Me ce engarbuglio tutta... no' me reuscirà mai de spiegàrve lo rebaltóne... lo
sfarfàllo... l'encròcchio... lo trastùllo...
Che strameràcolo t'ha fatto meo Signore de emporce a lui l'Adamo, lo Diavolo e a
me l'Enferno fondo.
E po' Signore Santo 'na penzata improprio da Padreterno l'è stata quella de
mandarce l'angiolo a ordenàrce che 'st'iracóndo Diavolo so', fusse cazzàto a picco
emprigionàto ne lo strafónno meo... a castigare... O alleluia, Segnore!... E anco:
Amen!

Figures 4.11 - 4.12 Extracts from Rame's stage script *Sesso? Grazie. Tanto per Gradire!* (Sex, Thanks! Don't Mind if I Do!) Archivio Franca Rame Dario Fo, Verona. Courtesy of Fondazione Fo Rame.

On the contrary, Rame recited those lines, as demonstrated both in the published script and videos of her performance.[118] Those marks are also part of *la drammatica*, marking a *racconto promiscuo con voce dorata*, essentially indicating that the section of the script within those marks was to be

[117] Ibid.
[118] F. Rame, D. Fo, J. Fo, 'Sesso? Grazie. Tanto per gradire!' in D. Fo, F. Rame, *Le Commedie di Dario Fo e Franca Rame,* Vol. XIII, (Torino: Einaudi, 1998); YouTube link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NSjSoH6cBLA

delivered with a distinct vocal placement.[119] Rame delivered those lines in a tone that was colloquial, intimate, direct to the audience, before she transitioned into Eve's dialectal voice to begin the Adam and Eve scene. This monologue starts with the *voce appropriate,* the 'appropriate voice' for her character, marked by the sign known as the *cappelletto*, a kind of asterisk placed at the beginning of the line: 'Io non so cosa sia...'.

As a performer, Rame modulated her voice with a wide range of nuanced intonations, yet always retaining her natural vocal tone, never transforming it into something caricatural or artificial. This range of vocal nuances in her performances was carefully codified in the notation system she used. Figure 4.12 presents the same three diagonal lines in the final part of the monologue, where Rame steps out of Eve's character. The sign indicated the tone of her voice when she again addressed the audience directly, in a sort of *a parte* (aside), open to improvisation.[120]

This symbol is the same one that Sica identified in two pages of the script by Italian actor Gustavo Modena (1803-1861), in his adaptation of Friedrich Schiller's (1759-1805) play *Morte di Wallenstein* (Death of Wallenstein).[121]

[119] A. Sica. Interview with the author, August 28, 2024.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid.

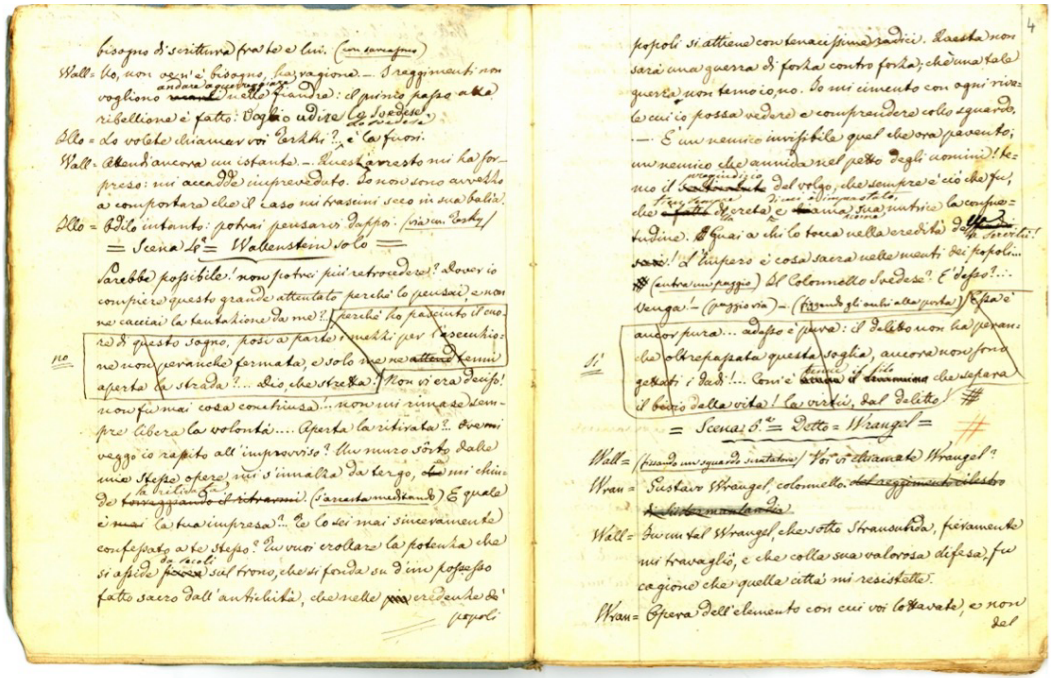


Figure 4.13 An extract from Gustavo Modena's script of *Death of Wallenstein* (Biblioteca Teatrale del Burcardo di Roma). Courtesy of Anna Sica.

These two examples of Rame's signs in her stage scripts, compared to both Duse and Modena's signs, demonstrate how Rame's system of notation was rooted in different historical periods of *la drammatica*. What struck me is that in our interviews, the actors in her company never mentioned the origin of Rame's signs. This probably means that, like Duse, Rame did not discuss or explain her system to her collaborators, following the tradition of *capocomici* who also kept such practices implicit.[122] She absorbed it while growing up and working with *Famiglia Rame*, much like one learns grammar by immersion. In the archive documents there is a consistent use of these signs, reflecting a deliberate method rather than random markings. Decoding and comparing them to the symbols in the prompt books of actors who used *la drammatica* therefore enables us to gain insight into Rame's *scrittura scenica*, specifically, how she embedded her directorial intentions into the text and how she envisioned its delivery on stage.[123] For example, it helps understand shifts in tone, variations in her interaction with the audience, such as moving in and out of character, and her use of explanations or

[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid.

anticipations to clarify or set up a scene, as in the case of Eve's scene in *Sesso? Grazie. Tanto per gradire!* (Sex? Thanks! Don't Mind if I Do!).

While it is commonly believed that Italian 18th-century drama opposed the improvisation practices of *Commedia dell'Arte*, the roots of *la drammatica* are intricately connected to the stagecraft of *improvvisa*, a key practice of *Famiglia Rame,* as analysed in the first chapter. [124] This explains the apparent paradox in the way Rame integrated elements of both improvisation and notation, treating them as complementary tools in her creative process. Through her *scrittura scenica*, she combined these methods: for instance, the monologue of Adam and Eve was meticulously developed, structured, and directed using her notation system. Other sections, such as the prologue, were deliberately left open to improvisation and interaction with the audience. In all cases, Rame maintained a readiness to improvise, often incorporating unexpected on-stage events into her performances. As we have seen in the example from in *Il Diavolo con le Zinne* (The Devil with Boobs), an unforeseen moment was later integrated into the final version of the text.

Another key instrument to interpreting Rame's notation is Lorenzo Camilli's 1852 publication *Fonografia* (Phonography).[125] Camilli (1792-1857) was a Sicilian actor and a renowned teacher of declamation who lived in Naples.[126] He introduced the declamatory symbols (*sigle)* through distinct charts (*tavole*) that I use to decipher Rame's signs in her monologue *Lysistrata*. This short text was the opening scene of the 2003 satirical play *L'anomalo Bicefalo* (The Twin-Headed Anomaly).[127] The play tells the story of a film about the transplant of Putin's brain into Silvio Berlusconi's head. With Rame and Fo as protagonists, the play was a satirical protest against the growing threat to a free media in Italy and the lawlessness of the late right-wing Italian Prime Minister and media mogul Berlusconi.[128] Rame's character is Anastasia, an actress who auditions for the director of the movie, played

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[124] Franca Rame entitled her autobiography 'Una vita all'improvvisa'.
[125] L. Camilli, *Fonografia* (Napoli: Stamperia del Vaglio, 1852).
[126] A. Sica, ed. *The Italian Method of La Drammatica. Its Legacy and Reception (*Milano: Mimesis, 2014).
[127] D. Fo, F. Rame L'anomalo bicefalo (Milano: Fabbri, 2006).
[128] https://www.archivio.francarame.it/scheda.aspx?IDOpera=3&IDSchedaLocandina=24889

by Fo. For her audition, she presents a short extract from the classic Greek play, *Lysistrata*, written in 411 BC by comic playwright Aristophanes.[129] Lysistrata is a woman who is tired of the war between Greek city-states, and convinces women from both sides of the war to stop having sex with their partners until they agree to negotiate peace.

> Lysistrata, that's what they call me in Athens, where I was born. I danced in the agora and in the temple...I have a husband whom I adore, but now he is not here with me. The government of the polis sent him, along with other young men like him, to reinforce Agrigento, which has occupied Syracuse, our ally. The gentlemen leaders of Parliament explained to me that those young men from Athens are not there to fight, but only to maintain peace, to help the defeated establish democracy. But every day, one or two of our young men are killed. Yesterday, many bodies of peace soldiers returned on a ship. And we women were left to shed tears over our lifeless men and wail like mourners... No, we cannot go on like this, powerless and resigned. Women, we have a powerful and invincible weapon, let's put it to use. Tomorrow, ten ships will return for a brief break. From those ships, our men will disembark at the port with eyes gleaming with desire... we will go there wearing light, transparent garments that reveal our graceful shapes... and we will dance with our dresses swaying in the wind, dazzling our lovers and husbands, brushing against them like eager bacchantes. We will bring them to our homes, but when their trembling hands reach out to strip us of our clothes, we will pull away. 'What's wrong with you?' our excited men will complain. And we will reply, 'No, as long as you continue to draw your swords, we will keep our butterflies hidden and untouched. Love needs life and peace; war only needs lies and death. Choose, my love'.[130]

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[129] Aristophanes., *Lysistrata*. Translated by J. Henderson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

[130] In D. Fo, F. Rame, *L'anomalo bicefalo* (Roma: Citta' Nuova, 2004).
This adaptation by Rame and Fo of the original piece was also intended as a critique against so-called peacekeeping missions. During those years, Italy sent many soldiers in war zones, for example to Iraq, and several lost their lives. This was a cause that Rame championed during her time as a senator from 2006 to 2008.

The original stage script, preserved at her archive, reveal Rame's handwritten marks and ongoing edits, illustrating how she developed a vocal *partitura* (score) as an integral component of her *scrittura scenica.*[131] The images, taken at Rame's archive, are pages from her stage script, with many signs, arrows, colours, underlining, markings, highlights, and so on. My analysis of the signs builds on Sica's interpretation of Camilli's charts, alongside a close examination of Rame's video performance of *Lysistrata*.[132]



Figure 4.14 Production photo from *L'anomalo bicefalo* featuring Dario Fo and Franca Rame, at the Saschall Theatre in Florence, on February 14, 2004. Archivio Franca Rame Dario Fo. Courtesy of Fondazione Fo Rame.

