

# The Wheel

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**Summary:** 0. Introduction; 1. Methodology; 2. The Wheel; 3. Set design; 4. Videos as semiotic labelling

**Abstract:** *The Wheel* is a script, which embodies a philosophical reflection about the symbolic potentialities of a multisemiotic performance. Plurisemiotism is approached in the form of a tension between bodily movements and a semiotic classification which labels the different kinds of movement performed by the dancers. I argue that this tension produces a pluristable effect in which the selfreflective dimension brings both fields at a threshold and allows to question aesthetic and epistemological borders in performative arts and philosophy. The script contents exploit some aspects of the “free dance” tradition - a ‘feminist’ tradition in which mainly female dancers and choreographers moved in two opposite directions: towards the origin - re-discovering bodily practices and forms of life later removed from cultural memory, and back to the present and future - performing the crisis of western societies, their values and behaviour patterns and thereby imagining and prefiguring new possibilities.

**Keywords:** *Affordances, Peirce’s semiotics, Tanztheater, The Wheel, performative arts*

## 0. Introduction

*The Wheel* is a text I wrote in 2000. It has the form of a script for a videoperformance and is conceived of from the point of view of a philosopher of language who was suddenly and unexpectedly forced to go beyond the fields of her previous research. What I tried to do writing it was not completely clear for me. Did I just want to use differently some central concepts, questions and paradigms of my research fields (physiognomics and pathognomics, aspect change, origins of language, feminist philosophies and reflections on gender)? Did I aim at transforming them, giving them a sort of performative translation?

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1 Professore associato in “Filosofia del linguaggio” presso l’Università degli Studi “Guglielmo Marconi” (Roma). I wrote *The Wheel* in Italian at the beginning of 2000, then quickly translated it in English and in German with the help of Chris Artus (English) and Katrin Heinau (German) (whom I would like to thank for their generous support). Also in that regard the text is a plurilinguistic object. Although the several positive feedbacks the script received, it was not possible to perform *The Wheel* till 2016, when choreographer and filmmaker Daniela Lucato decided to use the text to start a choreographic project. The first part of the project, *The Wheel*, was performed at the English Theater Berlin the 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2017 (s. [www.danielalucato.de](http://www.danielalucato.de); <https://www.facebook.com/thewheelshortfilm> and [www.ilmitte.com/blog/2017/05/28/la-creativita-di-kreuzberg-the-wheel/](http://www.ilmitte.com/blog/2017/05/28/la-creativita-di-kreuzberg-the-wheel/)). The other two parts “The rebellious body” and “Sex in translation” are in elaboration.

When I wrote *The Wheel* I did not know very well the quite recent history of “Freier Tanz” whose birth could be situated at the end of the Nineteenth Century. And yet, after my first encounters with the late expressions of this tradition, I had no doubts about the philosophical relevance of this aesthetic experience in which female artists have had since the beginning a dominant role. In the same years (1999-2000) I started to work on Wittgenstein’s philosophy of seeing-as and aspect change<sup>2</sup>, a complex reflection on pluristability which challenges classical philosophy and its obsession about contradiction. Wittgenstein gives us deep insights about the crisis of our contemporary form of life offering therapies, which root a deprived verbal language back into embodied forms of symbolization. If Wittgenstein’s thought could be considered a form of antiphilosophy<sup>3</sup>, then free dance and the tradition of *Tanztheater* is surely its best artistic *pendant*. An important aspect in this form of performance is a shift from *Pathosformel* to *Toposformel*<sup>4</sup>. If Warburg’s concept of *Pathosformel* refers here to the free dance pioneers’ discover of ancient bodily practices and significant forms of life later removed from our relevant cultural memory<sup>5</sup>, the dimension of *Toposformel* seems rather to apply to the crisis of western societies and their increasing loss of meaning: *via* obsessive repetitions and deformations, movements become diagrams, topologies, abstract patterns. *The Wheel* aims at exploring both these choreographic directions situating the performers into ordinary frames - domestic life, factory work, leisure etc. - while the semiotic labelling attempts to grasp the performance multiaspectual dynamics.

