

XIII Premio Europa pour le Théâtre XIII Europe Theatre Prize



The poster is set against a dark blue background with a collage of theatrical images. At the top left, there is a red-bordered box containing logos for the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and the Wrocław Theatre Festival. To the right are logos for MKiDN (Ministry of Culture and National Heritage), Wrocław, and Instytut Kultury (Institute of Culture). The main title '13th Europe Theatre Prize' is rendered in large, multi-colored, overlapping letters. Below the title, the text reads: '13th Europe Theatre Prize', '13. Europejska Nagroda Teatralna', and 'Krystian Lupa'. Further down, it lists '11th Europe Prize NewTheatrical Realities', '11. Europejska Nagroda "Nowe Rzeczywistości Teatralne"', and names 'Guy Cassiers, Pippo Delbono, Rodrigo Garcia, Árpád Schilling, François Tanguy - Théâtre du Radeau'. At the bottom left, the dates '31st March – 5th April 2009' and '31 marca - 5 kwietnia 2009' are given, along with 'WROCLAW'. At the bottom right is the 'Use Theatrical Europe' logo.

International Seminar for New Theatre Critics

Organised by the International Association of Theatre Critics (IATC), within the 13th Europe Theatre Prize

From March 31 to 6 April, fifteen new theatre critics from all over the world are coming to Wrocław to concern themselves with the works of authors, directors and performers in an **International Seminar for New Theatre Critics**, organised by the International Association of Theatre Critics (IATC), within the programme offered by the 13th Europe Theatre Prize. Among others, the participants stem from Bulgaria, China, Czech Republic, France, Iran, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Sweden. Many of these up-and-coming critics already write for the arts and entertainment sections of newspapers in their home counties or are on their way to careers with daily publications, monthly cultural journals or more specialised theatre journals.

IATC has been organising these International Seminars since 1978, with the support of several host entities and festivals organisations. This International Seminar for New Theatre

Critics will be an occasion not only for informed and demanding discussions of the many theatre productions available during that week, but also for the exchange of experiences and critical perspectives on the theatrical realities of the many different countries represented by the participants.

The Seminar will be monitored by two experienced theatre critics, João Carneiro, from Portugal, and Mark Brown, from Scotland, and with the support of the Director of Seminars of AICT/IATC, Paulo Eduardo Carvalho.

João Carneiro is a member of the Board of the Portuguese Association of Theatre Critics (APCT), and a member of the IATC. He has been theatre critic for the weekly newspaper *Expresso* since 1992. Has written about dance, opera and film and has been conducting seminars on theatre. He has collaborated with the journals *UBU*, *Alternatives Théâtrales*, *Sinais de Cena* and *Obscena*. His many interests include also literature and literary theory.

Mark Brown is theatre critic of the Scottish national newspaper *The Sunday Herald*. He contributes reviews and articles about theatre to a range of publications, including *The Scotsman* newspaper and the UK website *theatrevoice.com*. He is a member of the jury of the Critics' Awards for Theatre in Scotland. He teaches in theatre studies at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama and the University of Strathclyde.

Paulo Eduardo Carvalho is Assistant Professor at the University of Porto, Portugal, and researcher at the Centre for Theatre Studies, University of Lisbon. Having published widely on the areas of theatre studies and translation studies, he holds a PhD on theatre translation and cultural representation. Member of the board of the Portuguese Association of Theatre Critics (APCT) between 2003 and 2009, he's a regular contributor to *Sinais de Cena*, the journal of APCT, and a member of the Executive Committee of AICT/IATC and its Director of Seminars.

- in **Wroclaw**, Poland, within the Europe Theatre Prize, between 31 March and 6 April. Our colleagues João Carneiro, from the Portuguese section, and Mark Brown, from the British one, are working as monitors and they coordinated the activities of 12 participants from 10 different countries: Bulgaria (Elena Peneva and Milena Mihaylova), Czech Republic (Jakub Škorpil), France (Caroline Châtelet), Iran (Mehdi Nasiri), Poland (Grzegorz Andrzej Konat), Portugal (Constança Carvalho Homem), Republic of Korea (Hwang Yuh Jhung), Romania (Iulia Popovici), Slovakia (Daria Feherova and Eva Kyselová), and Sweden (Anna Håkansson).

