



Silvia Calderoni: A Techno-Heart Athlete

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The actor is similar to a real physical athlete, but with this surprising corrective: the athletic organism is matched in him by an affective organism, parallel to the other, almost his double although not operating on the same plane. The actor is an athlete of the heart. (Artaud 1958–1997, 133).

Screen performer Silvia Calderoni is characterized by an androgynous body, slender and muscular, an unmistakably feminine voice able to scan crystal-clear diction, pale skin, bleached hair broken up into a leonine mane, a look poised between punk references and street style, fiercely queer. She thus showcases a certain resemblance to the dancer of the Canadian company La La La Humans Steps, Louise Lecavalier, who was the counterpart, in a music video and on several tours, of the androgynous pop par excellence: David Bowie. Calderoni, who is a performer of experimental theatre, a stable member of the Motus Theatre Company, and the winner in 2009 of the Ubu Prize for Best Actress under 30, can spread her presence transversally in various audiovisual environments: experimental and narrative cinema, music video, and fashion film. Calderoni herself declared: “This ambiguity of mine I have always felt. However, I started

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approaching art so young that that kind of ambiguity entered directly into that channel, so I didn't have so much of a problem with respect to my identity. Immediately it dissolved as an issue, it became something that could be used: I could be Ariel, however, I could also be a dog, a plant, be a female, a male" (Calderoni, in Bozzolini 2018). The ambiguity of her body was transformed into ambivalence, into a hyper-tool that can materially conquer the completeness of the alchemical Rebis: the perfect union between the female and male poles. Therefore, it is not a matter of pausing in the balance between the two dimensions, but of being able to cross them all, experiencing an anarchic dimension of the body. The ability to be the synthesis of a double transforms its presence into a vector capable of uniting the physicality of the body with the immateriality of sign, sense, and emotion. One of Motus Theatre Company's directors, Enrico Casagrande, stated: "Silvia has a special gift: the ability to transform ideas into gestures with extreme precision" (Casagrande, in Bozzolini 2018). Not only anarchy then: the concept of the athlete implies the need for training, that is education in precision, which is one of the indelible marks of Calderoni's performance style.

At the same time, always working on the groove of the double, she has built a rather specific and granitic character in her presentation as a "mask", always combed in the same way, dressed more or less in the same style, endowed with an unmistakable gestural expressiveness. Whether on the stage of a theatre, the set of a film, a music video, or a fashion film, she is always Silvia Calderoni. Wherever she is seen, she is an alien "fallen to Earth." For this reason, her voice also works on a consciously anti-realistic acting model, the result of an uprooting of the relationship between character and performer: it is not the tool with which to play a character and identify with it, but to give a plastic form to the word on stage, manifesting its fiction. Her voice seems to come from another world.

Calderoni's first audiovisual appearance was in 2007 in the music video *Musa* (*Muse*) directed by Laura Chiossone for the band Marlene Kuntz. The director chose the "sense-producing" body of Calderoni, who became a kind of urban sprite who distributes kisses with low erotic intensity to various characters ranging from young girls and boys to adult women and men. The kiss to the reflection of herself in a mirror cannot be missed. Indeed, Narcissus is yet another mythological declination of the theme of the double that the figure of Calderoni can effectively evoke. At some points in the music video, Calderoni sings the lyrics of the song in sync and wears a pair of headphones. When she removes them from her

head, the music is lowered in volume. This choice transforms the music video into a narrative structure in which the song track becomes a diegetic element. Calderoni thus becomes the envelope of the music track itself, which is handled by her body and performed as if she were the singer.

