

## **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 5 - What are the common values which are at the basis of  
the European cultural exchanges in front of the new totalitarianism:  
capitalism religious fundamentalism, nationalism, xenophobic  
movements...**

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Is it to be naive to believe that Theatre can be a place of resistance facing New  
Totalitarianism?

We can reasonably think that as far as Theatre is concerned, we perform stage left or stage  
right, but we don't play with the big boys”.

Nowadays, the “big ones” perform on television, on cinema screens and find their fame  
online. Facing these new media platforms, that increase everything and anything, our impact  
seems ridiculous. We do not play on equal levels. We can only reproduce, every evening -one  
to one- our theatrical creations, in front of a limited audience.

So then, can Theatre resist those steamrollers that are Mass Media? As spectators, we can  
consummate Mass Media without really “chewing them”, digestion being instantaneous.  
Pictures stream because of their fascinating potential. They get stuck somewhere in our  
cortex and we don't really have the chance to check whether they have left subliminal marks  
on us, or not. The efficiency on controlling our thoughts, influencing people and unifying  
desires is... fearsome. We could expect a collective indigestion but it is rather a collective  
addiction to connected objects that widens and gets generalized

We are promised a *virtual reality*, and that idea can leave us confused. What we see on  
screens or with 3D glasses is certainly an impressive reality. However, but anyway, it remains  
pixelated, fragmented and incomplete. The world that is being sold pushes us little by little  
aside from the real world. Human beings get separated by screens settled between them.  
Soon we will totally be able to survive without the physical presence of other humans, a total  
anomaly, in my humble opinion, to the animal world we belong.

But today we're not totally there yet, and there are three aspects of humanity they are still unable to reproduce: its density, its energy and its smell. Yes, humanity can't have a body but a smell. When spectators see actors in real live, and breathe the same air, they exchange a part of humanity. This proximity tickles our body intelligence as well as our spirit one. To hold on to that genuine, direct, unartificed humanity that would put a distance between us, is essential at that time when humanity asks itself questions about its own survival, when human activities seem to lose all their common sense, and when the human people seem to lose connection between each other.

Nowadays, the media-totalitarianism feeds us with the ready-to-think. With the increasing number of mobile applications, it gives us the illusion of being able to intervene on everything at any moment. But we will principally intervene on what attracts the internet users, on the announcers, on what is commercial, on what entertains us. These massive entertainment weapons make us used to intervene with a click...without any apparent risks. We are given the illusion of a power but it is to enslave and control us better. Don't see in these words a kind of a prosecution speech against new technologies but a serious concern about the upheaval they provoke among the human remains of our social connections.

And if, as I said at the beginning, we don't seem to play in the major league, then we will play in the minor league, with those who are helpless, disinherited, forgotten, deprived of any rank, any voice, those who are revolted, survivors, pirates, men and women of *good will*... That is in fact what the theatre-action companies have decided to defend in Belgium.

*"As long as the lions won't have their own historians, hunting stories will always glorify the hunters"*. In line with this African proverb, we collectively create the theatrical plays that are like us. They always bring a special point of view about the realities we more or less share. By that action we humbly try to build resonances and dissonances.

It is a way for us to resist to the first form of censorship in our so-called democratic societies: self-censorship. This resignation that we progressively acquire and let us think we have nothing very important to say, and therefore, that it is better for specialists to talk: politicians, trade unionists, scientists, philosophers, artists... all those people who are to represent us in one manner or another, all those who are supposed to bring us answers to our existential fears.

We have to say that we are not generally so sure to be well represented. To occupy the stages is a bit like demonstrating in the streets, in order to get back the power we have given to our representatives, and reappropriate speakers' and listeners' spaces. It's also to put up the decor of our questionings to allow answers to germinate. The fertile ground- being fed with our improvisations, discussions, attempts, recoils, excitements, hesitations, doubts, bereavements, enthusiasm, kindness, requirements, challenges, humility, and fears shared with fraternity. The actors and actresses' vulnerability will be transcended by collective energy. We will achieve unanimity on the stage: *unus anima* in Latin... a single breath.

Contrary to an opinion anonymously given on a discussion forum, we will assume our responsibilities as actor/creator of a collective speech that will represent a special point of view about the world that surrounds us. It is usually a critical view that we will defend body

and soul. In order to build this speech, we will pay attention to another form of censorship: consensus. The fear of being displeased could push us to moderate our speech, not to take the risks to go to the conclusion of our "dramaturgical performance". Balance is a difficult exercise, a tension between the will to provoke...a reaction, a shock, the awakening of consciousness...and the fear of being aggressive to some spectators who could not hear us anymore. So, because our performances are often stages in front of those who are similar to us, there is obviously a desire to federate, to unify, to reinforce.

Anyway, those groups of creation, even if they are short-lived for most of them, leave prints we hope unforgettable for participants and spectators. On this point, we of course unite with groups who put up authors' plays or collective creations which do not necessarily deal with society subjects. They are against the current that dominates our society in a very insidious manner, especially in the working and high-level sportive world: competition. This conception which is not from the same humus reinforces all totalitarianisms. But this may be another subject.

Then, if there is a *common practice* as a basis for cultural exchanges, it could be the resistance to what pulls us away from a human dimension, to what seems to get over us. You may notice that I resisted the temptation to mention the *common values*, as it was suggested in the title question, because the words that name them are used to unite as well as to divide since what is common to a group underlines it is different for other ones. I dare hope this *common practice* which has united young people for almost 28 years has transmitted values that are universal.