[131] https://www.archivio.francarame.it/Scheda.aspx?IDScheda=26152&IDOpera=3
[132] L. Camilli, *Fonografia* (Napoli: Stamperia del Vaglio, 1852);
See video collection D. Fo, F. Rame, *Tutto il Teatro di Dario Fo e Franca Rame* (Milano: Fabbri Editore, 2006). Franca Rame's monologue is also available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X44XCLDkxoE

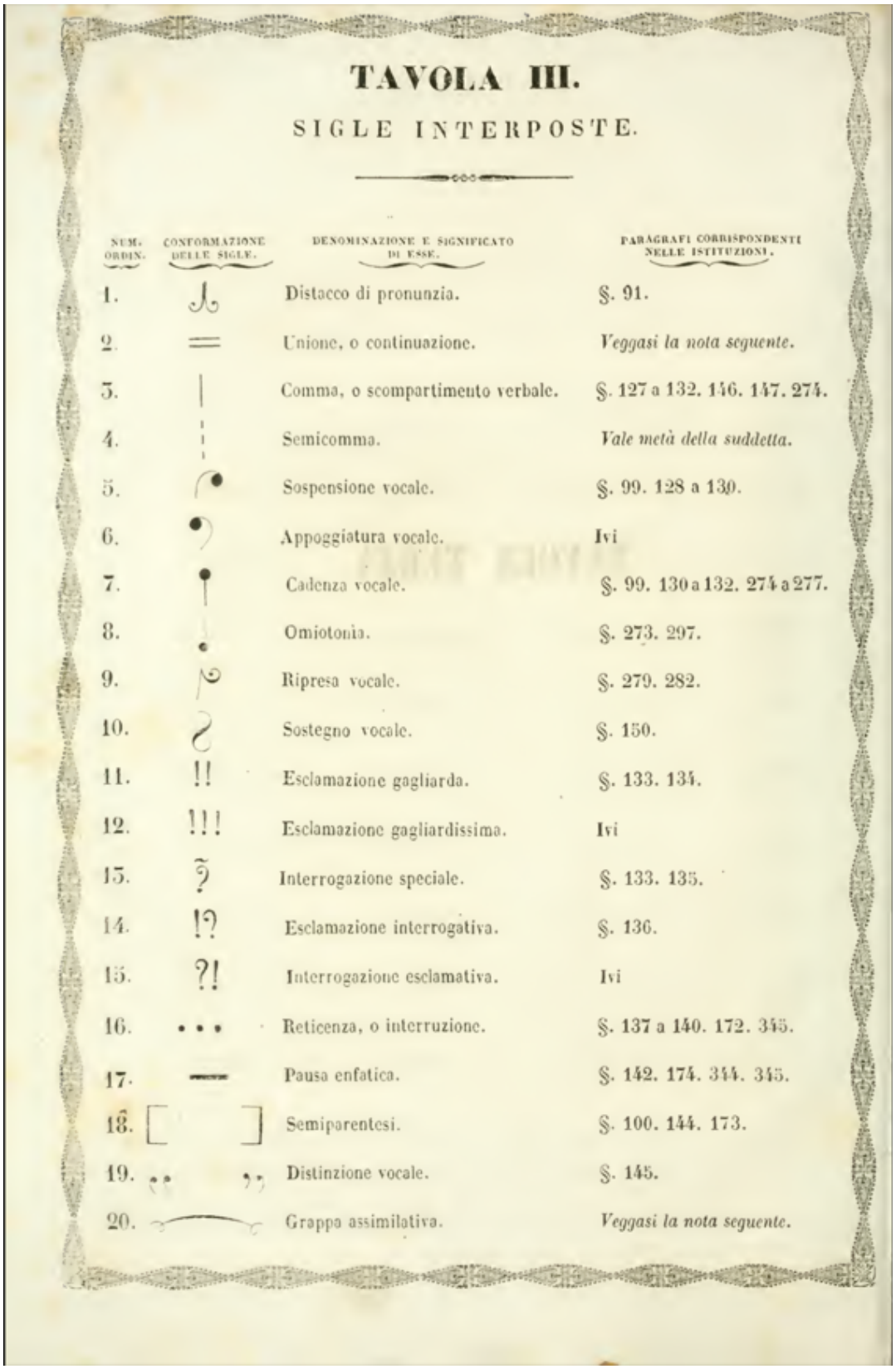


TAVOLA III.

SIGLE INTERPOSTE.

NUM. ORDIN.	CONFORMAZIONE DELLE SIGLE.	DENOMINAZIONE E SIGNIFICATO DI ESSE.	PARAGRAFI CORRISPONDENTI NELLE ISTITUZIONI.
1.		Distacco di pronunzia.	§. 91.
2.	=	Unione, o continuazione.	*Veggasi la nota seguente.*
3.	|	Comma, o scompartimento verbale.	§. 127 a 132. 146. 147. 274.
4.	⁝	Semicomma.	*Vale metà della suddetta.*
5.		Sospensione vocale.	§. 99. 128 a 130.
6.		Appoggiatura vocale.	Ivi
7.		Cadenza vocale.	§. 99. 130 a 132. 274 a 277.
8.		Omiotonia.	§. 273. 297.
9.		Ripresa vocale.	§. 279. 282.
10.		Sostegno vocale.	§. 150.
11.	!!	Esclamazione gagliarda.	§. 133. 134.
12.	!!!	Esclamazione gagliardissima.	Ivi
13.	⸮	Interrogazione speciale.	§. 133. 135.
14.	!?	Esclamazione interrogativa.	§. 136.
15.	?!	Interrogazione esclamativa.	Ivi
16.	. . .	Reticenza, o interruzione.	§. 137 a 140. 172. 345.
17.	—	Pausa enfatica.	§. 142. 174. 344. 345.
18.	[ ]	Semiparentesi.	§. 100. 144. 173.
19.	,, ,,	Distinzione vocale.	§. 145.
20.		Grappa assimilativa.	*Veggasi la nota seguente.*

Figure 4.15 Camilli Table III – Sigle interposte (interposed symbols, in between words). Courtesy of Anna Sica.

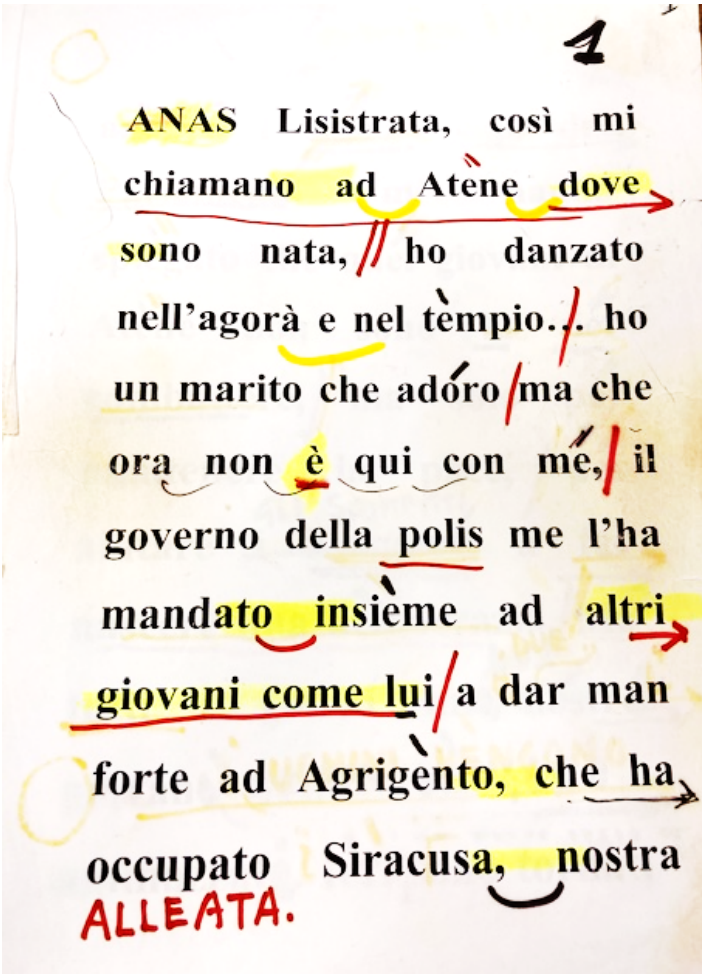


Figure 4.16 Rame's stage script, page 1, from the play *L'anomalo Bicefalo*. (Archivio Franca Rame Dario Fo, Verona. Courtesy of Fondazione Fo Rame)

The first page of Rame's script Figure 4.16 presents symbols which are present in both Camilli's *Tavola III - sigle interposte* (Chart 3 - interposed symbols), and *Tavola I - sigle sottoposte*, (Chart 1 - symbols below the words).[133] For example, symbol n.3 in *Tavola III* is called *comma o scompartimento vocale* (Comma or vocal compartment), which is a pause, defined by Sica as *pausa ideologica* (ideologic pause). The pause can be single or double, in fact actors used to measure the length of pauses calculating one or more breaths or sighs. For example, the emphatic pause,

[133] Interestingly, *Tavola III*, at the bottom, displays the signs of the *grappa assimilativa* that we have already analysed in Rame's script, although in this instance, the sign appears horizontally, unlike in Rame and Duse's text, where it is positioned vertically.

which is a bold line in between words, was equivalent to eight breaths. The pause served ‘to change modulation and capture the audience's attention, making it clear that what you're saying is being thought of in that moment’.[134] The double pause in Rame’s text (//) is also an emphatic pause; it comes after ‘dove sono nata’ (where I was born), and indicates a moment when Lysistrata recalls dancing in the agora’ (square) and in the temple. Then, another pause after ‘ho un marito che adoro’ (I have a husband whom I adore), followed by legato signs, helps to establish the context about who is Lysistrata and her past history, before entering the main issue of the piece.

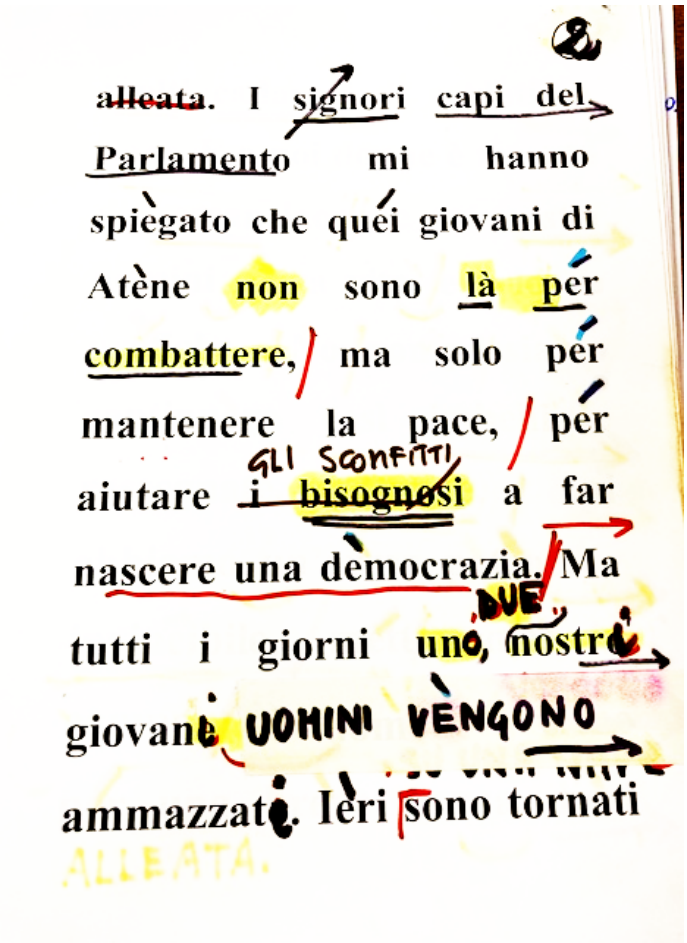

alleata. I signori capi del
Parlamento mi hanno
spiegato che quei giovani di
Atène non sono là per
combattere, ma solo per
mantenere la pace, per
GLI SCONFITTI
aiutare i bisognosi a far
nascere una democrazia. Ma
DUE
tutti i giorni uno, nostro
giovane UOMINI VENGONO
ammazzati. Ieri sono tornati
ALLEATA.

Figure 4.17 Rame’s stage script, page 2, from the play *L’anomalo Bicefalo*. Archivio Franca Rame Dario Fo, Verona. Courtesy of Fondazione Fo Rame.