The monitors' reports

The XIII Europe Theatre Prize hosted a training seminar for New Professional Theatre Critics. It took place in Wrocław, Poland, from the 1st until the 5th of April, 2009.

Twelve young critics took part in the seminar, whose daily sessions were coordinated by Mark Brown, from Scotland, and myself. Our work had a close relationship with the theatre performances that took place during the event. The programme of the Prize included works by Kristian Lupa, Árpád Schilling, Guy Cassiers, Pippo Delbonno and Rodrigo Garcia. During the same time, it was also possible to attend performances by the Song of the Goat Theatre. Almost everyone saw the majority of the performances.

It was an extremely fruitful group of sessions, thanks to the lively and willing participation of all the critics. With sharp intelligence, acute attention to detail and a strong sense of analysis, the discussions were an enlightening tool regarding not only the actual performances but also a broader artistic and sociological context.

Different opinions, different points of view, different critical and theoretical approaches were very much some of the most stimulating features of the seminar. For my part, I cannot but feel that our joint work in Poland was a totally rewarding experience.

João Carneiro

As co-monitor, with my Portuguese friend and colleague João Carneiro, of the new critics' seminar in Wrocław, I would merely add that the complementary factors of intellectual rigour, abundant enthusiasm and energetic-yet-friendly contestation made the seminar a credit to the IATC. With participants from countries as diverse as Iran, Romania, Sweden, France and host nation Poland, the quality of the work carried out over our few days together filled me with optimism for the future of both the IATC new critics seminars programme and, indeed, the International Association itself.

Having attended many such IATC seminars, as both participant and monitor, from Portugal to South Korea, and numerous other countries besides, I can honestly say that I have never encountered a higher intellectual level than I did in Wrocław.

Mark Brown

Some reviews by the participants in the seminar

Time in the Factory: *Factory 2*

Dária Fehérová

To think of a theatre production which takes eight hours seems to be impossible. For an ordinary spectator it is normally difficult to watch even all three parts of *Lord of the Rings* in one evening, and, to be honest, cinema seems to be a little more popular than theatre (definitely the seats are more comfortable). Nevertheless, there are performances in three or four parts (e.g. *Oresteia* directed by Arianne Mnouchkine), the duration of which pretty much oversteps the usual duration of a theatre show. In the contemporary world, which is fast and with no time to rest, such performances are especially valuable. They offer the audience the opportunity to feel and perceive the flow of the time, real time.

Polish director Krystian Lupa also bases his performance *Factory 2* on the real time concept. The three parts of the eight hours long performance (even though dramaturgically there are only two parts) are inspired by the Silver Factory, a place created by Andy Warhol to study people and find inspiration in them. The real time concept of the show demonstrates the passing, or actually not passing, of time in the Factory. The world of Andy Warhol and the figures around him is somehow mysterious and only this unspecified, unlimited structure can reveal it to the audience, even if only partially.

In the performance we can follow two lines. One line tracks Andy Warhol himself, who becomes just an appearing and disappearing chaotic figure later in the play. Nevertheless, his presence is always implied, even when he is not on stage. The second line tracks the inhabitants of the house.

Above all there is the always present eye of a camera. At first it brings an overview on Warhol's poetics, showing a movie which he made (*Blowjob*). Slowly the camera gets closer, its focus changing from the entire space of the factory to ever smaller details, such as fingers, nose, and shadows. Everything that is filmed is projected onto the screen, creating a distance between audience and character, as the performance exists on two levels, live theatre and live film. This is particularly relevant as to be in a movie, to become a film star, is actually the reason why all those strange people lived in the Factory. Lupa seems to have used this motive of shooting as a framing device for the performance, and it all finishes with one group photograph made by someone from outside.

Every character you might have expected to see in the production does, in fact, appear: Ultra Violet, Candy Darling, Brigid Berlin, etc. They behave as they are expected to, their dialogues and actions based on biographies and memories of real people from the Factory. Therefore Lupa's presentation could hardly bring something new to audience members who are familiar with Warhol's life and work. That is also the reason why it is hard to even perceive this performance as a theatrical piece, or look at the actors as actors and not characters from the Factory. It is more or less a cut-out from real life, a probe into Warhol's studio. And that brings us back to the real time concept, which is essential and crucial for the production.

