

Marinella Senatore

Building Communities

Marcella Beccaria *"My name is Vito and I'm a magician. I'm an expert in 'micro-magic' and I provide entertainment for birthdays, weddings, parties. I also offer my 'microskills' to hospitals and nursing homes. I teach 'Magic in the Wards' courses for people who want to learn more about this kind of work. [...] Yes, of course, we can see each other again and I'll be happy to explain at greater length how I developed my method. I read the ad and I'd like to participate".*

"Thanks, Vito, very interesting... I think that your expertise could work well for the School of Narrative Dance. Like I said, that's one of the three participatory spaces that will be part of the structure of the exhibition to be held here at the Castello in the fall. Please give us your contact information so we can set up a time to meet again and talk more extensively. I appreciate your interest in the project, so let's get back in touch over the next few days. Hello, who's there? Please, come in".

"I was born in Villaggio Leumann. Actually at the time it was called Cotonificio Leumann, it was a big factory founded by this family from Switzerland. My parents worked there at the cotton mill. Like other children, I went to school there, in the company town. That's where our house was, along with a church, a train station, a post office and a gym. [...] Now almost seventy years have passed, the factory is gone, but our group of friends – some are here with me – has founded an association to tell the story of our village and open its doors to those who want to see it".

"I've heard about that place. I'd like to come visit. When can we set it up? You know that in the exhibition we also want to have a space dedicated to storytelling, to writing? What's your name?"

"Rosalbina".

"Thanks, Rosalbina, let's get together soon, then. Leave us your email address... Ah, maybe your phone number's better? Sure, of course. We'll make a note of it right away. In the meantime, if anyone else wants to come..."

Please, come in. You're an association that organizes events? Hi, welcome, I'm Marinella. [...] As I said at the beginning, I'm here this evening to meet people who might like to be involved in the activities that will take place in and around the Castello di Rivoli as part of the show we are organizing at the museum in the months ahead. And you, what are your names?"

Reflecting on the art of Marinella Senatore means examining a diverse body of work that includes film, video, photography, sound, installation, drawing, and collage, but also writing seminars, dance sessions and workshops on a wide range of subjects. In addition to this variety of languages and techniques, each of the artist's projects must also be analyzed from a broader angle that includes the context and modes of production that are employed, starting, at least conceptually, from her many conversations and interactions with the people she encounters, because it is on these forms of participatory synergy that the very existence of Senatore's works is based.

As she has said more than once in talking about her method, Senatore sees her role as an artist as one of "catalyzing processes" and thinks of the public not as an audience of viewers, but as an assortment of active, creative subjects, each with his or her own story, skills and interests. "Each time, you start from scratch," says the artist. "Each project requires you to meet new people. With each conversation, people talk about themselves, suggest things, ask questions, argue for or against their potential participation. I use the term 'participant' in the sense that to me, these people really have 'a part' in it. If that part is missing, the overall result will not be the same. That's the concept of participation as I see it".

Senatore knows she is working in a realm tied to "participatory art", and shares with other contemporary artists an

¹ These conversations, presented here in a slightly edited form, come from the meetings that were held at Castello di Rivoli Museum of Contemporary Art for several months, starting on July 3, 2013, in preparation for the solo exhibition "Marinella Senatore: Costruire Comunità / Building Communities" (October 5, 2013 – February 6, 2014). Supported by the Amici Sostenitori of the Castello di Rivoli, the exhibition marked the 2013 edition of the Castello di Rivoli Fellowship for Young Italian Artists, won by Marinella Senatore.

urgent desire to radically reinvent the traditional roles of artist and audience, finding new modes of artistic production and interaction between art and the real world. Like other artists, Senatore is heir to a significant line of forerunners that stretches from the relational art of the Nineties all the way back to the early avant-gardes, especially the Dadaist currents of 1920s Paris.² Still, before looking at her art-historical roots and possible similarities or differences in relation to some contemporaries, I think a comprehensive examination of Senatore's career, as this essay hopes to provide,

Interno Notte, 2003
Installation: wall, drawing, wood, 2 Fresnel lamps 650 W and 300 W, mixed media
Dimensions determined by the space
Courtesy T293, Naples / Rome and the artist



might begin by emphasizing the close relationship between her academic and professional training and her later artistic choices. The artist's recollections highlight a specific familiarity with spheres of work featuring a choral, collective aspect, like the structure of an orchestra or the production machine involved in filmmaking. "I studied at the conservatory, where I got my violin degree, learning to understand sound as the product of the orchestra's work," she recalls. "My family made huge sacrifices to allow my sisters and me to study," explains Senatore. "Music was a great learning experience, but my dream was cinema, that magical blend of different talents that leads to the creation of a movie. I worked very hard, and after studying at the academy, in 1999 I passed the entrance exams for the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome. Once I started, it was even harder. I studied under Giuseppe Rotunno, Italy's wizard of light. I learned so much, but every day was like survival training. I got my degree with him, in cinematography".