The first line on page two of the stage script features an upward-pointing arrow which crosses the word *‘signori’*, along with an underline beneath *‘signori capi del Parlamento’* (the gentlemen leaders of the Parliament).
This is a composite symbol that signals both climax (Camilli’s *Tavola I*, symbol n. 13) on the word *signori,* and emphasis (symbol n.15) expressed through a higher vocal pitch, across the full phrase *‘signori capi del Parlamento’*. Words and phrases underlined in the script denote tonic emphasis, which may be less pronounced when the line is dashed. The

[134] A. Sica. Interview with the author, August 28, 2024.

emphasis in Rame's text now falls on the authorities, who feign justification for sending soldiers, not to fight, but as part of a so-called peacekeeping mission.

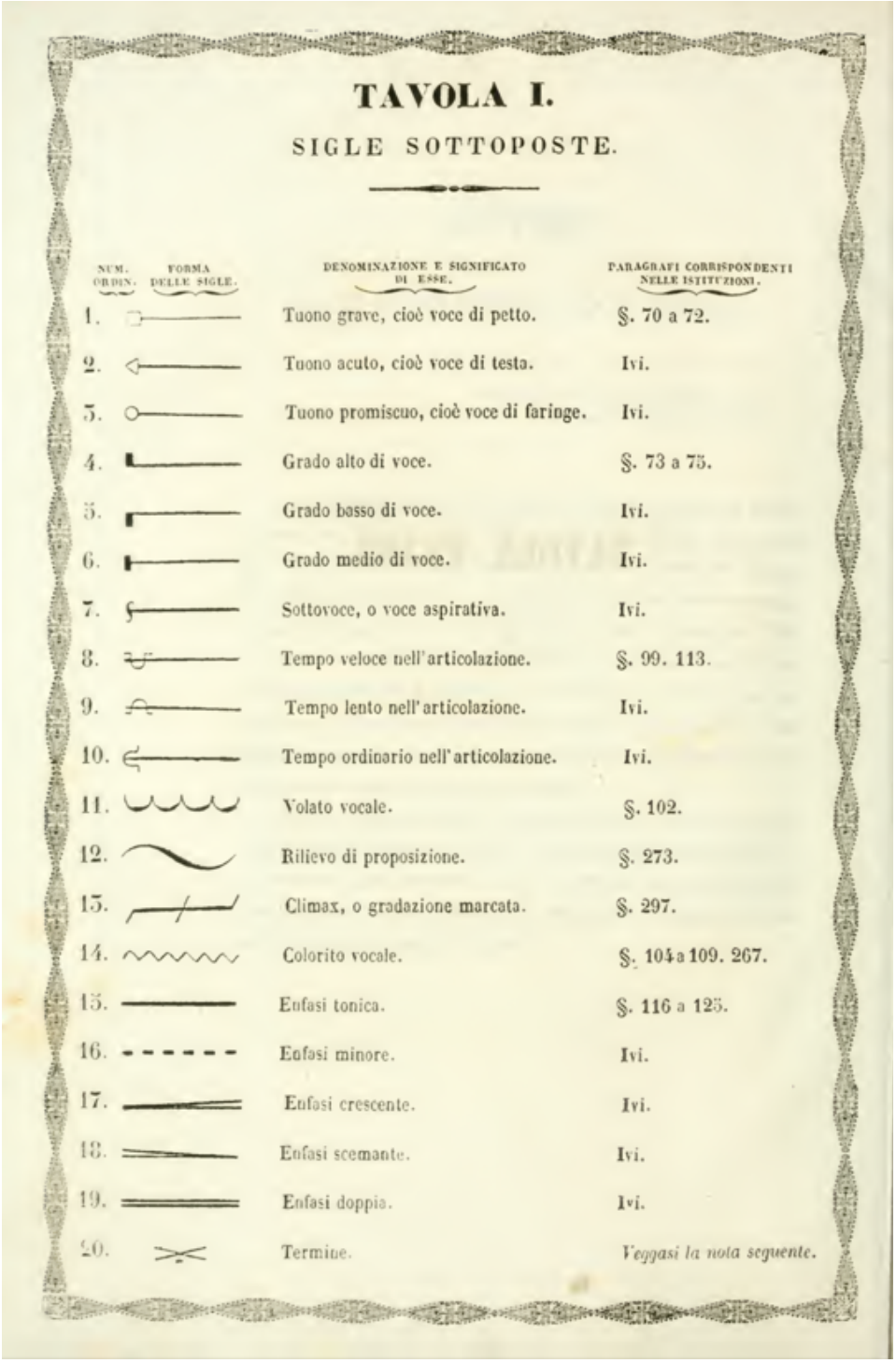


TAVOLA I.

SIGLE SOTTOPOSTE.

NUM. ORDIN.	FORMA DELLE SIGLE.	DENOMINAZIONE E SIGNIFICATO DI ESSE.	PARAGRAFI CORRISPONDENTI NELLE ISTITUZIONI.
1.		Tuono grave, cioè voce di petto.	§. 70 a 72.
2.		Tuono acuto, cioè voce di testa.	Ivi.
3.		Tuono promiscuo, cioè voce di faringe.	Ivi.
4.		Grado alto di voce.	§. 73 a 75.
5.		Grado basso di voce.	Ivi.
6.		Grado medio di voce.	Ivi.
7.		Sottovoce, o voce aspirativa.	Ivi.
8.		Tempo veloce nell'articolazione.	§. 99. 113.
9.		Tempo lento nell'articolazione.	Ivi.
10.		Tempo ordinario nell'articolazione.	Ivi.
11.		Volato vocale.	§. 102.
12.		Rilievo di proposizione.	§. 273.
13.		Climax, o gradazione marcata.	§. 297.
14.		Colorito vocale.	§. 104 a 109. 267.
15.		Enfasi tonica.	§. 116 a 125.
16.		Enfasi minore.	Ivi.
17.		Enfasi crescente.	Ivi.
18.		Enfasi scemante.	Ivi.
19.		Enfasi doppia.	Ivi.
20.		Termine.	*Veggasi la nota seguente.*

Figure 4.18 Camilli Table I – sigle sottoposte (signs below the words). Courtesy of Anna Sica.

After the double emphasis (Tavola I, symbol n. 19) indicated by a double line beneath the words *'gli sconfitti'* (the defeated), another emphasis (Tavola I, symbol n. 15) underlines the phrase *a far nascere una democrazia* (to establish democracy). Rame delivers the word *democrazia* slowly and deliberately, articulating each syllable with marked emphasis. This is followed by a double pause, represented by a double vertical *comma* //, which has the same tonal force as the emphatic or ideological pause indicated by a horizontal line between two words. It means that the tone must change after the pause. The voice shift can also be ironic; for instance, moving from a grave tone to a high one requires a pause, it indicates that you are thinking, you stop to understand what is happening.[135] Rame changes her tone after the word democracy, to start her argument against the so-called peace missions: 'But every day, one or two of our young men are killed. Yesterday, many bodies of peace soldiers returned on a ship'. This choice highlights the irony and hypocrisy of claiming to bring democracy to a defeated people. Her decision to cancel the word *'bisognosi'* (needy), which originally appeared beneath, deepens the critique: it exposes and rejects the colonial gaze that framed war-torn nations as helpless recipients of Western-style democracy.

[135] Ibid.

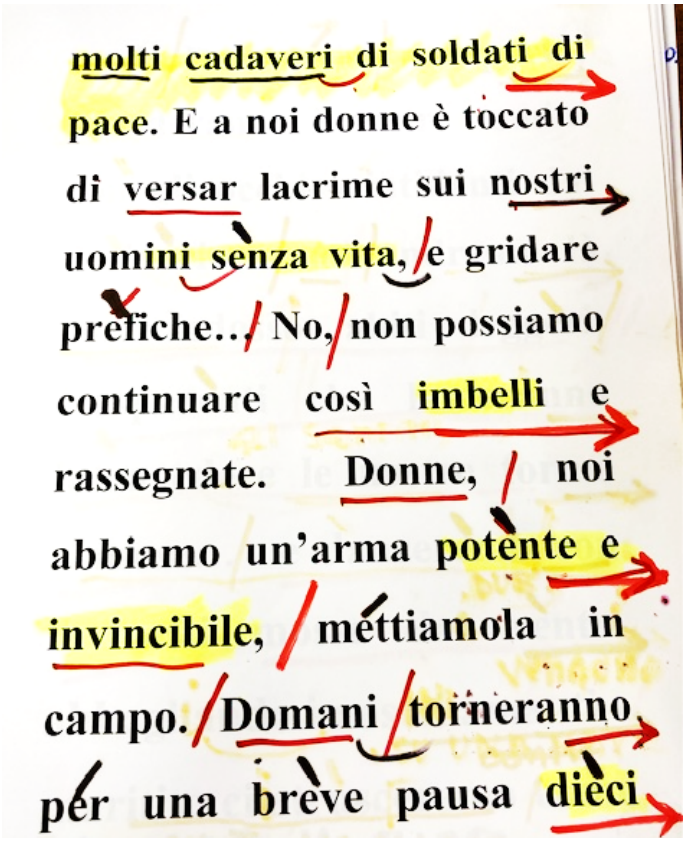


Figure 4.19 Rame's stage script, page 3, from the play *L'anomalo Bicefalo*. Archivio Franca Rame Dario Fo, Verona. Courtesy of Fondazione Fo Rame.

Page 3 of Rame's script presents a line that starts with an emphasis (underlined) and a legato: *molti cadaveri di soldati* (many bodies of peace soldiers). The arrow at the end of the line means that the phrase continues below, it is another way to indicate a 'legato'. After *senza vita* (without life) there is a legato + a comma sign, where the actor takes a breath, in Sica's words: 'it is a sigh that can be heard' (Camilli Tavola IV, N. 20).[136] This is the same sign at the bottom of the page, after the word 'Domani'. There is an emphasis both on *Donne* / (women), and again in /Domani/ (tomorrow). These signs indicate that this is a crucial moment in the monologue. In fact, the word *domani*, tomorrow, means the beginning of plan of action that the women are going to implement, under the leadership of Lysistrata.

The sentence '/Domani/torneranno', shows the application of three declamatory symbols: the sign of ideological pause / repeated both at the beginning and at the end of *Domani,* the emphasis (underline), and Camilli's *cadenza conclusiva* (concluding cadence), symbol of the loud sigh/breath right before *torneranno* (will return). These signs indicate that there is a *trapasso vocale,* a vocal transition, a change in intonation and pause after 'mettiamola in campo'.

[136] A. Sica. Interview with the author, August 28, 2024.