Factory 2

Anna Håkansson

Krystian Lupa's *Factory 2* is a performance with pretensions, a fact that is not only signalled through its impressive and somewhat frightening length (eight hours!), but also through its attempt at discussing the roles of art and the artist in their relation to life. The production revolves around the artist Andy Warhol and his beautiful entourage at the Silver Factory. Naming the piece *Factory 2*, Lupa states clearly the conditions of his performance. This is not just any performance, it is a sequel to the artistic melting pot and thus life as such. Taking the shape of the images of Warhol and filmmaker Paul Morrissey in films such as *Sleep* or *Blowjob* it presents everyday actions in real-time.

The performance is divided in three parts, shedding light upon different aspects of the intricate play between life and art. The first is perhaps also the strongest, revolving around the collective of artists and taking its point of entry in the film *Blowjob*. The film is screened in its entirety on a projection space which is almost becomes the actual stage during the performance. The performance poses the question as to what is shown and what is not; that question is then restated in the repeated line: "The action takes place outside the screen".

In this upgraded edition of the *Factory*, the documentary methods of Warhol and Morrissey develop into a constant exposition of the members of the collective, expressing their vulnerability and innermost feelings, with Warhol – the artist as vampire – as the projection screen for human experience. But these persons become more than marionettes in the hands of the artist, which is manifested in the amazing monologue by the end of the act. The narcissistic Eric slowly pulls his clothes off in front of the camera, his gaze constantly turned upwards, as if mirroring himself in his own image. Taking his time, talking about the fact that he can never become fully exploited, comparing the mind with a reef of corals, he expresses something that Warhol himself never really succeeded in putting on either canvas or screen.

The second part of the performance goes deeper into the actual relationships, starting with the gender-challenging love between Viva and Andy, where Viva impersonates Andy, who in turn is only able to meet her desire dressed as a woman. The scene is replaced by the one describing the doomed relationship between Paul and Edie, using the Nina Simone song and the well-known aria from *La Wally* in creating an emotionally heightened mode. The act is ended by a telephone conversation between Andy and Brigid, where Brigid's lengthy accounts of her neurotic cleaning procedures manage to reach the very essence of drama, reconciling the thin red line between tragedy and comedy.

The third and final part ends up in a more anarchistic mode where the camera is being taken over by its earlier objects, starting with Nico filming the silent Tibetan monk, continuing with scenes paraphrasing Warhol's own films but being given a life of their own.

Being a while since I saw *Factory 2*, I began to notice that it is slowly turning into a shadow, but what a beautiful shadow it is, somehow still going on in my mind.

Accidens (matar para comer)

Constança Carvalho Homem

Rodrigo Garcia's *Accidens (matar para comer)* (*Accidents: Killing to Eat*) is a puzzling, highly manipulative piece. A more accurate, comprehensive title for it would be something along the lines of Purpose: Torturing for Entertainment, which pretty much sums up most of the action as well as the ethical issues it gives rise to. Badly disguised as a reflection on closure and death, killing rites and consumption, the pivotal element of the piece is the displaying of a dying lobster for a period of about fifteen minutes, after which it is chopped alive, seasoned and grilled before the audience. Apart from this, there is a video projection on car crashes and one's difficulty to sympathise with any kind of suffering but one's own, which, with the assistance of the Louis Armstrong's well-known cover of "What a wonderful world", also becomes as blatant as can be. Infuriating as it was to watch a piece that, from the very beginning, attempts little else than to shock as means to get the message across, Garcia's deployment of the lobster is fetishist, to say the least.