*The Wheel* uses verbal language as a provisory solution, just adopted to evocate visions which other media will be able to express properly. In this respect, I was forced to reflect about the tight relationship between linguistic turn and iconic or pictorial turn<sup>6</sup>: then, when philosophy discovers language as its privileged object, at the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, it also directs against verbal language its most destructive critique joining the Avantgarde in looking for other symbolic forms, first of all the “*Körperbilder*”. The new primacy of dance among the arts corresponds to a specific aesthetic gesture in which the borders between art and philosophical reflection blur and their semantics enters a pluristable dimension.

## 1. Methodology

A preliminary element of reflection is the fact that **The Wheel** is a written text mediating a project that excludes itself as linguistic, verbal dimension. The performance develops solely through the physical interaction between objects and bodies; in fact language doesn’t play any part, the only exception being sign language - this, however, has a special place because it is considered from the perspective of non-signers, and thus has a special symbolic status. In the

2 S. A *un secondo sguardo*, manifesto libri, Roma 2002, and „Gesichter, Wahrnehmung, Symbolisierung: Die Geschlechterdifferenz zwischen dritter und zweiter Person“, S. Fortuna and K. Heinau (eds) *Feministische Philosophie in Italien, Die Philosophin*, 29 (2004), p.26-38.

3 S. Fortuna, *Wittgensteins Philosophie des Kippbildes. Aspektwechsek, Ethik, Sprache*, Turia+Kant, Wien 2012.

4 G. Brandstetter, *Tanz-Lektüren. Körperbilder und Raumfiguren der Avantgarde*, Fischer, Frankfurt a.M. 1995, p.43-48 and 317-218.

5 S. G. Brandstetter’s analysis in “Der Tanz der Mänade”, *Tanz-Lektüren. Körperbilder und Raumfiguren der Avantgarde*, Fischer, Frankfurt a.M. 1995, p. 182-202, and Katrin Heinau’s work about matriarchal mythology: *Webe*, forthcoming.

6 S. M. Bartolini, *The “Pictorial Turn” as Crisis and the Necessity of a Critique of Visual Culture*, “Philosophy Study”, March 2015, Vol. 5, No. 3, pp. 121-130 and H. Bredekamp, *Bildakt*, Wagenbach, Berlin 2015.

videos, semiotics will instead have – at a first analytical level - a classifying function: the forms of semiotic relationship between the video images and the simultaneous scenic actions, to which they refer, will be described using primarily the semiotic classification of Peirce. The performance embodies the semiotic labelling, which describes the forms of interaction instituted by the different media and thereby introduces a further aesthetic layer to explore. Semiotic classification makes here accessible to the aesthetic comprehension an essential metamorphosis staged in the play: the shift from the *Pathosformel* to the *Toposformel* – using the terminology of Gabriele Brandstetter previously introduced – i.e. the transformation of bodily expression into abstract forms of movement whose meaning is detached from the pathognomic dimension. That will happen at several performative levels (dance, music, video, stage design) and particularly in the *affordances*<sup>7</sup> sequences in which such a symbolic shift is produced - in contents and connections which are rarely used and at times considered taboo - by repetitions which deconstruct fixed meanings, open up to ambiguity and allow the symbolic shift.

A central question for this experiment concerns selfreflectivity: to what extent the expressive specificness of the different *media*, analysed and categorised by way of the instruments offered by semiotics and by the philosophy of language can be effectively incorporated into the artistic message and appropriated by the audience.

## 2. The Wheel

**Characters:** Sister 1 (S1), Sister 2 (S2), Mother, Fat Woman, Father/Acting teacher, group of four dancing women, group of five dancing men.

### 1. Scene. Sleep

In the inner lower part and in the upper outer part of the wheel there are two women, the two sisters (S1, S2).

One sister (S1) is stretched out along the upper outer part of the wheel with her belly down. The other (S2) is crouched down on one side (in the foetal position) in the lower inner part of the wheel. The arms and the legs of S1, dangling in the empty space, put light pressure on the wheel, which sways about half a meter back and forth. S2 crouches and doubles up as much as possible, while S1 stretches out, extends her arms and her legs, and lets them swing in the air.

(Note on the sound effects: the chain squeaks at every movement, the music, which is barely audible, electronically reproduces the sound of pulsating arteries, alternating with the sound of ultrasonic waves, the overall effect must be that of a muffled sound coming from the inside.)

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<sup>7</sup> I refer here to J. Gibson's theory in which *affordances* are "invitations" that things strike by way of perception, making certain types of physical behaviour inevitable. To use an example of Gibson taken from Koffka, it is as if the entire world of objects speaks a natural language: "Each thing says what it is...a fruit says 'eat me'; water says 'drink me'; thunder says 'fear me'; and woman says 'love me'." J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston 1979, p. 138.