² For a history of participatory art, see Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, London: Verso, 2012.

A rapid look at her early work shows the strong influence that studying the language of film initially had on Senatore's imagination. Presented for her first solo exhibition in Naples in 2003, *Interno Notte (Campo, contro-campo)* (Interior Night-Shot, Reverse Shot), takes the form of two environments that one moves through as if transitioning between frames in a movie. In the photographic series *Places*, 2004, modulated artificial light is used to create a series of domestic settings, yielding potential references to different places around the world. On the other hand, *Memeland*, 2005, *16°*, 2007 and *Settings*, 2008, are installations where the scenic elements evoke more complex narrative ideas. These experiments highlight Senatore's growing technical skill with the controlled use of light as a factor in presenting the experience of a place, time, or situation. Taken as a whole, these early works suggest hypothetical film sets where it seems like the action is about to begin, stages that are still silent, but ready for the actors to arrive.

Places - Germany
2005
Lambda Print on Dibond
50 x 70 cm
Courtesy the artist



In 2006, the invitation to take part in an exhibition at Trento's Galleria Civica, appropriately focused on the theme of cinema, offered an opportunity for the first actors to appear. Senatore came up with the idea of making a video in the form of a musical, whose soundtrack and lyrics she wrote. The starting point was the figure of Wilson A. Bentley, an eccentric American scientist whose story fascinated Senatore – starting with his choice to study the structure of snowflakes, due to a heavy snowfall on the very day his parents gave him his first microscope. By publishing ads in local papers, Senatore recruited her actors: non-professional volunteers of various backgrounds, ages and ethnicities, like most participants she would work with in the years that

followed. The resulting video, *All the Things I Need*, stresses the idea of coincidence, also addressed by Senatore in her early work *I'll Never Die*, a two-channel video installation made in 2003. Both works thus hinted at the lucky synchrony of places, events and people that would underlie later participatory projects, what Senatore sees as “fertile poetic relationships”. *All the Things I Need* was shot inside the Trento museum during normal opening hours, so that the production would be visible to the public.

The need to open up her projects even further to other people's involvement, sharing the creative decisions as well, emerged in her later *Manuale per i viaggiatori* (Travelers' Handbook) created in 2007 for the project room of Madre in Naples. “I wanted to get the immediate area engaged in it as much as possible. The neighborhoods around Madre are a place teeming with life,” the artist recalls. In addition to putting ads in local and national papers as she had in Trento, to find potential participants Senatore relied in this case on handing out leaflets and on pragmatic “word-of-mouth” operations. The project unfolded as a series of workshops in which Senatore interacted with hundreds of people who lived nearby, attracting art enthusiasts, curious residents, and students from the city's art academy. In a series of sessions grounded in both theory and practice, Senatore explored

I'll Never Die, 2003
Video still
Private Collection
Courtesy
MOTInternational,
London / Brussels
and the artist



some of the main stages in the production of a film (screenwriting, set design, cinematography, costuming, sound). The artist recorded these meetings, and in each of them, encouraged participants to produce their own additional visual

and audio material. With the students, she also created a set that took the shape of a wood and fabric structure, inspired by the traveling cinemas that were used in many parts of Italy before the advent of movie theaters, but equipped with a permanently active webcam hooked up to the museum's website. The structure was used for auditions, shooting, and screening, and intentionally left open to other future uses. Over the course of these various workshops, Senatore and the participants decided that the project would be a work in progress, which can come up with different solutions for every exhibition. Using a digital blog, the most recent incarnation of the project, subtitled *Versione cinemobile* (Mobile Cinema Version) and made for the Castello di Rivoli exhibition “Marinella Senatore: Costruire Comunità / Building Communities” in 2013, involved, for example, recreating the set with video projections and a selection of soundtracks that can be activated by each visitor, using analogue devices to hear the recordings made in Naples.