In 2012, Calderoni starred in another music video, *When the Day Is Done*, directed by Cosimo Alemà for the band LNRipley. Adopting a pop logic, the director interprets the performer's body as a reference to that hybrid genre that mixes horror and cyberpunk aesthetics. Explicitly inspired by the style of the music videos made by Floria Sigismondi for Marilyn Manson, the performer appears in a man's tank top and black amphibians. The creation of the "Silvia Calderoni mask" begins as such. In the music video's finale, the protagonist performs a long, harrowing disjointed dance, more akin to an epileptic seizure or ritual possession, which becomes one of the most characteristic features of her gestural style. In 2012, Calderoni also starred in a film that quickly became a small cult phenomenon: Davide Manuli's *La leggenda di Kaspar Hauser* (*The Legend of Kaspar Hauser*), a visionary work that mixes surrealism, theatre of the absurd, experimental cinema, fairy-tale atmospheres and references to techno-rave culture. Through the performance of Calderoni, director Davide Manuli transformed the almost mythical figure of a man, Kaspar Hauser, into an "unidentified flying object" that mysteriously comes from the sea to land on the mainland of an unspecified island. Once again: an alien fell to Earth. Consciously or not, this film is a kind of biography-portrait of Calderoni. The director of Motus Theater Company, Daniela Nicolò, recalled: "When Silvia began working with us, she had more experience related to dance and performance, and the first thing she told us was that she did not want to speak on stage and that she wanted to work only with her body" (Nicolò, in Bozzolini 2018). Calderoni appears as a figure wearing only a pair of pants and sneakers and, as in the previously mentioned music video, she has headphones firmly anchored to her ears. After a path of growth following his symbolic birth from the waters of the sea, his body awakens to the rhythm of techno music. The discovery of movement is intrinsically connected to the musical rhythm, to the heartbeat: her body is ritually possessed by the bpm of techno, it is transformed into a primordial musical instrument that assigns, through the breath, the timing of the gesture. "The tempos of the breath have a name taught us by the Cabala; it is these tempos which give the human heart its shape, and the movements of the passions their sex" (Artaud 1958–1997, 134), and as Antonin Artaud explains shortly afterward, the

Cabala divides human breath into six arcana the first of which, that of creation, is precisely the Androgyne. In the second stage of his growth, Kaspar Hauser can do nothing but utter meaningless phonemes, or short phrases repeated without understanding their meaning. All these vocalizations are precisely aligned on a rhythmic base that trains the body until it is almost exhausted. In the film's final sequence, the connection of the body with sound transforms Hauser's body into a music producer, a DJ who turns the island into a giant dancefloor. Calderoni-Hauser's body becomes poetic. This sequence is yet another homage to one of Calderoni's performance activities. Indeed, she makes performances for discotheques and is also a DJ.

The world of cinema conceives Calderoni's presence as an anomaly that can be interpreted in various ways. In 2017, in Francesca Comencini's film *Amori che non sanno stare al mondo* (*Stories of Love That Cannot Belong to This World*), the performer showed up dressed in white and carrying a cane that she used as if it were a conductor's baton, vaguely recalling the uniform of the "droogs" in Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), as he lectures a female audience on how women's age is calculated in the sexual marketplace of the hetero-capitalist system, concluding that in the queer sphere, that kind of calculation cannot work and that therefore lesbian women are freer. Calderoni first appears in the audiovisual world as a "talking creature" declaiming a queer manifesto. Her anti-realistic presence becomes a fragment of theatre wedged into a narrative film structure: the incursion of a counter-voice of thought that overturns clichés, to lucidly dissect this world.

Also in 2017, Calderoni joined the cast of Roberta Torre's super-pop musical, poised between Shakespeare, Ken Russell, and Tim Burton, *Riccardo va all'Inferno* (*Bloody Richard*). The performer is called to play an anomaly of the body that has a disturbingly old iconographic tradition: twins. Thus once again she is cast to play a double. Gemello Mancini is a character played by a tandem of actors: Teodoro Giambanco and Silvia Calderoni. They are brothers, but the male pole is clearly a mirror imitation of Calderoni's "mask."

In 2018, Calderoni appeared for a few but significant minutes in Roberto Andò's film *Una storia senza nome* (*The Stolen Caravaggio*) as a fugitive Mafia boss, Romeo Agate, who, in order to escape from the police, makes the gender transition to become Barbara Fuentes. Metaphorically speaking, gender ambiguity (here plastically represented as a transition from man to woman) becomes the creative tool to conquer

the freedom of the body. In the film, Calderoni is a mute presence, and her acting is structured on gestures and, especially, facial expressions. She is thus substantially a silent film actress. In the final sequence, she is standing on a surfboard towed by a speedboat: she smiles mockingly, like a diva of the past, looking toward the camera, and thus toward the viewer. It is the last mockery of a free body that with anarchic joy mocks authority.