## 2. Scene. *Awakening*

An alarm clock is suspended in the air by a thin metal pole and hangs near S2 (who is below). All of a sudden, the alarm clock goes off, it hovers slowly and gracefully like a ballerina (it also has feminine colours and features and a rounded shape with hips and breasts). The movement is that of a pendulum and the sound is that of a machine gun, with the sound background of a war scene (bombs, gunshots, screams, etc.). The sisters attempt to reach the alarm with blind frenetic gestures of the hand (three or four times). Finally S2 is able to stop it.

S1 and S2 continue to sleep. The 'sound of sleep' (see note in the previous scene) becomes louder, and the rhythm quicker. One must hear the growing noise of the sisters protesting against being woken up.

From two doors at the two extreme opposites of the space in which the scene develops, two women enter (one tall and thin, and the other fat, short with a squinting purple eye, obviously fake, that swirls with spiralling movements). When they enter, the sound of sleep overtakes them. In the pockets of her apron fastened over her belly the fat woman carries sparkling metal instruments she uses to pull out S2, as if she were an obstetrician.

The tall woman (Mother), turning her back on the wheel, climbs up the stairs directly on the left side of the wheel. She arrives at S1 and leans up against her, back to back. They stick together from head to toe, also thanks to a material joining them (a velcro-like fabric). The Mother grasps the arms of S1 and slips her own arms into them. The velcro sticks and comes off again four times because S1 does not want to get out of bed (she holds onto the poles of the two side staircases with her hands and her feet).

After several attempts, the Mother succeeds in pulling S1 up and goes down the little staircase carrying the clinging woman. They arrive on the ground and walk straight, then bent at 90 degrees, and finally on all fours.

Finally, the three body movements become convulsed, extremely fast and go on several times. S1 continues to have her eyes shut. The Mother wants S1 to open her eyes and even without seeing her she knows that she is not opening them. She places S1 under the short faucet of the shower and sprays a stream of water directly onto her face. The scene ends with S1's eyes wide open, completely white.

## 3. Scene. *Fish eyes, reversed rain and the affordances – 1)*

The fat woman pulls down the "kitchen" case from the wheel (see *Set design 1*). She takes out the fish and begins to clean them with the same oversized instruments she just used to wake up S2. S2, seated nearby, watches. The woman makes piles of bones, organs, scales, and fish eyes. Then, solemnly, she gives S2 the white eyeballs of the fish to eat. S2 puts them in her mouth and chews them painstakingly, as if she were chewing gum. In her mouth, the balls begin to grow. When she spits them out, they become huge balls of gum that bounce on the ground with ever larger upward bounces (effect: rain-like movement with adequate sound accompaniment, see note at the beginning).

The fat woman puts back the kitchen case with the rest of the fish.

She and S2 begin the game of *affordances* (see *Set design 2*). At the end of the game, the sister climbs on top of the stairs of the wheel and looks at the study/library case (see). There, behind

a pile of faded yellow papers, a glowing coloured light illuminates the pages from below (a cone of light shines in the opposite direction of the spotlights that follow the actors). At the same time, down below, in the cone of light there is a strange pressure that begins to beat from behind the pages, over and over again, until S2 runs off terrified.

(Note on the music: in the scene of the fish, there is as soundtrack children's songs - with a repetitive serenity and an opaque, ambiguous background).

#### 4. Scene. *The sexy woman.*

The Mother prepares to go out and S1 watches from below, seated on her side in the lower part of the wheel. The Mother walks wiggling on her high heels, her face is completely obscured by a hat with a thick veil. She heads towards the main street of the city, walking back and forth looking at herself in the shop windows. Other women (4), dressed similarly, walk just like the Mother, wiggling on there high heels and looking at themselves in the shop windows on the street.

(The music plays some classical homage to feminine grace - like in the 1950's songs of Trenet, Spadaro, Brél etc. The dullness of the melody is emphasised by tedious repetition of the same musical phrases that become slower and slower).

