

European Seminar 5 – 8 May 2016

“Youth Cultural Exchanges through Theatre: What are the objectives and what future can they have in a world in crisis?”

Petit Théâtre, Grenoble

Session 3 - General reflection on the function of theatre exchanges for the participant organizations and their leaders.

By Alberto Ferraro, Director of *Iustumo*

My professional growth as a responsible of workshops in an international context is closely linked to my participation, for 10 years now, to the Rencontres.

Everything started in 2008, when I participated to the event as an actor. Fernand Garnier had the idea to ask me to come back the following year as a leader of the Commedia dell'arte and mask workshop.

That gave me the possibility to mature and experiment the pedagogic methodology in an European context as well as the practical and theoretical tools that allowed me to put in practice an idea of theatre that I still broadcast today in the entire Europe.

My participation to the Rencontres year after year has put me in contact with different theatrical realities. The cultural exchange has imposed me the necessity to learn or to improve my knowledge of at least three languages added to my native language: thanks to these years of practice I can now count on a European teaching experience.

Consequently, the European experience that I got, thanks to the collaboration with Créarc, inside the Rencontres, allowed me to elaborate three fundamental axes on which the central idea of my practice of theatrical creation is based .

1. A European vision of theatre and a theatrical education as a tool of cultural exchanges for the development of individual.

In a Europe where the communication between “European individuals” often gives way to economic interests, where the money flow gets over the human dimension and where the economic exchanges represent the only plausible answer to the European concept of the circulation of persons, there is a big need to create a new generation for which the concept of “European” is based on the exchange of cultural concepts, ideas and analysis that can change the society in its basis and prepare the new generations to a collective vision, based, above all, on human interests only.

We can feel the necessity to reinvent a collective education to tolerance, equality and possibility. It is urgent to develop among the new generations the taste of a healthy curiosity, concrete and dynamic that would allow the birth to a new "community ideology" made of aspirations and common needs, rather than social inequalities and "the poor wars" that relegate the human being to the role of a passive spectator of the economic and social devastation created by those who govern us.

In order to do that, we need to reinvent the rules of the social game, we have to give the possibility to the young people of all nationalities and social origins, to meet each other, to confront each other and talk to each other.

Theatre, culture and art in general can and must play a determinant role in the process of reconstruction of the relational dynamics and social values that the new generations need. Thanks to theatre and its practice, we promote a concrete approach to abstract problems, we develop awareness, confidence and self-control. The collective work gives the tools for the understanding of imaginary, of what can't be explained, of everything that is unusual. Thus, the theatre becomes a time of reflexion and discovery of oneself under unconventional shapes.

So the theatrical work appears with all its importance because it offers the opportunity to work, at the same time, on oneself and with others. However this process will be possible only if this discipline is inserted in the educational programme of the European students, in the educational offer of the schools and cultural propositions that the society elaborates for the young people.

Thanks to cultural exchanges, European festivals, international encounters of art and culture, we can give the young the possibility to reinvent the concept of democracy, based on the active participation of the individual who, from the first phase of its "adult" life, can be able to share and communicate its primary interests.

2. The theatre as a political manifest of a possible European cultural revival.

The theatre needs to reappropriate its political function, in the way that it has to carry a message, an exigence that belongs to the **polis**, to the individuals who live in a society, go through its transformations and live through its changes.

In this purpose, the theatrical practice and discipline need to be spread in all classes of the society. They must become a tool of education, a way of thinking at the disposal of the public service, not only in the official cultural centres, isles of happiness for a very small part of intellectuals, but also in different contexts as in educational establishments of all kinds, community youth clubs and arts centres, retirement homes, prisons, disabled centres.

Theatre must go out of "*the scene*" go to suburbs, to the most distant places of the society, to villages and hamlets. It has to confront with the most concrete problems and the most hostile ones that exist in a community and then try to transform the chaos that reigns there into a positive and creative magma.

All this in order to reinvent a new language that could be able to bring other tools for learning, analysis and confrontation that are usually outside the bourgeois concept of theatre as a product that is **seen** and not **lived**. People don't go to theatre anymore because they are not educated by it (ou to it) anymore, because they don't have money, because the society offers more and more simple means, virtual and alienated, allowing people to forget about their daily problems and

personal frustrations. We give ourselves away to a virtual world that isolates and anesthetizes critical spirit and any aspiration to a positive change.

The person who acts must be aware, now more than ever, that he or she has a huge responsibility. The one to create the basis of a collective thought inside which can be expressed a social utopia and a possible cultural revival. The process is long, slow and very exhausting but hoping in a possible cultural resistance is the only way to give back to art its function of an expressive moment that could bring back into life ideas and concrete human requirements.

3. Bring back to Italy the European vision of cultural exchange

After years of practice and theatrical creation abroad, my reflexion has been concerned by the necessity to incarnate the vast and complex experience gained in a project that could take root and above all in my native country.

Association " **lustumo** " was created in the Natural Park of Roman Castles, 30km from Rome. It is a geographical area not far from the capital city, but away from it as far as possibilities and cultural means are concerned : an agglomeration of villages in a marvellous country, rich of potential and resources but in fact abandoned to themselves.

" **lustumo** " has just started its activity. The aim of the association is to become an antenna of the European network inside which I have developed, throughout the years, artistic and at the same time human collaborations. The mission of the association will be to create workshops of theatre, music and expression in a part of territory where the lack of economic means and ideas contribute to create dark peripheries, where feelings contrary to social harmony and intellectual development grow and develop, where boredom reigns, as well as uneasiness, resignation and above all the awareness that, in a society that does not see you, you are useless and cut off the world.

The aim of **lustumo** ' is to create an international festival of arts and artistic education. The place chosen for the event is Monte Compatri, a small medieval village with natural suggestive and unique scenographies. The idea of the festival is based on what I learned on working in the European festivals that welcomed my work. It should be : a festival where young people can confront themselves with those who come from other countries, a moment of sharing and collective creation, an encounter of languages and different ideas, an occasion to imagine a world possible beyond the small realities they think today locking them up.

Here is the synthesis of the elements of my personal and professional development that, for the eight years of experience and education at the Rencontres, have contributed to develop my idea of theatre and acting. I wish I could still be available to this European project and participate to the collective growth of an idea of shared cultural liberty.