The concept of learning has played a key role in the evolution of Senatore's method. At the level of theory, the artist recognizes the influence of philosopher Jacques Rancière, particularly *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*.³ From this book, which borrows in turn from the innovative educational ideas of Joseph Jacotot, Senatore has drawn the conviction – a bit utopian, yet positively engaging – that we can all learn from each other, and that a teacher must first and foremost create the conditions for people to teach themselves, working as an interactive figure who puts each student in a position to cultivate his or her potential. As Rancière notes, “the schoolmaster Jacotot teaches us the art of distance, that is, the art of stepping back, and encouraging the other person's subjective and intellectual power to emerge”.⁴ In practical terms, Senatore also built up experience as an educator from 2006 to 2011, teaching audiovisual language, screenwriting and photography, respectively at Complutense University in Madrid and at the University of Castilla-La Mancha, and honing her skills at working with large groups of people. Continuing her artistic path alongside her teaching activities, Senatore brought her students in on several projects, the most emblematic of which is *Speak Easy*, made in 2009. Like *All the Things I Need*, the final format is that of a video musical. For the first time, the story was fully

3 Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991.

4 Alain Goussot, “Joseph Jacotot e la pedagogia del maestro ignorante”, in *Educazione Democratica*, vol. IV, no. 8, June 2014, p. 205.

developed by the participants themselves, growing out of the working method that was adopted. At Senatore's urging, the students looked in turn for other participants, and wanting to break out of the university enclave of Madrid, found them in nearby Leganés, where they entered into contact with local associations of retirees. The memories of the people they encountered and their stories about episodes from the past thus became the inspiration for *Speak Easy*. Set in 1950s New York, the video features multiple overlapping plotlines that intentionally cite narrative clichés, including a happy ending with pies to the face. In addition to writing the screenplay, the participants were also actively involved

Costruire Comunità / Building Communities
2013-2014
Installation view at Castello di Rivoli, Turin (I)
Photo: Renato Ghiazza



in various aspects of the production, from building the sets to sewing the costumes, and even the original fundraising campaign "1€ PARA SER PRODUCTOR" ("€1 to be a producer") for which volunteers publicly presented the project in various places in and around Madrid, collecting the money needed to produce the work.

By pooling the energies of students from Madrid and older residents of Leganés and creating an unusual group of participants/funders, in a kind of synergy that linked together different generations, center and outskirts, conception and production, *Speak Easy* established an important paradigm for Senatore's development. With this work, the artist demonstrates her ability to interact with more than one context, moving in multiple ways so that the artistic project fosters interaction and social exchange, but also grows out of it. The dynamic governing these exchanges is neither accidental nor imposed, and the search for this complex balance is one of the tasks that the artist assigns herself, keeping

Rancière's lesson about "ignorance" and "distance" firmly in mind. To this end, Senatore says that she always shifts her position "outside and inside" the work, in a controlled alternation.

The School of Narrative Dance: *Piccolo Caos / Little Chaos*, 2013
Production still
Courtesy the artist



Significant in this respect is the project that culminated in making the video *Nui Simu* ("That's Us", in Sicilian dialect). Invited by Palermo's Museo Riso to produce a new work, in 2010 the artist chose to visit the town of Enna, in the center of Sicily, since she was interested in meeting some of its former miners, whose work in the "zolfatare" (sulfur mines) had been the core of the local economy until the Seventies. "I began with extensive research, gathering information and moving to the place, an approach I would follow in later projects as well," the artist explains. "I was interested in the miners," she continues, "because of their avowed ability to band together, to organize their working lives through groups similar to *società operaie* (workers' mutual aid societies) and produce a sort of ongoing oral history through these structures". When she got to Enna, Senatore spread the word that she was looking for people to participate in a film project – stating explicitly that the plot had yet to be developed. She organized meetings in the form of screen tests, meeting retired workers who, in many cases, reminisced about their lives and the harsh experience of the mine that for quite a few had been their only form of schooling. Aided by the artist herself and by the art students from the University of Catania, the miners thus became the authors – "the true screenwriters," Senatore explains – of several parts of the resulting film project. Younger inhabitants of Enna contributed in various ways, and the volunteer effort included taxi

drivers who offered transportation, beauty schools that provided hairstyling, and local restaurants that donated meals.

Shot predominantly in yellow tones with smoke-like effects, *Nui simu* does not fall into the snare of neorealism, but rather presents itself as an elaborate semiotic construct whose structure reflects the idea of a “text within a text” or rather, in this case, a “film within a film”. Though it features a series of scenes based on the miners’ stories, for the first time in the artist’s work, the video also includes sequences about the process of its making, with sections that record the search for participants, the various meetings and conversations that took place, and Senatore’s presence both “inside and outside” the project. In the development of the artist’s work, *Nui simu* also exemplifies the method of reversal that she uses with certain conventions of the entertainment industry, like auditions, which rather than being a stringent mechanism of selection and exclusion, become a joyful form of inclusion, allowing the artist to get potential participants involved even at their very first encounter.