S1 has followed the women with her gaze without moving. Then she climbs on the pile of clothes, burying herself inside it. She attempts to jump onto the mountain of shoes, but she falls into the stream and is transported by the current. She swims and disappears for a moment from the stage (S1 has to mime these actions in an exaggerated way: while swimming she wears goggles and a diving mouthpiece). When she reappears, she is dressed as a sexy woman with a blond wig, a red feather boa, a little purple dress and gold extremely high-heeled shoes.

(The group of women continues to wiggle until the sister appears as the sexy woman. A video of drag queens accompanies the last part of the scene. As the women leave the stage the Father/Acting teacher appears).

At this point a song perfectly suited to the role of the sexy woman begins. S1 must sing and dance as if it were a rehearsal for a cabaret show. The Father/Acting teacher observes her while sitting on an extremely high stool (like the perch of a parrot). S1 intermittently stops, hesitates, starts again. She is clumsy in her movements and continues to look at the ground. The Teacher shakes his head with disapproval, and lets out a sarcastic laugh several times that sounds more and more like a crow cawing. Other teachers gather round his stool, they crouch on the floor and lift their avian noses to the sky. The effect should be that of a storm of cawing birds mixed with protesting human voices, which overwhelms the music (the shadows of birds are also projected on the screen).

S1, reacting to the protests, stops, stands still with her head hung in shame. S2 comes in and gives her a CD, S1 places it in her belly (with a trick much like the sword trick at the circus) and starts again. Now she sings and dances in a skilful way, sensual and smooth, seeming like another person. This time it is a great performance and success: the acting teachers approach her and dance in the style of the Madonna's video "Like a Virgin". S2 sitting close by with her legs wide apart observes the scene.

Meanwhile the male dancers get closer to S1 and dance around her, S2 with the tip of her tongue in a corner of her mouth plays with a remote control that controls the program she has given to her sister. She pushes the buttons clearly with bad intent and makes the entire program

go crazy. S1 begins to make rigid disjointed movements and to slap the teachers that are still dancing. The teachers after being slapped a few times, retreat to a safe distance away from S1 and begin to dance a very passionate tango amongst themselves.

The movements of S1 become even more disjointed and uncontrolled: the swinging of her arm turns on herself and she slaps herself several times. In the end her legs tangle with each other at every step. Tripping over her own feet she falls to the ground, where she remains, unmoving. S2 pulls her away by her feet.

When the tango is over the teachers line up and begin to play the *affordances*.

### 5. *Flying gorilla and Musical Chairs*

While the teachers are finishing the *affordances* S2 gets onto the wheel using one of the small side staircases and looks at the library/study case. A cone of light projected from the base appears again through the pile of faded yellow papers and something behind pushes them (as in Scene 3). This time however, the sister, driven by curiosity, forces it open and lifts out the damp papers. Like a rocket, a flying dwarf gorilla comes out with luminous yellow wings. A spotlight, this time from above, lights up the gorilla as if a soloist has entered the scene. The gorilla, as to celebrating its being liberated changes its luminous colours several times (pink, orange, and blue), while it flutters around S2.

The gorilla does several numbers that highlight its conflicting nature: it swells up and shows its muscles and then immediately turns with its arms held gracefully above its head; it beats its chest several times with a cruel air and at the same time flutters its wings like a butterfly.

S2 follows and pursues the gorilla several times, like a lively little girl, until he lies down on the pile of shoes, touches himself between his legs (hinting at masturbation), maternally caresses himself and in the end falls asleep.

(Note: the musical accompaniment motif after the entrance of the gorilla should portray these conflicting tensions).

Having finished with the game of *affordances*, the teachers arrange the chairs in a circle, the sisters join them and they all begin a slightly modified version of Musical Chairs: for each round of the game there is a person eliminated, but also a special winner, i.e. the person whose chair lights up and makes a noise like a pinball machine. The vertical surface of the pinball machine is projected onto the back of the chair when the occupant stands up from the chair and raises his arms, swinging them around in joy. The winner lifts the chair up onto his shoulders, raising it high, taking it away and exiting the game. Gradually, the group becomes smaller and the music must reflect the drama of a game that is a game of winning or losing all.

S1 and S2 remain with only one chair. The music begins and then immediately stops, and both S1 and S2 are able to sit down. After a strenuous battle, S2 pushes S1 off the chair and she falls to the ground with her legs still holding onto the chair (it is as if S1 wants to conquer a fortified castle and S2 is defending it from above. The music should allude to this type of battle).