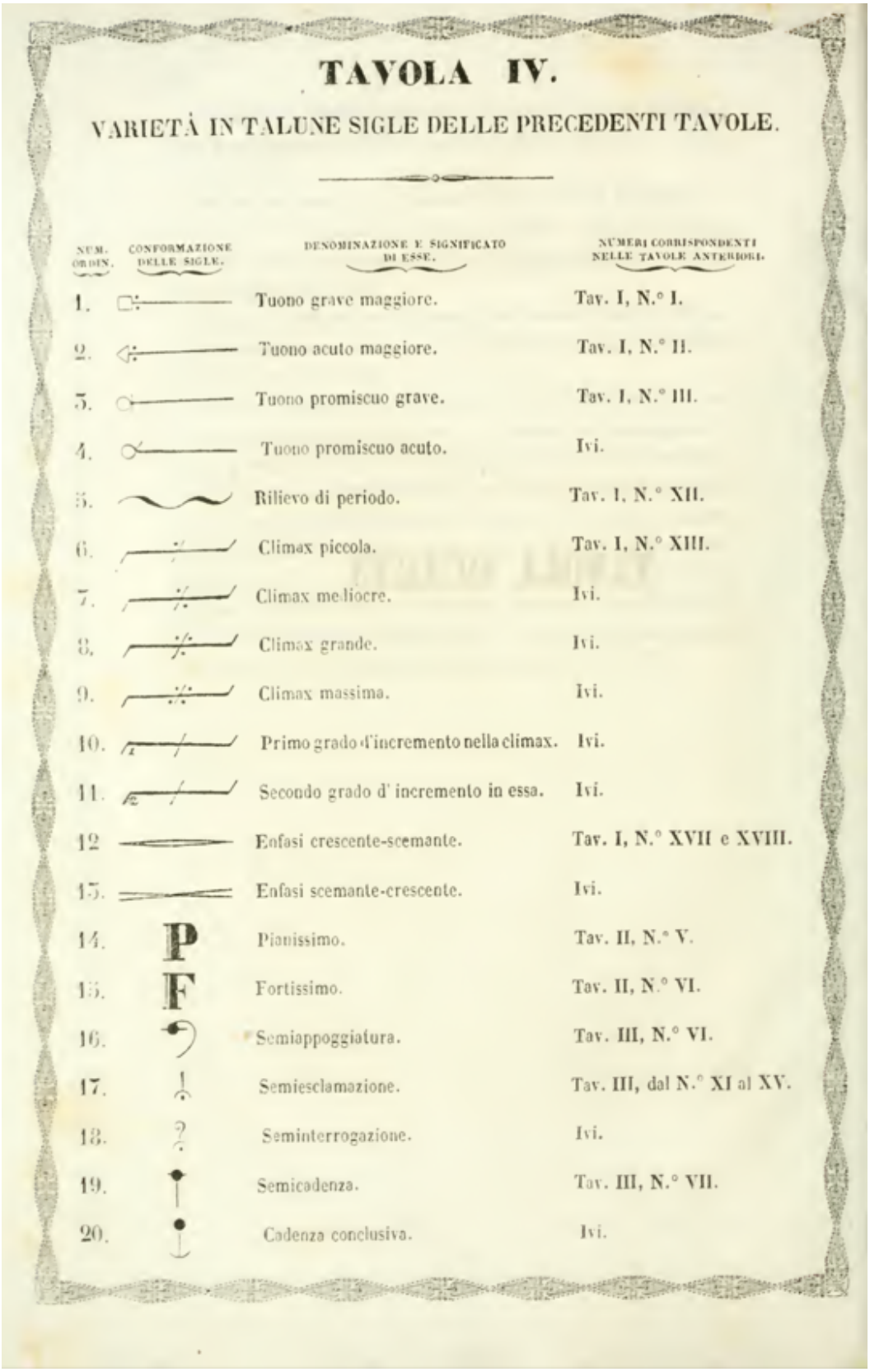


TAVOLA IV.

VARIETÀ IN TALUNE SIGLE DELLE PRECEDENTI TAVOLE.

NUM. ORDIN.	CONFORMAZIONE DELLE SIGLE.	DENOMINAZIONE E SIGNIFICATO DI ESSE.	NUMERI CORRISPONDENTI NELLE TAVOLE ANTERIORI.
1.		Tuono grave maggiore.	Tav. I, N.° I.
2.		Tuono acuto maggiore.	Tav. I, N.° II.
3.		Tuono promiscuo grave.	Tav. I, N.° III.
4.		Tuono promiscuo acuto.	Ivi.
5.		Rilievo di periodo.	Tav. I, N.° XII.
6.		Climax piccola.	Tav. I, N.° XIII.
7.		Climax mediocre.	Ivi.
8.		Climax grande.	Ivi.
9.		Climax massima.	Ivi.
10.		Primo grado d'incremento nella climax.	Ivi.
11.		Secondo grado d' incremento in essa.	Ivi.
12		Enfasi crescente-scemante.	Tav. I, N.° XVII e XVIII.
13.		Enfasi scemante-crescente.	Ivi.
14.	P	Pianissimo.	Tav. II, N.° V.
15.	F	Fortissimo.	Tav. II, N.° VI.
16.		Semiappoggiatura.	Tav. III, N.° VI.
17.		Semiesclamazione.	Tav. III, dal N.° XI al XV.
18.		Seminterrogazione.	Ivi.
19.		Semicadenza.	Tav. III, N.° VII.
20.		Cadenza conclusiva.	Ivi.

Figure 4.20 Camilli, Table IV: Variations in Certain Abbreviations from the Previous Tables. Courtesy of Anna Sica.

Sica explains that a vocal transition might occur only two or three times in a piece, as the meaning of the text is often encapsulated in the way the actor

modulates these vocal transitions. In the last page of the monologue (Figure 4.21), the other word that includes a *trapasso di voce* (vocal transition), is */la guerra//(war).* This vocal transition represents the main focus and the scope of the text, which is about women protesting against the war.

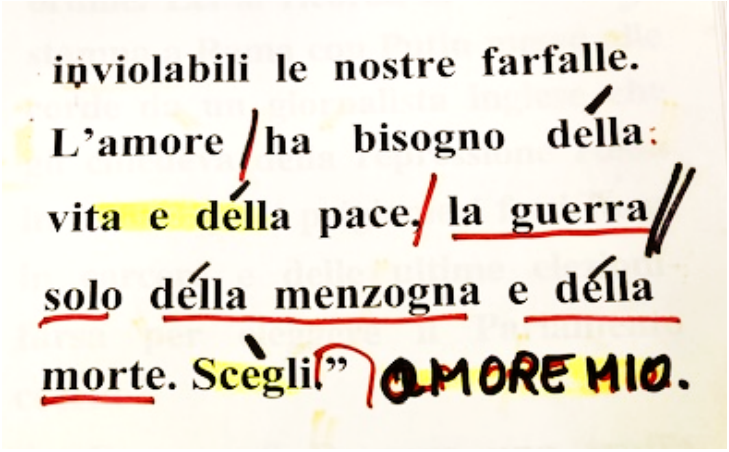


Figure 4.21 Rame's stage script, page 6, from the play *L'anomalo Bicefalo.* Archivio Franca Rame Dario Fo, Verona. Courtesy of Fondazione Fo Rame.

The final line, *'Scegli amore mio'* (Choose, my love) shows a kind of inverted legato between the words scegli (choose) and amore mio (my love). The sign reflects Camilli's n.9 symbol in Tavola I, which indicates *tempo lento nell'articolazione*, a slow time in the articulation of those words, which exactly corresponds to Rame's delivery of that phrase. She slows down and lowers her tone in the final words, where Lysistrata asks men to choose between peace and war.

My analysis of Rame's notation here shows its crucial role not only as a guide for the actor's vocal delivery, but at the same time as a key vehicle for conveying the play's political meaning to the audience. Rame's handwritten signs in the different versions of the text that I have analysed show how she modified them during the repeat performances, according to the audience's reaction. This approach emphasised and vocally structured the most critical passages of her monologue, such as those that underscored the women's plan to halt the madness of war, instigated by men. The women compel the men to confront a vital choice between life and death by employing the ultimatum of refusing sexual relations until their demands are met. This loose adaptation of Aristophanes' text was recontextualised to

reflect the geopolitical rhetoric surrounding the U.S. and allied intervention in Iraq in 2003, a supposed humanitarian mission that masked imperial interests. In the same year Italy deployed numerous soldiers as peacekeepers to Iraq, where several lost their lives. Analysing Rame's signs through the lens of *la drammatica* unveils therefore the deeper meanings she intended to convey to the audience. Rame's vocal score reinforces the political message beyond the satirical tone of the text. As the analysis develops, the extent to which the vocal score reinforces the political thrust of her adaptation becomes increasingly evident.

My analysis shows how Rame's notation system was essential in refining her approach to *scrittura scenica*, shaping the dynamics of each performance, incorporating a form of direction into her stage scripts, developing and adapting it to the audience's reactions. With the advent of computers in the 1990s, she further enhanced this practice by translating her notations into digital form, employing a range of tools such as different fonts, sizes, underlining, colours, and symbols like dashes and semicolons to evolve her system.[137]

4.5 Conclusions

My investigation of Rame's *scrittura scenica*, including the analysis of its musicality across different contexts, and the decoding of her notation system through the Italian codes of *la drammatica*, situates her practice within the broader framework of scenic writing, adding at the same time a significant dimension to its interpretation. The shift from traditional Italian theatre, which incorporated elements of both *improvvisa* and *la drammatica*, to director-centred approaches in the early 20th century, marked a major transformation in theatre practices.[138] As Sica emphasises, the method of *la drammatica* was thoroughly ignored by Italian theatre academies, including the

[137] An example of Rame's use of notation is a private email Rame sent me in 2010. It was her editing of the lyrics of a song I wrote about her, where she used different colours and font sizes, underlying, highlighting. See Appendix B.
[138] S. D'Amico, *La regia teatrale* (Roma: Belardetti, 1947).

Accademia Nazionale d'Arte Drammatica (National Academy of Performing Arts) founded by D'Amico in 1936, and since then, its principles have gone largely unexplored.[139] Despite criticism, the artistry of *grandi attori* (grand actors) of the Italian theatre tradition, rooted in deep cultural knowledge and codified techniques, remains however evident in acting treatises, scripts, and memorabilia, like Modena's charts or in Duse's prompt books.[140] This highlights the significance of a figure like Rame, who not only embodied both traditions of *improvvisa* and *la drammatica* but also bridged a centuries-old heritage with her *scrittura scenica*, adapting and renewing these traditions in line with the technical innovations of her time, while using them as a vehicle to strengthen her political message. For this reason, I underscore the importance of Rame's documents in her archive, which provide critical insights into this artistic practice. I encourage further research into her notation system related to *la drammatica*, particularly the symbols that, according to Sica, refer not only to vocal declamation but also to the actor's gestures on stage. Moreover, the findings of this chapter call for further inquiry into the relevance of her creative methods in today's performance context, which is the subject of the next chapter.

[139] A. Sica*, The Italian Method of La Drammatica: Its legacy and Reception* (Milano: Mimesis, 2014).
See also https://www.accademiasilviodamico.it.
[140] A. Sica. Interview with the author, August 28, 2024.

Chapter 5. Out of the Archive: Activating Rame's Practices in Contemporary Performance

Building on the findings in the previous chapter, several questions arise. What do methods from musical performance reveal about Rame's scores and her *scrittura scenica*? How can Rame's creative practices be activated, emphasising vocality and improvisation as key connections between political activism and liberating creative practices? What new understandings of Rame's work can be reached by voicing or sounding it?