In Senatore’s work, the notion of writing holds a role of growing importance. In addition to the specific form of the screenplay, it has gradually become a kind of choral storytelling through which various groups or communities paint a portrait of themselves. If considered in chronological sequence, *Manuale per i viaggiatori*, *Speak Easy* and *Nui simu* highlight the evolution of this format. As noted earlier, Rancière’s influence is fundamental in this respect: by focusing on the values of self-teaching and independent learning, the artist bolsters an awareness that her role includes the possibility of putting other people in a position to write and tell their stories, whatever their level of education. Recognizing that the concept of writing has a connotation potentially linked to discrimination and social exclusion, Senatore reverses its meaning, employing it instead as an element of inclusion and unification.

This approach is also at work in the projects Senatore made over the course of several residencies in the United States, between 2009 and 2011. While in *How Do U Kill the Chemist?*, 2009, the video presents a story that unfolds through the words of a close-knit group of rappers, in *Variations*, 2011, the artist broadens the scenario, bringing together the residents of a very ethnically and culturally diverse urban neighborhood. This project grew out of the Festival of New Ideas at the New Museum in New York. Once again, Senatore started off from a cinematic model and began looking for participants, proposing that they make



The School of Narrative Dance, Rivoli, 2013
Installation view at Castello di Rivoli, Turin (I). Private Collection
Photo: Renato Ghiazza



Rosas: *Opera in 3 Acts*, 2012
Installation view at Castello di Rivoli, Turin (I). Collection Castello di Rivoli, Turin (I)
Courtesy Peres Projects, Berlin; MOTInternational, London / Brussels and the artist
Photo: Renato Ghiazza



a movie “about the neighborhood”, but with its content open to the creative input of the participants. The artist literally knocked on the doors of many people in the area, managing to get hundreds involved. She held numerous auditions, meeting with the potential actors, screenwriters, and other amateur or sometimes professional volunteers who wanted to lend a hand as storyboarders, makeup artists, camera operators, etc. These encounters, like the work sessions, took place in the auditorium of the museum, which was just down the street from where everyone lived, but whose elegant threshold many participants had never crossed. The plot of the film, Senatore emphasized at each meeting, would be “written by you, the participants”. “People from a wide range of cultural backgrounds all came together at the New Museum,” she recalls. “The residents of the area are Latino, white, African American. The variety of professional skills and interests was remarkable. Over a hundred people volunteered to be writers, for instance, and there were intense debates about what the characteristics of the main characters should be. Despite the innumerable possibilities, the participants gradually managed to agree on things and find a narrative throughline”. The project was brought to completion, and the final video uses tight editing to juxtapose the stories contributed by the participants with the various stages that marked out the production.

Conscious of working in an environment like the Lower East Side, where the process of gentrification – spurred in part by the presence of the museum building designed by the Japanese firm of Kazuyo Sejima + Ryue Nishizawa / SANAA – is in full swing, Senatore seems to employ another mechanism of reversal in *Variations*, creating the conditions for turning that very museum into a platform for the voices of area residents, including the long-term ones who are primarily suffering from the changes underway. Another instance of using a contemporary art institution as a sphere for “giving a voice back” to people from different contexts can be found in *Estman Radio Drama*, produced in 2011. Invited to take part in “Illuminations”, the 54th Venice Biennale, Senatore decided to focus on nearby Porto Marghera, the historic hub of the Italian petrochemical industry and a breeding ground for some of the country’s most significant labor rights campaigns. With the involvement of local residents, including current and retired workers, as well as students from the Venetian universities IUAV and Ca’ Foscari, the artist organized meetings, debates, and sessions focusing on the social history of the area. The themes addressed were inspired by records from the “Augusto Finzi” labor archive

at Marghera's historical documentation center, comprising flyers, factory newspapers, posters, typewritten documents and copies of court proceedings related to the struggles at local factories from 1950 on, including their painful judicial repercussions for some activists.