There is no real victory for S2 either, as her chair does not light up or make a noise. After becoming more and more impatient, she pushes her chair back, kicks it and leaves. S1 is still on the ground and remains alone.

## 6. *Serial affordances and Siamese Twins.*

The Father/Teacher arrives and picks S1 up from the ground. The two play a new set of *affordances*.

It is however, a game slightly different from the original version of the *affordances* because the two play the *affordances* together:

In the first *affordance* (1a) the Father sucks the muzzle of the bear while the sister strokes its head. In 2a S1, sitting on the shoulders of the Father, leaves the print of her hands on the little nails, while the Father leaves his footprints in the wet sand. In 3a they beat on the keys of the computer together, as if they were playing a duet on the piano. On 4a (rubber band and honey) it is the same because it is already an *affordance* for two. In 5a it is the sister that gives up her booger to the Father and he feeds the carnivorous plant with it. In 6 they are both in the shower, but S1 follows the first sensory impulse (touch/sight: in 1 she tries to eat the snow, in 2 she blinks her eyes sleepily in front of the pastel lights, in 3 she cleans away the sweat). The Father continues to follow the second sensory impulse, sound (as in the two previous *affordances*). In 7a they put together their two heads between the massaging hands that massage them as if they were only one head. Before sending them away, the hands smash the heads together.

The Father puts S1 to bed (with stereotypical movements that communicate the ritualistic nature of this event). They lie down back to back in the lower part of the wheel, as in Scene 2: velcro is used to join the two backs to each other.

The Mother arrives dancing a sinuous dance like Salome, in front of the Father, with obvious seductive intent. The Father looks hypnotised like a snake, stretches out his chin and follows the Mother, continuing while walking to stretch his neck and to stick out his chin in a very unnatural way, and dragging along S1.

A game begins between Father and Mother. The Father spanks the Mother, the Mother straddles the Father's stomach, the Father drags over the Mother with his head at her feet. Standing again they rub each other's noses, their bellies in a type of belly-dance, and while sitting they rub their knees. All of these movements are made between two large mirrors, so that S1, still stuck to the back of the Father, is able to follow them. But S1 is not watching the Father and Mother. Instead she makes faces in the mirror, fixes her hair, cuts her toenails (see PO) and at the end she falls asleep with her head dangling and her mouth open while the Father and Mother aggressively stroke each other's knees. S2 frees S1 from the back of the Father.

## 7. *Potlatch and return*

(According to the findings of various anthropologists, Potlatch (gift) is a ritual celebrated in several tribes, in which all community members give each other more and more valuable gifts, until they have deprived themselves of all that they have. In the end, they put all of the gifts that were given and received in a large pile and burn them).

To play the game of Potlatch, S1 and S2 climb on the two stairs attached to the right and left sides of the wheel and pull down all of the cases and some of the *affordances* (the mobile ones: 1, 3, 5). Each case and *affordance* belongs to one of the two sisters. They mark each piece as their property with two different spray colours. A couple of times the sisters fight over a piece, which they both mark with their own spray. Then S1 begins to give 'gifts' of her pieces to S2 and S2

does the same. They form two piles of objects near their respective recipients.

S1 and S2 put together the two piles, pushing them with their hands. They jump on top and trample on them. The luminous gorilla appears inside a test tube of transparent pink liquid (like the genie in the lamp), gets out of the tube and buzzes around the sisters' faces with ever-quickenings movements, intensifying sound, and colours that appear more and more luminous.

The luminous colouring of the gorilla spreads over the pile and creates an enormous bonfire of increasing dimensions. The sisters continue to jump until they lay exhausted in the luminous flames.

In the last scene they are once again in the wheel. Everything is as it was in Scene 1: S1 sleeps in the upper part of the wheel, S2 in the lower part, the wheel squeaks, and there is the intense sound of sleep.

### 3. Set Design:

#### 1.) *Description of the wheel:*

*a) Dimensions:* about 2 ½, 3 meters in diameter. A cylindrical structure of wood with a metal tube wrapped around which is used for telephone cables – very similar to a huge spool of thread and still seen at times in the streets – can be used.

*b) Materials:* two rectangular sheets of a transparent plastic material to “close” the top and the bottom of the cylinder, and wooden stairs.