To answer these questions I generated two hybrid performances that integrated music, vocal improvisation, and performance: *Concert in F,* developed with jazz pianist Steve Lodder, presented at London's Playground Theatre on November 26th, 2023, and *Rampsody,* created in collaboration with vocalist Maggie Nicols, showcased at the Collisions Festival at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama on September 26th, 2024.[1] These projects represent the outcome of four years of inquiry and creative exploration in dialogue with the thesis, encompassing archival research, vocal and musical improvisation, songwriting, and music arrangement, informed by my findings on Rame's *scrittura scenica*. By employing vocality as a method of improvisation, these two collaborative projects demonstrate how embodied strategies including breath techniques, singing, interplay, and deep listening are key tools in the activation and critical reading of Rame's scores, integrating thought into practice. This approach resonates with Konstantinos Thomaidis's call for non-hierarchical, unpredictable modes of engaging with voice, a process of 'thinking through voice', in which its phonic dimension reclaims space within epistemological research, 'revocalising knowledge without entailing a de-logosisation of practice'.[2] Shifting from voice to vocality, involves moving from a phenomenological view of voice to understanding it as a cultural construct.[3] Specifying female vocality highlights

[1] See *Concert in F* https://iiclondra.esteri.it/en/gli_eventi/calendario/concert-in-f/; *Rampsody* was presented at Collisions Festival at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. https://www.cssd.ac.uk/events/collisions-2024.
[2] K. Thomaidis, *Voice Studies: Critical Approaches to Process, Performance and Experience* (London: Routledge,2015),10-20; K. Thomaidis, *Theatre & Voice* (Red Globe Press, 2017),13.
[3] L.C. Dunn, N. A. Jones, *Embodied Voices, Representing female vocality in western culture* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 2.

how gender fundamentally shapes this construct. In the context of my practice research, embodiment becomes crucial; the voice acts as a material bridge between inside and outside, connecting the self with others. As Nelly Furman notes, the voice serves as a 'locus of articulating an individual body to language and society'.[4] In these projects I move beyond language to embrace the full spectrum of vocal expressions, singing, laughing, crying, sighing, and more. This broader understanding emphasises the richness and depth of vocal utterance, encompassing both verbal and non-verbal sounds.[5] This process serves to reflect on how Rame's notation system embodies vocality as an active form of sonic agency, to highlight the inventive and liberating potential of her creative tools, to offer new perspectives on her methods, and to underscore their enduring relevance. Ultimately, it demonstrates how contemporary performance can function both as a lens through which to understand her work and as a medium to activate and further develop her legacy.

Moreover, this practice-based approach helps to investigate how the study and the development of new forms of creative notation and repertoire (from script writing to graphic scores, and from singing *repertoire* to free improvisation) contribute to what performance scholar Rebecca Schneider has framed as a 'body-to-body transmission'.[6] I refer to a performative and embodied approach to archive, performance, and technology, drawing on the notion of *repertoire* used by Diana Taylor in rethinking archival practices that overcome the politics of documentation, including for example embodied mnemonic systems as songs.[7] Taylor argues that these embodied practices imply learning by means of imitation, by copying from one person to another, using a word, an object, etc., to remember something else. In the case of Rame, the repertoire is brought to life through direct, physical, and vocal expression aided by a score.[8] The importance of this practice element

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[4] N. Furman, Opera, or the Staging of the Voice, "Cambridge Opera Journal 3, 3. (1991) in L.C. Dunn, N. A. Jones, *Embodied Voices,* 2.
[5] P. Zumthor, The Vocalization of the Text: The Medieval "Poetic Effect", https://doi.org/10.1484/J.VIATOR.2.301372
[6] R. Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Re-enactment* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011).
[7] D. Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire* (Duke University Press Books, 2003).
[8] Ibid.

of the research is therefore to embody and articulate Rame's *bocca a bocca* (mouth-to-mouth) technique (as seen in Chapter One and Four) and her experimentation and adaptation of the declamatory system of *La Drammatica* (as analysed in Chapter Four). I also focus on the development of contemporary graphic musical scores within the context of performance art and theatre.[9] Drawing a parallel between vocalist-composer Cathy Berberian (1925-1983), who engaged vocally with experimental scores, and Franca Rame's *scrittura scenica*, I highlight how both artists challenged the traditional view of performers as mere interpreters of the author's work and build a practice method stemming from this.[10] My argument is that Rame's approach to notation diverges from traditional scripts that rely on punctuation and fixed grammatical rules. Her notation instead is structured around the rhythm of her breath and explores a different range of vocal tones and pauses. By employing dialect, improvisation, and satire, both Rame and Fo have shown the way in which certain popular traditions have resisted the rigidity of standardised, written language.[11] However it is through Rame's *scrittura scenica* that vocality can be entered, embodied and performed as a feminist strategy, as a counter-narrative to dominant patriarchal structures. Rame's notation allows performers to internalise the text through bodily rhythms. This approach underscores her dedication to a theatre practice that allows performers to fully embody the material and engage in a dynamic, interactive, responsive process.

As I demonstrate in *Rampsody*, the vocal performance that Rame cultivates transcends mere textual fidelity, inviting performers to inhabit, transform, and take ownership of the text, fostering both creative and political

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[9] Experimental composers including Earle Brown and John Cage developed graphic scores in the 1950 and 1960s. The novelty consisted in replacing conventional music notation with typewritten numbers, words and sometimes also symbols and drawings, as in the score by composer Cathy Berberian, *Stripsody* (1966).
For further development in text based scores see for example Liz Kotz, 'Post-Cagean Aesthetics and the "Event" Score', *October* 95 (2001): 55–89.
I. Revell. 2022. "Speculating on the 'Feminist Performance Score': Pauline Oliveros, Women's Work and Karen Barad." *Contemporary Music Review* 41 (2–3): 281–94. doi:10.1080/07494467.2022.2080460.

[10] P. Karantonis, F. Placanica, P. Verstraete, Ed., *Cathy Berberian: Pioneer of Contemporary Vocality* (London: Routledge, 2014).

[11] A. Scuderi**,** "Dario Fo and Popular Performance: Playing the Commedia." *Modern Language Review* 95, no. 2 (2000): 524–525.

agency. Through this practice research approach, I examine the interwoven elements of vocality and improvisation, employing Rame's scores to explore how voice can serve as a medium of empowerment, agency, and liberation.

In my vocal interpretation of stage scripts such as Rame's *Lysistrata*, discussed in Chapter Four, I focus on how her notation rejects conventional punctuation and grammar, an approach I read as a deliberate disruption of phallogocentric language systems. [12] Through her notation system, actors and performers can in fact explore alternative rhythms, tones, and layers of meaning.

I have selected and enclosed five video extracts from my documentation of both live performances, with the objective of illustrating how Rame's *scrittura scenica* and her notation constitute a powerful reclamation of voice and body in performance, fusing breath, dialectical forms, humour, and improvisation as tools to subvert patriarchal norms and liberate the performer's agency. In performance, the rhythms and musicality of the body break free from syntactic constraints, making room for a vocality that is fluid, relational, and politically charged. This approach highlights the significance of Rame's legacy as a performative and authorial practice that actively challenges standardised language and promotes a subversive, embodied form of vocal expression.

Both *Concert in F* and *Rampsody* open with an ironic twist on Descartes' philosophical maxim, 'Cogito Ergo Sum' (I think, therefore I am), drawing a comparison to the title of Franca Rame and Dario Fo's 1966 performance *Ci Ragiono e Canto* (I Think About It and I Sing).[13] In this music-centred piece, Rame and Fo worked with folk singers from various Italian regions, incorporating popular and dialectal songs. In my practice research, I advance this concept through vocal embodiment: 'I sing, therefore I am'. My approach draws on Adriana Cavarero's exploration of vocal expression as the marker of embodied uniqueness:

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[12] Ramos-Martínez' idea of 'exploding the grammar' refers to dismantling and reconstructing traditional grammatical and linguistic structures, such as punctuation, rhythm, and syntax, to resist dominant, militaristic, and capitalist forms of communication. See Ramos-Martínez, Manuel. "'Actors Simply Explode' – To Act in the Cinema of Straub and Huillet." Manuscript, 2024.

[13] Alice nel paese senza meraviglie, in D. Fo, *Le commedie di Dario Fo. VIII: Venticinque monologhi per una donna* (Milano: Einaudi, 1989).

> From the maternal scene onward, the voice manifests the *unique being* of each human being, and his or her spontaneous self-communication according to the rhythms of a sonorous relation. In this sense, the ontological horizon that is disclosed by the voice, or what we want to call a *vocal ontology of uniqueness*, stands in contrasts to the various ontologies of fictitious entities that the philosophical tradition […] designates with names like 'man', 'subject', 'individual'.[14]

Cavarero's critique of the universal categories of philosophical tradition is directed above all to the Cartesian subject which 'has no voice and speaks only to itself through the mute voice of consciousness' […] it neither invokes nor speaks, it cogitates.[15] According to Cavarero 'every human voice is sound, an acoustic vibration among others, which is measurable like all other sound'. However, it is in the human voice, the embodied voice, that 'uniqueness makes itself resound'.[16]

Cavarero's theory of vocal ontology of uniqueness has been instrumental in understanding the role of voice in feminist creative practice. This framework informs my exploration of how Rame's performative methods empower the performer to express and embody their singularity on stage, as previously discussed in relation to jazz. In her study of voice, rooted in Greek mythology and philosophy, Cavarero highlights how *logos* has been divided into a binary opposition: while the feminine is identified as *phoné* (pure sound), the masculine is the expression of *semantikon* (meaning).[17] The devaluation of the vocal part of *logos* in Western metaphysics parallels the marginalisation of female subjectivity and the relational aspect of voice: the notorious symbolic patriarchal order according to which 'man is conceived as mind and woman as body'.[18] Cavarero therefore advocates for an approach

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[14] A. Cavarero, *For More than One Voice, Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression* (Stanford University Press, 2005*)*,173.
[15] Ibid., 173
[16] Ibid., 177
[17] Cavarero used the dichotomy proposed by Aristotle in *Poetics*. See A. Cavarero, *For more than one voice*, 107.
[18] A. Cavarero, *In Spite of Plato, A Feminist Rethinking of Ancient Philosophy*, tr. by S. Anderlini and A. O'Healy (Cambridge: Polity Press,1995).

that challenges patriarchal conceptions which often reduce the female voice to sexualised tropes by treating it as irrational or merely a bodily expression. For example, her feminist methodology of overturning stereotypical images, such as sirens and muses, by reimagining them from oppressed figures (able to sing but not to think) into new female political subjects has been helpful in contextualising Rame within a feminist genealogy of creative practitioners who have reclaimed voice as a mode of writing, thinking, and acting according to the law of rhythm, musicality, and resonance. From the re-interpretation of the Sirens as pluriphony to Hélène Cixous' *écriture féminine* as a modern example of maternal Chora which maintains the vocal rhythm of the *languelait*, the rhythms and musicality of the body break free from syntactic constraints.[19] In this context, Cavarero's conceptualisation of vocality offers a critical framework for reinterpreting Rame's scores, providing a foundation for reimagining stereotypical mythical female figures, such as the Sirens, as new sonic subjects. Beyond exploring these scores as supportive tools for the co-productions with Fo, I gradually learn and perform Rame's script as a vocal practice that was bodily rooted in the pre-semantic realm of the mother/child relation. As Rame learned her vocal practice mouth-to-mouth from her mother, I have revisited Rame's scores on her stage scripts as a kind of *languelait* of the Italian tradition of capocomicato. The sirens' voice takes centre stage in my piece *Song of a Siren,* through the vocal and music improvisations with pianist Steve Lodder, as part of *Concert in F*.

[19] Cixous connects the pre-symbolic space of *chora* to *languelait*, the rhythmic, nurturing 'language of milk' rooted in the mother-infant bond, suggesting that feminine writing can celebrate this pre-symbolic connection and transcend the constraints of traditional language. See H. Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa." Translated by K. Cohen and P. Cohen. *Signs* 1, no. 4 (1976): 875–893.

5.1 Song of a Siren



Figure 5.1 *Concert in F.* Click HERE to watch Video n.1 – Song of a Siren

In this piece I also engage with dialects, invented languages, and vocal utterances that break away from conventional linguistic norms on stage, further disrupting traditional expectations of vocal expression.[20] My lyrics resonate with Cavarero's analysis of the Sirens' voice.[21] This has traditionally been portrayed as seductive and dangerous, luring men to their doom and serving as a metaphor for the fear of feminine vocal power. Originally depicted as bird-like creatures, the Sirens were later reimagined in Western culture as half-fish, half-women figures, merging with the image of the mermaid. In this transformation, they became alluring women, with their beauty objectified and their voices diminished to wordless, erotic sounds.

[20] The music of *Song of a Siren* has been composed by Charlie Pyne. My lyrics are inspired both to Cavarero's theory about the voice of the sirens, and to Italian author Stefano Benni's poem *Sagrademari*, written using a blend of invented and dialectal words. Benni is an Italian satirical author, poet, and playwright, was also a close friend and collaborator of Rame and Fo, as mentioned in Chapter Three.