In *Estman Radio Drama* – the title *Estman* refers to an itinerant theater company that traveled through Spain's northern mining towns in the early 1900s – Senatore leaves behind for the first time the cinematic model that structured her previous works. Taking up the strategy of workers who have improvised radio stations in factories since the Sixties, she developed the project as a radio drama, hoping it would reach more people than the contemporary art video circuit. The many overlapping personal memories, like the letters by Finzi, the recollections of Gianni Sbrogiò and those of the protagonists themselves (in the Italian version⁵) keep the work from sliding into rhetoric. Alongside sequences describing the everyday experience of working with toxic substances, in precarious safety conditions and under an almost military hierarchy, the radio drama weaves the story of how many workers, undertaking a personal path of study and cultural enrichment, joined together to develop autonomous forms of organization, turning the petrol hub of Porto Marghera into an active political and social testing ground. Achieving her goal of reaching a different audience from the one found at the Biennale, Senatore managed to get many radio stations in Italy and abroad to broadcast the work daily over the course of the exhibition.

In Senatore's method, the "inside and outside" mentioned earlier does not therefore seem to describe just the artist's position during the various stages of the project, but her intention to work both inside and outside of the contemporary art system itself. Sidestepping its conventions and restrictions, the artist uses the tools of inclusion and collaboration to arrive at seemingly impossible results. The method that led to the creation of *Rosas*, her largest participatory project to date, is a good example. In 2012, Senatore responded to invitations from Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin, QUAD in Derby, and Matadero in Madrid by connecting the three institutions as a network, bringing together the many possibilities offered to her – which included a residency, the production of a new work, and a solo exhibition – and channeling them

⁵ The involvement of students from the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama in Glasgow allowed an English version of the audio to be made, in which all the characters are played by young actors.

in a direction and at a scale hitherto unheard of even for her, to reach the impressive figure of over 20,000 participants. For the initial stage in Berlin, Senatore applied the method she had tested in previous works and turned her residency into a packed calendar of appointments, during which she met with many local associations and private citizens. Her many conversations guided her towards the idea of proposing the production of an opera, but for the screen, whose libretto would be written by the participants themselves. The division of tasks is another aspect that the artist leaves up to the participants: "According to their interests, skills, or motivations, people volunteered as dancers, costumers, makeup artists, camera operators, writers or musicians. In Berlin, lots of them wanted to write. It's an aspect that seems to keep growing in my work".

Rosas: Opera in 3 Acts, 2012
Installation view at Castello di Rivoli, Turin (I)
Coll. Castello di Rivoli, Turin (I)
Courtesy Peres Projects, Berlin; MOTInternational, London / Brussels and the artist
Photo: Renato Ghiazza



Divided into three acts, *Perfect Lives*, *The Attic*, and *Public Opinion Descends upon the Demonstrators*, *Rosas* is built around the processes that characterized it in Berlin, Derby, and Madrid. The first act, *Perfect Lives*, is set in an imaginary Berlin of the Seventies, where the sudden spread of an epidemic leads the four main characters to realize that their survival depends on their capacity to collaborate. Shot in Derby, England, the second act, *The Attic*, is instead set in the attic of an old local school, whose impending demolition accelerates the jumbled accumulation of memories that unite or divide the various characters, with intense pathos. Shot in Madrid, *Public Opinion Descends upon the Demonstrators* is the third and final act. Here the story takes place in the Sixties, with a group of revolutionaries in an unspecified country who, due to a natural catastrophe, suddenly find themselves cut off from any possible contact

with the outside world. Those watching the opera for the first time immediately discover that in each of the three acts, the broader plot described above constantly branches into multiple narrative and temporal planes, in which the many scenes of development and rehearsal take on even more importance than the scenes of enacted fiction.

**Rosas: Movie Set
2012
Installation view at
Castello di Rivoli,
Turin (I)
Courtesy Peres
Projects, Berlin
Photo: Renato
Ghiazza**



Redeveloping the construct of a “film within a film”, *Rosas* takes it to a highly experiential level and envelops viewers in a walk-through installation, with three screen projections and numerous monitors placed around the exhibition space to form a complex symphony of sounds and images. In documenting its own production, the work also highlights the multiple linguistic and cultural communities of the participants, through the presence of German, English, and Spanish, as well as British Sign Language and Spanish Sign Language, which are the natural languages of several groups taking part. The remarkable number of people involved rose in an organic crescendo over the process of working on the project. “With the participants in *Rosas*,” the artist significantly recalls, “there was a very strong relationship of mutual trust. As in all my projects, I’m the person responsible for safeguarding the full dignity of each participant. That’s a responsibility I think I must in all conscience assume, each time”.