The inner lower part and the upper outer part have small parapets along the edges so that the wheel can be used as bunk beds. The two sections where the sisters sleep are covered by a quilted mat, and by a pillow nailed to the wood. The colours and designs of the mat and the pillow are faded and childlike, with old-fashioned fantasies of animals and flowers.

The wheel, which occupies the right part of the scene, is connected to the ceiling with the extremities of a metal tube that squeaks. The larger inner half of the wheel is occupied by seven sections of wood and glass fastened by joints to the centre of the wheel. (The sections are not fixed and can be removed from the wheel – see Scene 7). Each section symbolises a part of a house and it contains:

1. Various types of fish, pieces of bottles, some plates and kitchen utensils (Kitchen).
2. Sink, tubes and other plumber's materials, a mini toy toilet (Bathroom).
3. Night cap, earplugs, lampshade, a small ripped up mattress with springs popping out (Bedroom).
4. Books, notebooks, pencils and other loose writing utensils, a pile of faded yellow papers sticky from humidity (Study-Library).
5. Broken toys, heads of dolls, pieces of stuffed animals, playing cards, pieces of board games (Play Room).
6. Pieces of a chandelier, miniature chairs, drawer handles, family pictures, fake flowers, ornaments (Living Room).
7. Nails, screwdrivers, hammer, part of a watering can, small bottles of oil, saw (Lumber Room-Cellar).

## 2.) *Affordances*

In the middle of the wheel, along the entire diameter a protruding metal structure is attached on which are suspended some objects inviting specific bodily activities. These are irresistibly uttered (*Aufforderungen, affordances*) by the performers, who follow a sort of assembly line. The cycle is repeated three times and is composed by the following *affordances*:

1. The protruding muzzle of a bear is to be grasped by the mouth and sucked as if there were a pacifier. The bear muzzle will sound like a metal horn.
2. In a rectangular structure made of 2 transparent rigid surfaces from which a few hundred small movable nails protrude. Two handprints are made on it and two footprints on two rectangular drawers full of moist sand on the ground.
3. An old laptop computer is turned on. When typed the keys jump like springs (when the keys have all jumped out one must close the computer, which will then reopen by itself).
4. An open jar of honey and a rubber band suspended horizontally. The snapped rubber band ends with a boomerang movement in the bust of the next actor that responds by smearing honey on the face of the other.
5. A carnivorous plant with its red mouth open wide is nourished by a fresh booger ripped from the nose. The plant after receiving the booger instantly closes its mouth, creating a sound much like that of metal dentures.
6. Shower (the spout from which water comes out is much bigger than normal – at the bottom there is another smaller faucet). As soon as one is under the shower the spout emits: 1) thin and slow snow flakes and at the same time a rushing water sound similar to that of Niagara Falls; 2) delicate jets of pastel coloured light and at the same time the hammering of techno music; 3) heat like that of a hairdryer and at the same time a mix of Christmas songs. The person under the stream takes on a behaviour according to the second sensory impulse - hearing: in 1 he sticks out his head with a fearless attitude as if to confront a flood of strong water; in 2 he waves with monotonous movements; in 3 he stretches out his neck and mouth and moves them solemnly and in time.
7. Two hands massaging a head (of a real person that inserts them in two holes from behind the wheel); the head rests in the two hands which rotate it to the right and to the left and up and down with forceful movements. They finish the session by pushing away the head and signalling with the index finger to go away. When not busy in this *affordance* the massaging hands speak in a sign language (continuing to speak this language until the cycle of the *affordances* is complete – text to be spoken in sign language: during the *affordances* an advertising message for head massages).

Musical accompaniment during the development of the *affordances*: the kind is that of band music which must produce the effect of an assembly line. One could take inspiration from the soundtrack of the film *The Illusionist* composed by Willem Breuker and *Lavorare stanca* by Daniele Sepe. Every single *affordance* should have its own distinct track, its own sound scheme (in the cases of the *affordances* 1 and 6, which already by themselves emit a sound, another is added). In each of the three executions of the *affordances* the music must remain the same. At the end, the spectators should be able to anticipate the sound scheme of the single *affordances*.

### 3.) *Landscape outside the wheel*

To the left of the wheel an urban landscape is reconstructed (materials: cardboard, plywood and transparent plastic): a city street with store windows and behind, in the background, a drawing of buildings or a collage done by children. In the middle of the collage there is a screen on which are projected the short films that accompany, according to various associating criteria, the scenes. To the right of the wheel there is a country landscape: a wavy hill made of a pile of clothes, a stream made of transparent plastic (a sort of water mattress in an extended form) that separates the hill of clothing and a rough hill made of shoes.