[21] This approach draws on the talk about the voice of the sirens by Adriana Cavarero, during our joint presentation of my research at the Italian Cultural Institute in London on September 23rd, 2023. https://iiclondra.esteri.it/it/gli_eventi/calendario/liberate-rame-and-voice-of-the/

Stereotypical representations of the Sirens, which come from *The Odyssey,* are associated with the body and inarticulate expression. Cavarero's analysis transforms the Sirens' traditionally dangerous vocality into a vehicle for feminist liberation, asserting their voices as a medium of both personal and political expression.[22] She reinterprets the Sirens' song not as a lure for men but as an expression of the Sirens' own pleasure in vocalisation and bodily vitality. In this reading, the Sirens sing for themselves, celebrating a pluriphony, a collective soundscape where individual voices coexist and resonate, each distinct yet part of a harmonious whole.[23] This concept of pluriphony serves both as a feminist and political ideal, representing a form of expression that resists homogeneity and celebrates individual uniqueness within collective resonance[24]. Such vocal plurality underlines the potential for a politics of voices as a way of connecting social relations, where each unique vocal identity contributes to a collective, intersubjective experience, embodying what Cavarero, inspired by Arendt, calls the democratic thrill of shared expression, or public happiness.[25] I applied this idea of pluriphony in the *Concert in F* performance by re-creating Rame and Fo's *terzo atto* (third act), a practice they developed with their collectives in the late 1960s and 1970s. As analysed in Chapter One, this used to be an invitation to the audience to engage with the show by becoming active part of it.[26] In my performance I invited a group of feminist activists to share their thoughts and experiences about contemporary feminist struggles and read extracts from the late feminist author and activist Michela Murgia. Conversations continued after the show in the convivial atmosphere we had intentionally created, with wine and food offered to the audience. This setting gave me the opportunity to engage with many spectators, exchange thoughts, and to gather feedback about the performance, echoing not only what Rame did in the *Terzo Atto,* but also her practice of welcoming spectators into her dressing room after her shows while touring her monologues, as analysed in previous chapters.

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[22] A. Cavarero, *For More than One Voice, Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression* (Stanford University Press, 2005).
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] A. Cavarero, *Surging Democracy* (Stanford University Press, 2021).
[26] See my analysis of the third act in Chapter One.

5.2 Rampsody



Figure 5.2 *Concert in F*. Click HERE to watch Video n.2 – Rampsody (solo)

Rampsody is a vocal interpretation of a collage of fragments, words, and signs, I extrapolated from documents in Rame's archive, particularly from her surtitles, as analysed in the previous chapter. I performed this piece twice, first as a solo performance during the *Concert in F* and then as a vocal duo improvisation with Maggie Nicols at Collisions Festival. Collaborating with Nicols has allowed me to further explore the intersections of theatre, performance, and music by developing and interpreting multiple scores alongside another vocalist/improviser. The graphic score I created for the second performance is slightly different and longer. It includes an improvised re-enactment based on Nicols' memory of her 1983 performance of Rame's monologue *Alice in Wonderlessness,* with feminist theatre company

Monstrous Regiment in London.[27] Prompted by my graphic score, our performance became a sort of improvised vocal dialogue, which always include the audience's reactions. I have also drawn on the work of musicians and contemporary composers who similarly challenge the conventional boundaries between these disciplines. A notable example is Cathy Berberian, who, in the same year as Rame and Fo's play *Ci ragiono e canto* (I Think about it and I Sing) premiered *Stripsody*, a solo vocal performance based on her graphic score inspired by comic strip sounds.[28] By subverting the conventional relationship between song and lyrics, Berberian expanded the expressive possibilities of the voice beyond textual constraints. In *Stripsody* she challenged established boundaries by transforming everyday sounds into art, using humour and spontaneity to critique and disrupt hierarchical norms in music and performance. Her innovative approach dismantled the conventional roles of composer and performer, allowing the voice to become a medium of self-expression and critical commentary, rather than a mere vessel for the composer's vision.[29]

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[27] The *Monstrous Regiment* show was based on four monologues from the collection *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa*, written by Franca Rame and Dario Fo, and translated for the company by Gillian Hanna. Actress Paola Dionisotti performed the monologues, accompanied by onstage musical improvisations by Nicols. See also https://monstrousregiment.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Scripts-22-Fourth-Wall.pdf

[28] C. Berberian, *Stripsody: For Solo Voice* (New York: C. F. Peters Corporation, 1966). Also see C. Berberian, *Striposdy*, live performance: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0dNLAhL46xM

[29] P. Karantonis, "Cathy Berberian and the Performative Art of Voice," in *Cathy Berberian: Pioneer of Contemporary Vocality*, ed. P. Karantonis, F. Placanica, A. Sivuoja-Kauppala, and P. Verstraete (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 151–68.

5.3 Rampsody with Maggie Nicols



Figure 5.3 *Rampsody*. Click HERE to watch Video n.3 – Rampsody with Maggie Nicols.

Rampsody represents my interpretation of Rame's notation and her writing on the *surtitles,* reimagined through a compositional framework inspired by Berberian's *Stripsody*. I developed this piece by adapting Rame's Spanish surtitles (as discussed in Chapter Four) for her monologue *Abbiamo tutte la stessa storia*, also analysed in Chapter Two, and integrating them with excerpts from *Alice nel paese senza meraviglie* (*Alice in Wonderlessland*), which is likewise part of the collection *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa*.[30]

[30] D. Fo, F. Rame, *Le commedie di Dario Fo VIII: Venticinque monologhi per una donna,* (Torino: Einaudi, 1989**);** D**.** Fo, F. Rame. *A Woman Alone & Other Plays.* Translated by Gillian Hanna (London: Methuen, 1991)

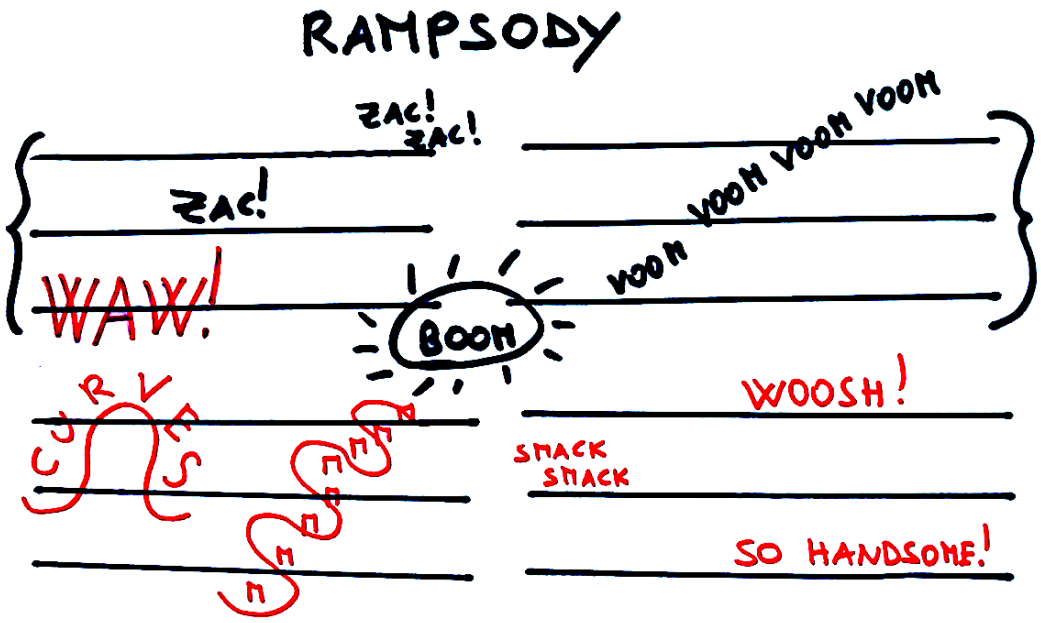


Fig. 5.4 Rampsody graphic score, page 1.

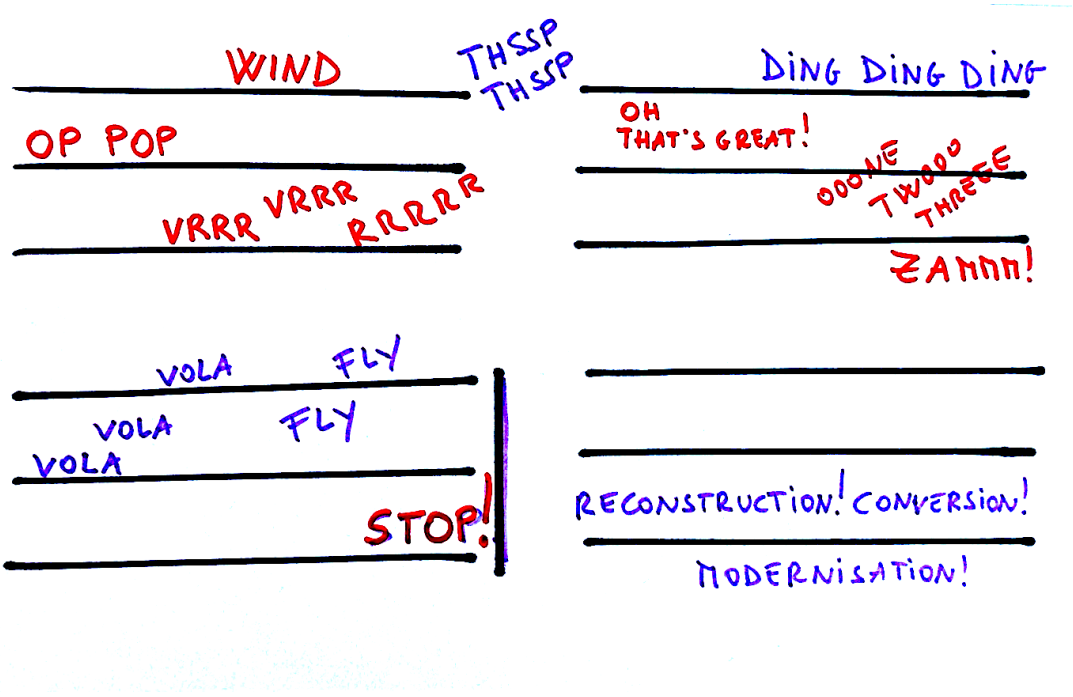


Fig. 5.5 Rampsody's graphic score, page 4.

The three lines function both as indicators of vocal pitch, like a musical staff, and as separators between different scenes. The signs and drawings emphasise expression, akin to visual cues in comic strips, which resonates with the method used by Rame in her *rulli* (scrolls). This process allowed us to use Rame's sounds and musicality, decontextualising them from the plays

they were part of. Through this approach, the focus shifted entirely on vocality, allowing improvisation to unfold organically in the interplay with both Nicols and the audience. This process fostered a form of connection and relationality rooted in body-to-body transmission, emphasising the importance of presence: ‘people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by being there, being a part of the transmission’.[31]

5.4 Lysistrata with Steve Lodder



Figure 5.6 *Concert in F.* Click HERE to watch Video n.4 – Lysistrata with Steve Lodder

In both performances *Concert in F* and *Rampsody,* I explored the notation system Rame used in her short monologue *Lisistrata* (Lysistrata) delivering the text by vocalising and playing Rame’s markings and signs in her script, according to my analysis and decoding of these symbols in the previous chapter. This approach fostered an embodied vocal interpretation that transcended traditional semantic or semiotic analysis. Rame's notations introduced unique rhythms, pauses, and tones distinct from a straightforward reading of grammar and punctuation, effectively directing the piece through her interpretive lens, to convey her political message. Leveraging the signs

[31] D. Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire,* 20.

on her promptbook, together with audio and video recorded documentation of Rame's performance, I developed a music piece in collaboration with pianist Steve Lodder, beginning with his piano interpretation of the signs on Rame's script.

