



*Sets for La fantastica storia di Don Chisciotte della Mancia e del suo scudiero Sancho Panza, inventata da Cervantes, ricostruita e rappresentata in uno studio televisivo da una compagnia di attori e musicisti con Ronzinante e l'Asino, animali veri*  
by Roberto Lerici, 1970

Directed by Carlo Quartucci, music by Giorgio Gaslini, produced by RAI Radiotelevisione Italiana.

Television play in five episodes, RAI Radiotelevisione Italiana, aired nationally, first episode on 10 April 1970.

Presented as a videoinstallation in Erice at the Salerniana, 20 and 21 December 1985, and at the Auditorium S. Giovanni, 15 September 1987.

Aired on television by RAI 5 (daytime-afternoon) and by RAI Play from 15 to 19 February 2021.

In 1971 Paolini was awarded the Telecamera d'oro (Golden Camera) for the set designs for this play.

“The story told by Cervantes is reconstructed in a television studio by a company of actors and musicians. Paolini chooses to use a variety of media for his sets (for instance, wooden planks, old and used books, and so on) and with these materials assembles makeshift scaffolding” (A. Mammì, *Giulio Paolini. La Casa di Lucrezio*, exhibition catalogue, Spoleto, Palazzo Rosari Spada [Casalecchio di Reno: Grafis Edizioni, 1984], p. 70).

“Most of the events portrayed take place in the RAI television studio in Naples, but some of the scenes also take place outside on the street or in the nearby parking area. [...] The sound is live, so that the voices of the actors overlap with the noise of the traffic, the passers-by and the jazz music improvised by a trio of musicians that carefully follow all of the movements of the actors inside the studios as well as on the street. From a visual standpoint, sixteenth-century costumes and styles commingle with parked cars, the paved road, the microphones and the movie cameras, and thus deliberately shown to be an integral part of the performance” (A. Peres, “*Per il teatro*” e “*con il teatro*”. *Collaborazioni e contaminazioni teatrali in alcuni artisti italiani (1967-1977)*), thesis presented for a graduate degree in Art History and Criticism, University of Milan, 2007-08, p. 142).

“*Cyril*: ‘The fantastic story of Don Quixote of La Mancha and his groom, Sancho Panza, invented by Cervantes, reconstructed and performed in a television studio by a company of actors and musicians with Rocinante and a donkey, as real animals, by Roberto Lerici. Directed by Carlo Quartucci, music by Giorgio Gaslini, set designs by Giulio Paolini.’

*Vivian*: You mean, Paolini the painter?





*Cyril:* No, the sculptor. I mean, yes, the painter. The last work he showed was a sculpture, but...

*Vivian:* I didn't see it.

*Cyril:* What?

*Vivian:* The set design.

*Cyril:* Ah, this is precisely what we need to talk about. Or rather, instead of discussing Paolini, Hitchcock or Buñuel, we'll talk about television set design in general, seeing that this conversation of ours is going to be published in the *RAI magazine* (Rivista RAI).

*Vivian:* Hitchcock, Buñuel?

*Cyril:* Actually, you'll be the one to mention them, not I.

*Vivian:* Let's proceed in orderly fashion. I must confess that in certain works by Paolini, I've found that there's no truly visual information, so it's hard for me to imagine how he came up with a set design.

*Cyril:* To be truthful, the impression is that the set design almost doesn't exist. The performance's various situations, shot in the studios of the production centre in Naples (including some of the service areas, such as corridors, workshops, parking areas, etc.) are presented by way of images, where it's difficult, and sometimes impossible, to distinguish between the work of the set designer and that of the operator or the director. The set design is identified in the real space of the surroundings: Paolini limited himself, or perhaps we should say forced himself, to emphasize the emotional and physical aspects of the story.

*Vivian:* Why, then, would he have taken on the challenge of designing the sets?

*Cyril:* Precisely because there is no apparent difference between a picture, the image of which is nothing other than the sign of its own presence, and a scene, which is revealed through the figures of the actors, the crew, the children present while the filming takes place, the materials, the very elements that make it up.

*Vivian:* I find it paradoxical and rash to consider these presences to be scenographic, when they are anything but scenographic.

*Cyril:* I spoke in paradoxical and rash terms, as you say, so as to clarify the way the performance is arranged above all. The truth of the matter is that the set design solutions do exist: 'real' trees (large rolls of paper fringed at the top) completely surround Don Quixote, who is resting in the forest; other trees are drawn by children on movable panels; these same panels are transformed into windmills; the Duke's table is an enormous parallelepiped made up of thousands of books placed side by side.

*Vivian:* You won't deny the fact that the somewhat abstract nature of the work of art is compromised by the narrative scheme, by the necessity for representation.



*Cyril:* If you accept the idea that a painting is not exhausted from the very moment it is conceived, then any work of art is subject to compromises: it's not up to the artist to also determine the public's appreciation.

*Vivian:* Art never expresses anything other than itself. Like thinking, it has an independent life and evolves along its own lines and on those alone. It's not necessarily realistic in a realistic era, nor is it spiritualistic in a spiritualistic one. Far from being the product of an era, it almost always opposes it.

The only story it offers us is the one that concerns its own development.

*Cyril:* Agreed...

*Vivian:* Hitchcock, like Buñuel, has never allowed into his films a single frame where the visual evidence (hence, the set design) was not the most rigorous image (in the sense of the greatest restraint) in the story's implications.

Naturally this premise does not hold true for television or for theatre either.

*Cyril:* Clearly, theatre takes place at a given moment and in a given place; cinema is everywhere and at any moment; television is there, behind the video screen, forever but for moments that are ever-changing.

*Vivian:* In other words, conceiving a television performance is not the same thing as doing theatre or cinema. Not only because the techniques are different and because the images are different, but because of the specific property of the language. If television broadcasts a western or a 'whodunit', it doesn't broadcast a performance of the western genre, or of the mystery genre – in this case the genre of the two performances is the same: cinematographic. If, instead, a performance is produced for television, it cannot be removed from the current situation, from the somewhat (more or less presumed) specific informational immediacy of television language.

*Cyril:* If *Don Quixote* had been written to be performed in theatre it would perhaps have filled the streets of Naples. On television it went beyond the limitations of the studio, it crossed the set design studio, but it did not go past the production centre gates. In cinema, nothing would have prevented [the cast and crew] from running out to the airport and boarding the first plane for Spain, in the midst of nature.

*Vivian:* By the way... nature, twilight, is extraordinarily suggestive and extremely rich in seduction, even if its principal function is perhaps to illustrate the quotations of poets. Let's go! We've said enough" (G. Paolini, "Intenzioni" su *Don Chisciotte*", 1970, revised version of the English translation published in L. Cherubini, "Giulio Paolini / Spettacoli teatrali", in *Sipario. Balla, De Chirico, Savinio, Picasso, Paolini, Cucchi*, exhibition catalogue, Rivoli, Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea [Milan: Edizioni Charta, 1997], p. 257).



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