#### *Notes describing some effects*

1. The chewed-up fish eyes in Scene 3 transform themselves into big balls of gum that, when violently spit from the mouth, violently bounce off the ground – giving the impression of rain in reverse (bottom-up instead of top-down): as the bounce increases and the height intensifies, the sound accompaniment should provoke the effect of rain.
2. The flying luminous gorilla has the dimensions of a fist, with sparse long hair, hippie-style, and wings. It flies like an insect, buzzing, and changing its vivid colours. It appears for the first time in Scene 4 where it flies out of a pile of sticky paper. Then it materialises in a test tube filled with red liquid in Scene 7.

#### *Notes about the different media present in the project:*

The main object of the stage design is the wheel. This work, a mixture of sculpture, architecture and *performance*, draws on aspects of the work of Joseph Beuys, in particular his construction of the “Cases”, *Vitrinen*. In his *Vitrinen* Beuys places everyday objects, recreating by way of their specific arrangement the atmosphere of their original contexts, such as houses, basements, stores, offices, etc. The vitrines of the wheel aim at reproducing the complex organisation of human activities, especially in relationship to the home. The wheel is at the same time a huge double bed and a house. Its cases represent the different living areas of a home. The wheel was also an instrument of medieval torture. The reference is present in a few elements of its structure (the metal tube with which the wheel is connected to the ceiling, the noises produced by this tube), and in the interaction of the two sisters with the wheel in the initial and final scenes (*Sleep*): the stretching and contracting of the body, as in a bed of Procuste (a mythological torture). The semiotic classification by Peirce in indexes, icons (images, diagrams, metaphors) and symbols can be useful to investigate the semiotic organisation of the wheel and the other elements of the stage.

The second *medium* consists of the actors' physical movement. Here the type of research that I have in mind refers in particular to the work of choreographers as Pina Bausch and Sasha Walz. The notion of *affordances* could be used to describe aspects of their performances. And I have applied this explicitly in the set of *The Wheel*, presenting a series of *affordances* (imitating an industrial assembly line) that offer a series of possibilities of physical interaction. Here are only a couple of the examples of the components in play: various senses (sight, hearing, touching), different media (sign language, music), the possibility of contrasting invitations, with positive or negative values, (for example to jump, to suck, to massage oneself and to caress vs. picking one's nose and eating the bogies, etc.).

The third *medium* consists of short films projected on a large screen, which accompany the dance performance at each step. The aim is exploring the different possibilities that the short film has to link itself to the action units, to bring out associations and to see in which measure they can be brought back to determine association principles. Another possibility is having the direct “competition” of the theatrical *medium* and the film *medium* projecting on the screen elements of the simultaneously acted scenes by way of frames and other technical methods that highlight the differences between the two *media*. The short films also have the function of bringing to light the hidden associations present in the same action. In the first scene “Sleep”, for example, the hidden association is that of birth. Therefore, in the short film we find images of a foetus in movement outlined by ultrasonic imaging. This highlights the fact that the experience of sleep is related to prenatal sensations and how, therefore, in the act of waking up, one reproduces the distress of being born. The associations are classified in Peirce’s typology: index, icons (image, diagram, metaphor) and symbol. This application ranges from the explanation and quotation to the juxtaposition of body language with more abstract expressions, diagrams, languages, etc.; to the selection of a single aspect that becomes reintroduced in numerous ways.

The fourth *medium* is music. In this case it would be interesting to undertake a systematic work contrasting the expressive possibilities offered in the musical medium with those in the visual medium. Moreover, there would be privileged works of experimental music that would use the voice and sounds of “normal” objects more than traditional musical instruments.

## 4. Semiotic labelling

### 1. Sleep

Short film 0: “Sleep” the word appears first in Italian, *Sonno* (like the title of a silent film with unclear images) and then at the same time in fifty different languages – each one in its own square, like on a computer desktop). Classification of the short film: symbol. (Note: the semiotic classification of the image used, in this case ‘symbol’, must always have the same format and the same positioning in the image, at the beginning and in the large non serial images, the title flashes).

Short film 1: A shot of the stage: S1 and S2 sleeping – (title that flashes: image).