The many meetings organized by Senatore in Berlin, through networks of local associations and free newspapers (entering into contact with dancers, amateur actors, orchestras of former public transit workers, and others) were expanded by the artist in Derby and then in Madrid. In order to reach a broader number of people, the artist responded to the different contexts she encountered. Visiting a significant variety

of places and non-places, in England she looked for participants at schools, libraries, social centers, shopping centers, and rugby stadiums, while in Spain, in addition to using social networks like Facebook and Twitter, she relied on handing out flyers, or even word-of-mouth. Setting in motion an intense circulation of energy, ideas, and people, the artist also organized training workshops for all participants, offering – obviously free of charge – specific courses in technical subjects like music for the cinema, stage movement, editing, direction, screenwriting. At each stage of producing *Rosas*, Senatore contributed her knowledge (her expertise in music and filmmaking techniques, as described before) and created the right conditions for participants to bring their skills and talents to bear. Fueling a fertile alternative economy, she also used part of the budget at her disposal to allow some of the participants (particularly the ones involved with writing the libretto) to travel between the different locations in Germany, England and Spain.

With its nomadic approach, *Rosas* lays a fertile groundwork for the evolution of *The School of Narrative Dance*, the artist’s most recent project. Currently undergoing further development, the school was founded in 2012 as a collaboration between Senatore and ESPZ – the choreographers Nandhan Molinaro and Elisa Zucchetti. As Senatore explains, “the school is aimed at creating alternative forms of storytelling, through the language of the body. Intentionally doing without any fixed location, tuition fees, or division into classes, each time it reinvents its own spaces”. “People can create movement regardless of skill, social background, education, gender, or age”, adds ESPZ. While its use of the term “school” connects this most recent project of Senatore’s to a vibrant tradition of artist schools, it is important to note that *The School of Narrative Dance* is not “for” artists, in the sense that, true to the broader outlook so characteristic of Senatore, it is not meant to target or favor any one category. Moreover, though its most notable precursor might be the Free International University (FIU) for Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research founded by Joseph Beuys in 1972, the name choice highlights the specific emphasis Senatore has placed on the dialogue between narrative and dance. Due to the vision of ESPZ, for whom “the body always preserves the memory of its past”, and the artist’s genuine interest in people and their histories, the school’s mission is centered on the idea of overcoming all barriers and differences, using the body in movement as the key tool for telling stories, including one’s own. Noting Western culture’s tendency to overlook this mode of transmitting knowledge, the school takes a new

“dynamic” and “physical” path that extends the principles established by previous projects, which see storytelling as a unifying, liberating tool through which groups and communities can compose unexpected portraits of themselves.

The school held its first event in Berlin in November 2012, when Senatore and ESPZ organized a parade in the Mitte neighborhood, tapping the energy of local dance troupes, bands, and performers, including some who had already taken part in the German chapter of *Rosas*. Over the course of 2013, later activities took place in Italy, first in Cagliari and then in Rivoli. In 2013 and 2014, the school also worked in other cities and countries, including Malmö, Göteborg, and Stockholm, in Sweden, Cuenca in Ecuador, St. Gallen in Switzerland, and Santa Barbara in California. At the time of writing, the school is in Rome, at the museum MAXXI. In each location, the school has invented its own spaces and undergone various mutations in response to the local contexts. In Cagliari, for instance, Senatore worked with the inhabitants of Sant’Elia, a neighborhood where crime, unemployment, and a low level of schooling exist alongside many associations, especially women’s groups, that fight for the health of their community. Here, Senatore and the choreographers of ESPZ got participants involved in a process of self-education, including the development of the play *Piccolo Caos*. In Sweden, the school instead engaged local activists and political refugees, triggering a narrative exchange in which the memories of people forced to flee from war encountered the actions of people aware they live in a rich, peaceful nation, but with a flourishing military industry.

**Rosas: Movie Set
2012
Production still
Courtesy the artist**



For the solo exhibition “Marinella Senatore: Costruire Comunità / Building Communities” at the Castello di Rivoli, the school became the initial step in the visitor’s path

through the show. Entering into dialogue with the spaces in the Manica Lunga section of the Castello, where it was held, the school’s project occupied a large area, rendered tangible by a big vinyl dance mat on the ground. Surrounded by six monitors with as many videos, “tutorials” that showed brief choreographic sequences, this dance mat was made available to the public, so that anyone could book and use it during the opening hours of the museum for recitals, per-