Always in 2018, Calderoni also appeared in the music video *Ed è quasi come essere felice* (*And It Is Almost Like Being Happy*) made by Dandaddy (Daniele Babbo) for songwriter Motta. In this video, the singer is portrayed in two dimensions: an everyday one and a more intimate and dark one, where he is immersed in a black space lit up like a theatre stage. Here, the figure of Calderoni appears as the singer's double. She peeks out from Motta's shoulders, dressed like him, as she performs repeated gestures that resemble a contracted, suffered, angular dance. Indeed, Calderoni was called upon to visualize the singer's inner dimension, the manifestation of his unconscious.

The year 2018 was also the one that marked Calderoni's entry into a new audiovisual genre that blends fashion and moving images: the fashion film. Calderoni became the testimonial of the fluid gender turn that creative director Alessandro Michele imprinted on the Gucci brand. Here, finally, Calderoni was no longer just an anomaly but also became an alternative paradigm of beauty. Chuck Grant directed the fashion film *Gucci Cruise 2018 Campaign: Roman Rhapsody*, in which a variety of characters appear, including Calderoni, who stands out for the situation described by her gestures. Dressed in a garment whose reflective fabric seems almost a metal armor, her body is poised on a chair as if she were to fall at any moment, in a choreographic game that can communicate the conscious funambulism of precariousness.

In 2020, Calderoni was the protagonist of the seven-episode fashion series directed by Gus Van Sant and Alessandro Michele entitled *Overture of Something That Never Happened*. The performer, the only character present in all episodes, becomes the “banner of a cry that is no longer solely about Gender and that accesses—through every possible dissent—the correction of those social stigmata that fail to recognize the various individualities and singularities” (Manca 2021, 87). Of all Calderoni's forays into the audiovisual world, this work is her most authentic portrait. Alessandro Michele stated: “Silvia is an exceptional artist, it would not have been possible to make the series without her. When Gus met her,

he immediately saw in her unique gifts as an interpreter and performer. Silvia brought to the stage many of her own personal idiosyncrasies. We followed, observed and filmed her exactly in her essence” (Michele, in Vertua 2020). In 2020 she also appeared in the first season of Matteo Rovere’s TV series *Romulus*, the second season of which aired in 2022. In this project, where the events of Romulus and Remus are told in a style halfway between the historical reconstruction of the mythological tale and references to Heroic Fantasy literature, Calderoni plays the role of the She-Wolf. Depicted initially as a fantasy animal, the character gradually manifests itself until it becomes Calderoni’s body dressed in a fur cloak and a wolf’s head as a headdress. This is a return to the past for the performer because in the 2005 show *Paesaggio con fratello rotto* with the company Compagnia Teatro Valdoca, directed by Cesare Ronconi, Calderoni wore headdresses depicting animal heads. Once again the performer is called upon to interpret something out of the ordinary, in this case a deity to be feared and worshipped.

In 2021, Calderoni was cast to play the role of the quintessential fantasy character in a cinematic production: the “revenant” or rather, the “overdead.” Indeed, the film is about a young man or woman who dies a violent death and comes back to life hungry for human flesh. In Andrea de Sica’s film *Non mi uccidere (Don’t Kill Me)*, the performer plays Sara, an expert “overdead” who teaches the protagonist the best method to stun victims and feed them before they die. Here, Calderoni, in a tracksuit, is a precise, perfectly trained soldier who with glacial calmness trains the protagonist in “precision of gesture” to become a body designed to be an efficient killer and adept at surviving without being discovered by anyone.

Always in 2021, Calderoni was also among the protagonists of the music video *Penelope* directed by Giulia Achenza for songwriter Rachele Bastregghi. The official title of the music video is *Rachele Bastregghi feat. Silvia Calderoni*, as the performer not only appears in it but is also an integral part of the song, thanks to a short recitative that closes the song with the line “My diversity is my strength.” The theme of the music video is exactly that: the performer, set in an idyllic natural space, accompanied by the female singer and a group of young women dressed in white, performs with her usual contracted, furious, excessive gestures. Yet, what would seem to be an anomaly is accepted by the community of women who transform the natural space into a place of acceptance, almost ritual, of a diversity that becomes a strength.

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