Short film 2: small squares of the same image as in Sf1 (title that flashes: image).

Short film 3: enlargement of the legs abandoned by the stretched out sisters up top (title that flashes: synecdoche).

Short film 4: enlargement of the belly curled up by the sister down below (synecdoche).

Short film 5: shot of an embryo a couple of weeks old that swims in the uterus (metaphor).

Short film 6: shot of an eight-month-old embryo tightly packed in the uterus (metaphor).

Short film 7: a coloured blotch (red) that gradually spreads (diagram, metaphor).

Short film 8: a coloured blotch (blue) that slowly shrinks (diagram, metaphor).

### 2. Awakening

This scene will be made up of only diagrams-signs that reproduce in geometric, abstract form the movements of the dancing women. In the end two diagrams will be dedicated to the music of this part: the first will be a score, and the second an analysis of volume, intensity etc., of the sounds.

### 3. Fish eyes and reversed rain

Short film 0 Title

Short film 1: a verbal description of the kitchen case (symbol), enlarged shot of the other cases, which are then shrunk into separate but equal squares on the screen.

Fish eyes/balls that bounce on the ground and create the effect of “reversed rain” (title: image?, metaphor?).

The *affordances* do not have accompanying short films. The title *affordances* runs in a continual horizontal line across the screen. Only when we arrive to the hands using sign language / massaging hands will there appear a short film with a group of actors using a sign language that act out a scene (title: symbol, image).

### 4. The sexy woman

Short film 0. Title. There are picture cards of fifty sexy women – taken from illustrations, advertisements, cartoons, etc. (title: image??).

Short film 1: Images of different towns (as an extra set design for the walk of the sexy women) where a red arrow indicates where at that moment the women can be found (title: index?? Image?? Diagram??). Drag queens images (title: metaphor)

Short film 2: enlarged shadows of birds – appearing when the teachers with their birdlike noses caw in mockery (title: metaphor, image, diagram). (Appears for an instant – only as long as it takes to be understood – a picture of the Marquis de Sade that anticipates Short film 4).

Short film 3: Detailed analysis of the cawing sounds of the birds (diagram).

Short film 4: (When S1 decides to make her sister crazy): cover of the work of de Sade in the original edition (metaphor, symbol).

### 5. Flying gorilla and Musical Chairs

Short film 0. Title. The hidden theme of the entire scene is the game. Images that appear for a second (only shown for as long as is necessary to recognise them) reproduce various fragments of game actions (ring-around-the-roses, duck-duck-goose, capture the flag, etc.)

Short film 1: The dwarf gorilla has a ‘real version’ and an image-version (on the screen) and it passes from one to the other. When the gorilla is “real” the short films deal with his contradictions: (Symbol: definitions of terms indicating conflicting elements: antinomy, paradox, etc. Diagram???: ambiguous images: the figure duck-rabbit, the vase-silhouette of two faces. Metaphor: picture of faces with ambiguous expressions: cry of joy or of pain; the Mona Lisa with her two “unambiguous” versions).

Short film as an interlude: The scene of games on the beach from “Drowning by numbers” by P. Greenway, with musical accompaniment by M. Nymann (while all of the male dancers enter the scene and prepare the chairs for Musical Chairs).

Short film 2. The entire game of Musical Chairs is accompanied by a short film (title: diagram) that is like a computer game that reproduces the action in a symbolic way. The face of an actor eliminated from Big Brother (Dutch, Italian, and German...) accompanies each eliminated player: title of the short film ???. When a player wins, the image (visual and sound) of a “winning pinball table” is shown (title: image??). When the sitting sister

does not win the image is that of a pinball table at the end of a game (using the typical sound effects that announce defeat: title: image???)

#### 6. Serial affordances and Siamese twins

Short film 0. Title.

Short film 1: An image dealing with a film of a snake charmer in action (title: metaphor), begins when the Mother seduces the Father.

Short film 2 and the rest: A series of images of big toes (different colours and sizes), little piles of cut nails, hairlines (variety of colours, thickness, waviness, etc).

#### 7. Potlatch and return

Short film 0. Title (in black and white in the style of a silent film). The definition of Potlatch (cut out of original texts in several languages, like a surrealist collage).

Short film 1: Flames (image).

Short film 2: (after the two sisters are back in the wheel). A shot of the two blotches, one growing, the other shrinking, as in Scene 1).