The improvisation and the interplay between us created a dynamic counterpoint, in which the evolving relationship between voice and instrument deepened the expressive impact of the performance. By transitioning into the Italian text and adhering to Rame's *partitura* (score), the performance simultaneously respected her structure while allowing for creative reinterpretation. This approach mirrored the improvisational essence of Rame and Fo's stagecraft, demonstrating how their methods can be activated and adapted in a contemporary context. The key learning from this process is the recognition of Rame's *scrittura scenica* as inherently dynamic, offering both structure and freedom, which invites performers to co-create meaning through embodied, vocal, and musical interplay. This reinforces a broader theme of the thesis: the capacity of practice research to uncover new dimensions of Rame's work, positioning it as a living, adaptable practice that challenges static interpretations and opens new pathways for feminist performance methodologies. Through this approach, I investigate how Rame's musicality can be activated not only through the text, but by focusing on the sound, the *phone*, of her notation, treating it as a musical score that operates beyond the semantic content of the words, the *semantikon*.

5.5. Lysistrata with Maggie Nicols



Figure 5.7 *Rampsody*. Click HERE to watch Video n.5 – Lysistrata with Maggie Nicols

In this performance, I adapted the structure of my solo piece, adding my English translation of *Lysistrata* (as seen in Chapter Four), which Nicols has performed, precisely following Rame's original notation signs, to explore their impact on the delivery of the text in a different language. In the second part of this piece, I delivered the text in Italian following Rame's score, while Nicols vocally improvised around it, emphasising its rhythm.

This performance revisited Rame's notation scores, reactivating an embodied practice focused on breath, vocal interpretation, and listening. Rame understood the affective impact of rhythm, tones, and pauses, for example in the articulation of words such as *democrazia* (democracy), *guerra* (war), *scegli* (choose), carefully crafting them to amplify the performance's emotional impact and its political message. In my analysis of Rame's *Lisistrata* in the previous chapter, I emphasised the significance of the specific tones she highlighted when directing actresses in her monologues.

By decoding and then engaging with Rame's notation embedded in her stage script, our performance was, in a sense, guided by her original direction of this monologue. At the same time, I maintained the creative agency to shape the dynamics of the text through my voice and improvisation, while listening and reacting to my partner's sounds, allowing for a personalised and interpretative engagement with her work. This shows the productive entanglement between precise notation, interplay, and improvisation when delivering Rame's work for an audience.

Through the selection and analysis of these five extracts from both performances *Concert in F* and *Rampsody*, I have shown how Rame's system of notation, her careful attention to the articulation and tone of each word, along with strategic pauses and silences, functioned as a vocal or musical score that enhanced the meaning of the piece through the body of the performer, proposing a different approach to activate her repertoire. Voicing and sounding Rame's *partitura*, reveal layers of meaning that transcend textual analysis, highlighting the central role, creativity, and agency of the performer's body and voice in interpreting her work and at the same time activating her methods. Vocal improvisation therefore represents a crucial tool to both decode and revive Franca Rame's system of notation, as embedded in her *scrittura scenica*. By engaging directly with her scripts and documents from her archive, I have explored how Rame's notation functions as a dynamic and relational performative score. Furthermore, this process underscores how Rame's feminist practice connects vocality to the reclamation of the female body as a site of liberation and empowerment, positioning voice as a medium of agency and resistance. Revisiting her scores through embodied strategies highlights the relational, performative dimensions of her work and confirms that new insights into Franca Rame's legacy can be better understood through an approach that prioritises presence, participation, and body-to-body transmission.

Conclusion

This thesis offers an original contribution to knowledge by reframing Franca Rame as a feminist *capacomica* to articulate her role as a creative leader and artist. It examines her often-overlooked practices through a broader feminist methodology, proposing them as a significant resource for future scholarly and artistic inquiry. I foreground the ways in which her feminist politics are enacted through the development of creative environments that encouraged collaboration, artistic work, political and social engagement, mutual care, social reproduction, and embodied performance practices. This perspective allows for a reassessment of her impact on feminist and political theatre beyond her public image as an actress or co-author.

In addition, this study analyses and repositions Rame as a central figure within feminist and theatre studies, demonstrating how she promoted and sustained an alternative model of theatre-making that redefined notions of shared authorship and collaboration. It offers a detailed examination of her creative practices and methodologies, focusing on the entanglement of social, political, and personal relationships across the various phases of her theatre companies with Fo and their collaborators, and situating these practices within their historical, cultural, and political contexts.

Chapter One demonstrates how Rame embodied the role of radical *capacomica*. Drawing on the hierarchical structure of the traditional Italian theatre's *capocomico* system, an approach she encountered early in her career working with her family's theatre company, she critically redefined her role in shaping the social relations of production within the participatory methods of the theatre collectives she created alongside Dario Fo. Building on these formative experiences, her leadership emerges as a form of negotiated authority that enables collective creation while maintaining artistic rigour, resulting in a dynamic and hybrid model of theatre-making. Her evolving leadership is likened to the structure and dynamics of a jazz ensemble, in which individual expression is made possible and sustained through a collaborative, interdependent framework.

Rame's engagement with feminist movements and ideas during and after the 1970s, is examined in Chapter Two through a case-study analysis of her monologues centred on women's experiences. While Rame often prioritised her socialist convictions over direct alignment with Italian feminist groups, her performances, particularly *Tutta Casa, Letto e Chiesa* (*All Ho*me*, Bed and Church), Lo Stupro* (The Rape) and *Sesso? Grazie. Tanto per Gradire! (Sex? Thanks! Don't* M*ind if I Do)* reflect a nuanced and deeply embedded feminist praxis. The chapter shows how these monologues draw on methods such as *autocoscienza* (consciousness-raising), personal narrative, and political engagement. Her exclusive use of the female voice on stage generates a performative space in which women's voices are affirmed, heard, and politicised. Rame's work functions as a site of feminist communal interaction, evident, for instance, in the public engagement at Palazzina Liberty, as well as a platform for political mobilisation, supporting feminist and other progressive causes through embodied performance. Her monologues thus operate as feminist interventions that dismantle the boundaries between the personal, the political, and the performative.

Drawing on her formative experiences with Famiglia Rame, her work within theatre collectives, and her engagement with feminist thought in the 1970s, Chapter Three repositions Rame as a feminist *capacomica*. Following the dissolution of *La Comune* and the loss of Palazzina Liberty, it demonstrates how, from the 1980s, Rame established a hybrid leadership model within the *Compagnia Teatrale Fo Rame*. This model of creative leadership enabled her to cultivate a theatre culture that negotiated the demands of discipline, authority, and labour, through collaborative practices grounded in what I read as feminist principles: mutual care, social reproduction, shared artistic and political commitment, and the generative force of joyful collective experience. Rame's feminist *capacomica* model emerges therefore as both a critical intervention and a reinvention of traditional structures of theatre production. This role is contextualised through the concept of *casa-laboratorio* (home-laboratory), the creative environment in which Rame transformed the domestic sphere into a feminist artistic hub, merging the public dimension of performance with the intimacy of domestic space. This space facilitated collaborative research,

performance-making, and community activism, functioning as a feminist counter-space to the patriarchal family structures that have historically shaped Italian theatre culture. Drawing on Silvia Federici's ideas of commoning and joyous militancy, as well as Rosi Braidotti's ethics of affirmation, I argued that Rame's leadership enacted a collaborative ethos that transcended biological kinship, fostering relations rooted in shared artistic and political values.

Nevertheless, Rame's ongoing partnership with Dario Fo occasionally reproduced gendered divisions of labour and patriarchal dynamics within the creative process. Therefore, the figure of the feminist *capacomica* emerges as both an aspirational ideal and a site of unresolved tension, a model that simultaneously contests and remains partially enmeshed within patriarchal theatre traditions. The *casa-laboratorio* operated therefore as a potential liberating space, where participants rehearsed alternative ways of living, working, and creating, though these alternatives were not without contradictions. Significantly, the chapter frames Rame's collaborative creation of her archive with her team, along with the everyday practices enacted within *casa-laboratorio,* as a dual feminist legacy. This legacy combines material documentation with embodied transmission, aligning with Diana Taylor's theorisation of the *archive* and the *repertoire* as complementary modes of cultural transmission.

Drawing on extensive archival research, Chapter Four explores Rame's compositional methods within the *casa-laboratorio*, with particular focus on her development of *scrittura scenica* (scenic writing). The chapter foregrounds the musicality of her theatre practice, particularly thorough her engagement with practices of *improvvisa* and *la drammatica*, both rooted in the Italian theatre tradition. Rame's engagement with these ancient forms reflects an intertextual dialogue with historical performance practices, which she reimagines and revitalises through politically charged, and embodied modes of theatre-making. Central to this exploration is Rame's intricate system of notation, preserved in archival promptbooks, which integrates gesture, vocal expression, rhythm, and breath. This multimodal approach challenges conventional author and director-centred models of theatre-making, highlighting instead the centrality of performer agency in the creation

and transmission of meaning. By treating the actor as both creative originator and interpreter, Rame repositions the rehearsal and performance process as a form of collaborative, shared authorship. This chapter situates Rame's methodology within broader critical debates on authorship, notation, musicality in theatre, and performance history. It argues that her *scrittura scenica* (scenic writing) constitutes a crucial intervention in the theorisation of performance as an embodied and collaborative art form.

Finally, Chapter Five expands and translates these concepts through practice research. By documenting five excerpts from my performances *Concert in F* and *Rampsody*, I demonstrate how Rame's notations function as performative vocal scores. Elements such as tone, articulation, pacing, and silence are not merely stylistic choices but integral components that convey meaning beyond the literal text. The act of voicing Rame's *partitura* (notation) reveals multiple layers of interpretation, foregrounding the body and voice as central to her creative methodology. In this context, Rame's *scrittura scenica* emerges as a form of feminist embodied writing, a mode of transmission that operates from body to body, privileging experiential knowledge and physical presence. This performative re-activation, through creative and subversive tools such as improvisation, laughter, graphic scores, and vocality, affirms the significance of Rame's artistic and political practices as a feminist intervention, rooted in collaboration, shared authorship, and embodied transmission.

Rame's Significance

This thesis establishes Rame's work as a groundbreaking model of feminist theatre-making. She disrupted dominant hierarchies in the theatrical field by advancing a collective, embodied, and relational mode of creation that functioned simultaneously as aesthetic practice and political intervention. Rame's role has often been obscured in favour of the more publicly celebrated figure of Dario Fo. This study directly addresses that historical marginalisation by focusing on Rame's artistic methodologies, including not just what she performed, but how she created, led, and sustained collective

theatrical environments. It offers a critical corrective to reductive readings of women's labour in theatre, which often focus narrowly on performance or representation while overlooking the organisational, dramaturgical, and affective dimension of creative labour. By foregrounding these aspects, this thesis has forged a critical connection between two often separate scholarly domains. Whilst feminist theatre studies have often concentrated on text analysis, representation, and audience reception, materialist performance historiography has tended to overlook questions of gender. By bringing these fields together, the study has provided a more comprehensive model for understanding how feminist politics are enacted not just thematically but structurally, through the material processes of production.

At the same time, the thesis has examined how Rame's use of the monologue in the 1970s marks a turning point in Italian theatre. Her solo performances redefined the performer–audience relationship by staging the female voice as a site of autonomy, resistance, and subversion. These works engaged the audience in acts of collective reflection, activating the political potential of laughter, autobiography, and improvisation as strategies of feminist critique and liberation. In doing so, the concept of Rame as a feminist *capacomica* contributes to feminist performance studies by interpreting women's artistic leadership as a practice that is simultaneously political, affective, and collaborative.