**Costruire Comunità –
La Parata
(Building
Communities – The
Parade)
24 November 2013
Production
photograph
Coll. Castello di
Rivoli, Turin (I)
Courtesy
MOTInternational
London / Brussels
and the artist
Photo: Andrea
Guermani**



formances, talks or rehearsal sessions. In addition to the space offered by *The School of Narrative Dance* and by the major projects discussed in the previous pages, the exhibition included *Movie Set*, 2012, and *Variations – Laboratorio di Scrittura Creativa*, 2010-2013, two other projects stemming from previous works by Senatore (respectively, *Rosas* and *Variations*, also in the exhibition) which became independent situations, reformulated as areas open to active participation by the public. While *Movie Set* offered the chance to use a true set, with mirrors, film lighting and a professional video camera to stage photographs or spontaneous performance sessions, the screening of the video *Variations* outlined the operating context of the *Laboratorio di Scrittura Creativa* (Creative Writing Workshop), a project that involved the Scuola Holden creative writing school in Turin, as well as individuals, groups, and local associations such as the Amici del Villaggio Leumann cited at the beginning of this essay.

In 2012 and 2013, the task of preparing the artist’s solo exhibition at the Castello yielded most of the comments I have made so far on Senatore’s work. Although it is not easy to analyze an exhibition one has curated, I believe further

considerations about the show – Marinella Senatore’s first mid-career retrospective – may provide insights about Senatore’s process, if one wants, for instance, to look at it in the museum context and within the current debate about the shifting relationship between institutions and audiences. From a curatorial standpoint, one of the first questions I asked myself had to do with the possibility of extending, at the exhibition level, the chance to experience both the works and the artist’s methods. In dealing with Senatore’s art, I wanted to avoid the paradox of relegating visitors to a passive position. Instead, it was a question of developing a project as “transparent” as possible, just like the structure of Senatore’s works, making it possible for viewers to “teach themselves” about the salient characteristics of her work, and witness their engaging potential first-hand. In agreement with the artist, the exhibition concept therefore focused on a selection of her participatory projects made since 2006 and on works to be activated by the public, juxtaposing her “finished” works with the aforementioned “open” platforms – *The School of Narrative Dance*, *Movie Set*, *Laboratorio di scrittura creativa*. As part of *The School of Narrative Dance*, the exhibition project also included from its inception the plan for a public parade to be organized outside the museum walls.

As a whole, the exhibition project has posed more than one challenge to the conventions that still hold sway within the museum system, and despite an apparent simplicity, nevertheless dictate its conventional language, like the prime importance placed on the opening day, or the key role of the exhibition checklist in the promotion of the show. The ritual of the opening was avoided, for instance, by organizing a series of public auditions (where the encounters quoted at the beginning of this essay took place), with the artist working at the museum even before the installation days. On these occasions, Senatore began to present the exhibition as a work-in-progress, devoting less discussion to the works that would be displayed and more to the parade being organized and the platforms integrated into the exhibition. The show itself therefore became a kind of “production center” that generated other creative situations, bringing into the museum a variety of cultural expressions often shut out of the contemporary debate. During the four months that the show was open, participants included amateurs and professionals of all ages who brought their voices into the museum individually or as members of local associations. This broad, diverse list includes students, teachers, dancers, musicians, actors, performers, and artists, as well

as cultural, multiethnic and socially active organizations.⁶ Each participant entered into a dialogue with the artist, in some cases developing independent projects, and in others working in close contact with Senatore, in a proliferation of signifiers and signifieds that deserve to be explored in later studies. Within the scope of this essay, I believe this fertile proliferation of meaning can perhaps be summed up by

**Costruire Comunità /
Building
Communities
2013-2014
Installation view at
Castello di Rivoli,
Turin (I)
Courtesy the artist**



the parade. Orchestrated by the artist and choreographed by ESPZ, it was a special one-day event, a public action in the urban sphere which strengthened the link between the Castello and the surrounding area, stretching through the historic part of Rivoli to culminate in a friendly invasion of the museum plaza, and forging a diverse community that brought together thousands of people.⁷

“The art historian must therefore, in greater depth than we have seen to date, attempt to reconstruct these events that mustered the labor of architects, painters, and sculptors, but also an army of master builders and plasterers, silversmiths and engineers, pyrotechnicians and hydrotechnicians, inventors of emblems and allegories, masters of arms and pastry-makers, woodworkers and blacksmiths, tailors and embroiderers”, wrote Maurizio Fagiolo dell’Arco, in one of his seminal

6 The participation calendar was coordinated at the Castello di Rivoli by Valentina Sonzogni who, along with the Castello’s educational department also aided the artist in her local research. Posted on the museum’s website, the calendar was constantly updated throughout the run of the exhibition. The method that was adopted enabled each potential participant to talk directly to the artist and establish the terms of his or her collaboration, working out a schedule for it with the museum.