Methodologically, the thesis advances an integrated approach that weaves together archival research, oral history, performance analysis, and practice-based research. It promotes a feminist methodology grounded in embodiment, contextuality, and relationality. Central to this approach is the use of oral history as a feminist listening practice, one that constructs a counter-archive capable of challenging institutional erasure and recovering marginalised voices. By combining material documentation with lived experience and embodied memory, the thesis offers a research model attuned to the complexities of feminist historiography and performance and theatre studies.

Franca Rame's legacy

Franca Rame's legacy resides in her radical reinvention of performer agency as central to the theatre-making process. Her work contests the marginalisation of oral and embodied traditions, resists patriarchal structures of authorship and leadership, and advances a relational, politically engaged, and feminist approach to creation. Her archival materials, especially her annotated scripts, offer a valuable and largely unexplored resource for further research into notation, vocality, gesture, and feminist dramaturgy. Whereas this thesis offers new perspectives on Rame's work, certain areas remain underexplored, partly due to limited access to the archive. This limitation is primarily the result of ongoing cataloguing and preservation efforts, which have yet to render the archive fully accessible. Future studies could extend my analysis of Rame's use of *la drammatica* and her notation systems, as initiated in this thesis, particularly in relation to gesture. Such work requires an open and navigable archival infrastructure. Ideally, the archive will be relocated to a more accessible and publicly available venue, enabling theatre scholars and practitioners to continue engaging with the rich creative materials and methodologies that this study has begun to bring to light.

The thesis demonstrates that Rame's work cannot be adequately understood through static textual analysis alone, rather, it must be engaged through participatory, embodied processes that emphasise voice, rhythm, and relational transmission. For this reason, I propose vocal improvisation as a powerful method for activating and reinterpreting Rame's *partiture* (scores), underscoring her continuing relevance for contemporary feminist and politically engaged artists. Rame's rehearsal processes, collaborative authorship, and use of domestic space as a site for artistic and political work offer valuable insights for contemporary efforts to dismantle patriarchal systems within theatre and beyond. While Rame's work was not free of tensions and contradictions, the *casa-laboratorio* functioned as a prefigurative space, one that rehearsed and partially realised alternative models of theatre-making and communal living. As Federici observes, disillusionment often arises when idealistic aspirations confront the material

contradictions inherent in political work. Yet such disillusionment should not be seen as a failure; rather, it is a constitutive aspect of sustained political engagement. Rame's work as a feminist *capacomica* at the *casa-laboratorio* exemplifies this paradox: hopeful and imaginative, yet aware of the complexities and compromises embedded within collective practices.

Finally, her *scrittura scenica*, understood as a form of *écriture féminine*, points toward a feminist methodology of writing that is embodied, relational, and performative. This approach offers a framework that extends beyond theatre into literature, education, and activism. Repositioning Rame as a feminist *capacomica* not only allows for the recovery of a crucial and historically overlooked figure but also opens up new pathways for making, transmitting, and theorising feminist performance in the present. By foregrounding Rame's contributions and situating them within a feminist materialist framework, this thesis reclaims her legacy from patriarchal narratives and repositions her work as a catalyst for both artistic innovation and social transformation. In doing so, it offers new tools, conceptual frameworks, and methodological approaches for contemporary feminist performance scholarship and practice.

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Appendix A: List of Interviews

All interviews were conducted by the author.

Serena Anderlini, scholar. Zoom interview, June 9, 2022.
Alessio Arena, theatre scholar. In person, Archivio Rame Fo, Verona, July 29, 2022.
Eugenio Barba, theatre director and founder of Odin Teatret. In person, Holstebro, June 5, 2022.
Caroline van Gastel, actress, interpreter, and former collaborator with the Compagnia Teatrale Fo Rame. Zoom interviews, June 29, 2022, and April 30, 2024.
Giorgio Biavati, actor. In person, Rome, May 23, 2022.
Rosanna Brusegan, scholar. Zoom interview, June 2, 2022.
Felice Cappa, author, director, and former collaborator with the CTFR. Phone interview, June 20, 2022.
Marina De Juli, actress and former collaborator with the CTFR. Zoom interview, June 30, 2022.
Fabrizio De Giovanni, actor and former collaborator with the CTFR. Zoom interview, June 21, 2022.
Maria Chiara Di Marco, scenographer and collaborator. Zoom interview, June 21, 2022.
Joseph Farrell, scholar, translator, and biographer of Rame and Fo. Zoom interview, May 17, 2022.
Jacopo Fo, Rame and Fo's son, writer, and artist. Zoom interview, May 13, 2022; in person, Verona, May 17, 2023.
Mattea Fo, Rame's granddaughter and president of Fondazione Fo Rame. Zoom interview, June 5, 2022; in person, Gubbio, October 16, 2023.
David Gothard, former artistic director at Riverside Studios. In person, London, May 17, 2022.
Ron Jenkins, theatre scholar, practitioner, and translator of Rame and Fo. In person, New York, May 17, 2024.
Laura Mariani, scholar. Zoom interview, July 18, 2022.

Maggie Nicols, vocalist and improviser. In person, London, May 24, 2024.
Mario Pirovano, actor and former collaborator with the CTFR.Zoom interview, June 1, 2022.
Marisa Pizza, scholar, former archive director, and former collaborator with the CTFR. Zoom interview, May 16, 2022; in person, Rome, September 12, 2023.
Enrica Rame, Rame's niece. Zoom interview, August 23, 2022.
Anna Sica, scholar. Zoom interview, August 28, 2024.
Piero Sciotto, actor, musician, and collaborator. Phone interview, June 30, 2022.
Olimpia Vano, former senator and friend of Rame. Zoom interview, June 29, 2022.
Walter Valeri, scholar, practitioner, and collaborator. Zoom interview, May 24, 2024.
Giovanni Viganò, IT specialist and digital archivist of the Rame Fo Archive. Zoom interview, August 23, 2022.

Appendix B

Email from Franca Rame to the author, 2010 (personal communication).

This email illustrates Rame's distinctive use of colour, emphasis, and font size in her digital correspondence. In it, she edits the lyrics of a song I wrote about her, offering both stylistic and political commentary. Her editorial choices here resonate with the notational strategies discussed in Chapter Four, highlighting her performative and multi-modal approach to text.

Franca Rame <francarame@fastwebnet.it>

To:Theatralia@theatralia.co.uk

12 Dec 2010 at 10:38

Cara Filomena. La tua canzone è bella, ma se devo essere sincera la trovo un po' letteraria. Mi permetto, come faccio con Dario da sempre, di dirti quello che penso. Questa è l'amicizia vera. Penso, anzi, sono certa, che se ci lavorassi un po' le daresti il taglio politico che a mio avviso è accennato 'molto sottovoce'... Ma penso sia troppo tardi. Le mie condizioni di salute sono assai precarie... E sono la causa del mio ritardo nel rispondere alla tua mail.

Forse ti potranno servire per la prossima canzone che scriverai. Ti auguro un grande successo.

Abbraccio grande

franca

Evidenzio sul tuo brano:

(Queen of Clowns – traduzione)

'Salta!'

ma per un momento non sono sicura che le mie ali possano sostenere il peso **della mia anima.**

Aspetta! Quando sentiro' le tue mani afferrarmi i polsi allora provero' a lasciarmi andare.

Adesso devo essere coraggiosa e affrontare il pubblico
Io voglio essere esattamente dove sono **E QUELLO CHE SONO**
Ridere ora non basta
Il mio naso rosso sente **le fate che** si nascondono tra le nuvole **(Più KE LE FATE E NN PROPRIO NELLE NUVOLE CI SONO GLI ORCHI)**

I tamburi suonano celebrando i giullari e i re sono pronti ad andarsene **(SEI SICURA CHE SIANO PRONTI AD ANDARSENE?--- SON TUTTI ABBRANCATI ALLE POLTRONE!!! E AL POTERE. A TENERE LA GENTE CON LA TESTA BASSA,,, INCANTANDOLI COL FLAUTO DELLA LORO VITA DI AGI, SFRUTTAMENTO E SCHIFEZZE VARIE: tutti in questo paese vorrebbero essere berlusconi.**

BELLISSIMA LA FRASE CHE SEGUE Arlecchini danzano per la rivoluzione e votano la regina dei clowns
Ora e' tempo di essere coraggiosa e affrontare **il pubblico**
Metti su il tuo naso rosso e racconta la verita'!
Ridere ora non basta piu'
Il mio naso rosso sente **gli angeli** che sbirciano dalle nuvole. **SAREBBE BELLO CHE STI ANGELI SPINGESSERO LA REGINA GRIDANDOLE A SQUARCIAGOLA: "Ridere ora non basta piu'!"**

Non mi giudicare presuntuosa...
Cmq ecco il commento che mi hai chiesto:

Ecco, vorrei che dolce poesia portasse nel mondo questo messaggio: Arlecchini danzano per la rivoluzione e votano la regina dei clowns ma urlano tra squilli di trombe e rullar di tamburi: Sveglia regina! Ridere non basta più!"

Grazie Filomena di avermi dato la possibilità di conoscerti e stimarti profondamente
Un abbraccio franca

English translation:

Dear Filomena,
Your song is beautiful, but if I'm being honest, I find it a bit literary. I take the liberty, as I've always done with Dario, of telling you what I think. That's what true friendship is.
I believe, actually I'm certain, that if you worked on it a bit more, you could give it the political edge that, in my view, is only hinted at *very faintly*... But I think it's too late. My health conditions are quite precarious... and they're the reason for the delay in replying to your email.
Maybe these comments will be useful for your next song. I wish you great success.

A big hug,
franca

Highlighting from your piece:
(Queen of Clowns – translation)

"Jump!"
But for a moment I'm not sure my wings can bear the weight of my soul.
Wait! When I feel your hands grab my wrists, then I'll try to let myself fall.
Now I must be brave and face the audience.
I want to be exactly where I am AND WHAT I AM.
Laughing is no longer enough.
My red nose senses the fairies hiding among the clouds
(**MORE THAN FAIRIES, AND NOT REALLY IN THE CLOUDS, THERE ARE OGRES**)

The drums sound, celebrating the jesters, and the kings are ready to leave
(**ARE YOU SURE THEY'RE READY TO LEAVE? THEY'RE CLINGING TO THEIR SEATS!!! AND TO POWER.**
THEY KEEP PEOPLE'S HEADS DOWN... ENCHANTING THEM WITH THE FLUTE OF THEIR LIFE OF COMFORT,

EXPLOITATION, AND OTHER VARIOUS FILTH: EVERYONE IN THIS COUNTRY WANTS TO BE BERLUSCONI.)

THE FOLLOWING LINE IS BEAUTIFUL:
"Harlequins dance for the revolution and vote for the queen of clowns."
Now it’s time to be brave and face the audience.
Put on your red nose and tell the truth!
Laughing is no longer enough.
My red nose senses the angels peeking out from the clouds.
IT WOULD BE GREAT IF THOSE ANGELS PUSHED THE QUEEN FORWARD,
SHOUTING AT THE TOP OF THEIR LUNGS: “LAUGHING IS NO LONGER ENOUGH!”

Don’t judge me presumptuous...
Anyway, here’s the feedback you asked for:

I would love for sweet poetry to carry this message into the world:
"Harlequins dance for the revolution and vote for the queen of clowns,
but they shout, amid trumpet blasts and rolling drums:
Wake up, queen! Laughing is no longer enough!"

Thank you, Filomena, for giving me the opportunity to know you and to deeply admire you.

A hug,
franca



Figure B.1
Filomena Campus and Franca Rame at the home of Rame and Fo, Porta Romana, Milan, March 29, 2012. Photograph by Marco Varvello.