7 The parade was held on November 24, 2013. Organized by Castello di Rivoli Museo d’Arte Contemporanea, the event was sponsored by the municipality of Rivoli.

investigations into the ephemeral structures of Baroque culture, alluding to the fertile fusion of the arts that characterized the great public celebrations of seventeenth-century Rome.⁸ As has been rightly noted, Senatore uses models that can be linked to the artistic tradition of the *fiesta*⁹ and related forms of “ephemeral” art, and it is perhaps a lucky coincidence – the kind the artist has cultivated from the beginning of her career – that the parade in Rivoli, the largest Senatore has organized to date, took place in the setting of the Castello, a significant example of the Baroque genius of Filippo Juvarra. With a little adaptation, Fagiolo’s list could be seen as prefiguring the participants in Senatore’s Rivoli parade, which combined the sundry creative forces of bands, choirs, majorettes, sporting associations and biker clubs, history and folklore groups, actors, and theater and dance enthusiasts.¹⁰ Still, it is obvious that rather than celebrating a dynastic, religious, military, ethnic or political power, like the festive pageants of yore, Senatore adopts this model to convey a myriad of different creative microcosms, not dissimilar to the ones that traditionally made up its social fabric, but in a subordinate manner. One should emphasize that quite unlike those stately parades, but also unlike contemporary projects of other kinds, the people taking part in Senatore’s parade were not following any guidelines from the artist in the sense of directions or tasks to perform. Rather, as in Senatore’s other works, they agreed to take part in ways that reflected their own enthusiasms, inclinations and capabilities. As one also sees from the related film project *La parata – il video*, what grew out of this “relationship of mutual trust”, which Senatore feels is fundamental to the success of each project, was above all an original “staging” of themselves as members of a unique cultural community.

Inclusive, expansive, visionary, perhaps slightly utopian, but contagiously constructive and cheerful: I think the essence of Marinella Senatore’s art truly lies in the artist’s capacity to help forge new, unique communities on each occasion, re-envisioning the potential of art as a powerful agent for exchange, connection, and cultural growth. *Costruire comunità / Building Communities*, the title I suggested for the show from the outset, intentionally alludes to the various meanings of the word community – a topic of fertile debate

8 Maurizio Fagiolo dell’Arco, *La festa barocca: Corpus delle feste a Roma*, Rome: Edizioni De Luca, 1997.

9 See, on this point, Stefan Heindenreich’s essay “Rosas” (Berlin: Peres Projects, 2012), and, on the meaning of the “popular” celebration, Marco Scotini’s “The Role of Extras. The Social Theater of Marinella Senatore”, in this volume.

10 For a full list of participation, see *La Parata – il video*, shot by the artist on the day of the parade and made with the support of Film Commission Torino Piemonte.

in contemporary philosophy – and seemed to me like the most direct way to sum up the alchemy of the artist’s actions and the resulting reactions. Possibly even responding to inner needs of the participants, in each project Senatore reinforces precious human bonds.¹¹ I would like to conclude by quoting Zygmunt Bauman who, with his usual clarity, has outlined more than others the positive meaning of the term “community” in the contemporary Western world: “Words have meanings: some words, however, also have a ‘feel’. The word ‘community’ is one of them. It feels good: whatever the word ‘community’ may mean, it is good ‘to have a community’, ‘to be in a community’. (...) For us in particular – who happen to live in ruthless times, times of competitions and one-upmanship (...) – the word ‘community sounds sweet. What the word evokes is everything we miss and what we lack to be secure, confident and trusting. In short, ‘community’ stands for the kind of world which is not, regrettably, available to us – but which we would dearly wish to inhabit and which we hope to repossess”.¹²

Building Communities, 2014
Installation view
at Museum of Contemporary Art,
Santa Barbara (CA)
Courtesy the artist



11 In the context of current philosophical discourse, with his 1983 essay *La communauté désœuvrée*, Jean-Luc Nancy renewed the debate about the concept of community. The direct response of Maurice Blanchot, with *La Communauté inavouable* (1984), all the way to Giorgio Agamben with *La comunità che viene* (1990) and then Paolo Virno and Roberto Esposito, just to name a few Italian examples, opened up the discussion to touch on key issues, including the role of philosophy itself within the current historical and political context. Since the Nineties, the increasing use on the web of the word “community” seems to be direct proof of how the concept has spread at multiple levels.

12 Zygmunt Bauman, *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*, London: Polity Press, 2001, pp. 1-3.