Even though Garcia regards animals as theatrical material, and in principle there's nothing wrong with that, he shakes off any ethical responsibilities with respects to their exhibition and usage, and appears to show them no more respect than he would inanimate objects, while simultaneously drawing from their vital energy. The amplification of the lobster's failing heartbeat and the successive rehydration endeavours show the extent and the detail put into the staging of an entertaining, wholesome death process. Once the performance is over, the audience is invited to stay and watch the actor/executioner have his dinner, yet another deliberate and obvious shock manoeuvre. Needless to say, the performance will probably go down in history for the violent reactions it gives rise to and also for Garcia's inability to cope with them. In addition to the people who left the performance I attended in Wrocław, either in silence or in vocal protest, rumour has it that the second performance saw a member of the audience put the lobster back in the water tank, causing the director to intervene rather passionately in defence of his work. Apart from this lack of artistic maturity, there is seemingly no legitimate reason for a director not to accept a radical outburst from an audience which has been subjected to a rather crude display of violence. This reluctance to accept the consequences of the work's provocations is outrageous and shows why *Accidents* is nothing short of a low blow.

Is it sin, survival or even theatre?: *Accidens (matar para comer)*

Eva Kyselová

Rodrigo García, one of the winners of the 11th Europe Prize for New Theatrical Realities, is one of the most controversial and, maybe thanks to this fact, also one of the most interesting theatre makers of the second half of 20th-century. His name is well-known in most international theatre festivals, as well as his performances, which are made not only by using uncommon ways of staging and modern technology, but also with the collaboration of actors that are prepared to go and “play” above human limits and ultra vires. García requires absolute concentration and devotion, close to obsession. The important question is if the obsession is still artistic or if it is just worshipping the director. This is one of the problems with his works. But it is also true that some kind of “madness” is necessary to deal with his disputable productions.

The main theme of the performance *Accidens (matar para comer)* is death, the last moments of one’s life and also the duration of these moments in real time. I would also say that the way of staging used by García belongs to the newest trends in staging and it reflects our society, life and the way it is overfilled by media without any right to privacy or anonymity. Each of us knows this, each of us lives in it and submits to it because it is sometimes more comfortable than to complain or try to refuse it. García knows this too, and he knows people refuse and reject his performances, but he knows as well that they will come again and again to watch them. The answer is very simple: there is, as the saying goes, “no such thing as bad publicity”, and human beings are curious and perverse. Otherwise people would not come to the theatre to see the killing of an animal.

For me it was no problem to watch a lobster being killed, cooked and eaten: it was a cooking show on the stage. More problematic for me is to ask if it was still theatre. It was done in a building that could be signed as a theatre or an artistic venue, there was an actor who was concentrated on his role and there was a text with a more or less important artistic message. But is this enough for us to say that it is a theatre production? I have to say that for me it is not enough. I really do not have any problem with killing animals on the stage, because that is such a common and natural part of our society and its main point in this production was just to shock the audience, to lead us to react, in other words, to talk about García. What I missed was theatrical atmosphere, a harmonically driven use of stage means and also some kind of imagery that allows theatre to become alive, forcing the audience to think about it and to search for his or her own opinions and explanations. After this production there was nothing to think about, either in a critical or a theatrical way. Everyone focused just on the dead lobster and forgot the piece as a performance. I think this why I refuse to recognise the piece as theatre. Theatre should have some kind of structure, beginning and ending in different conditions, with different regularity, far from our reality. The pity of *Accidens* is that it offers nothing of these things.

The performance could be a touching statement about death, forcing us to admit something about human nature and the killing on the stage could even tell and show something more, but without a deeper analysis from the director it is just a cruel and useless wasting of the animal’s life and the audience’s time.

There is no doubt Rodrigo García is an artist with a specific poetics and an unconventional approach to staging. It is very effective, very touching and shocking, but I am not sure if there is something that remains, that can enrich modern theatre because what should be saved is theatrical value. And I am afraid that looking for it is hard and many times is almost impossible.

Arrojad mis cenizas sobre Mickey

Mehdi Nasiri

Harshness, adversity, pity and fear are among the factors and emotions which are stimulated by this play. In fact, Rodrigo García wants to reach a result which is the reverse of what he portrays on stage. He shows human violence, both moral and physical, to audiences with the intention of purifying and refining us.

García, with this method, could reach a kind of modern catharsis, but his success in achieving this is variable. His playing with violence, delirium and insanity creates a sense of pity and fear in audience. The existence of violence in the play is not intended to promote conscious ideas about the subject, rather García he seeks to reveal our hidden, suppressed desires and the controlled violence in his audience.

In this production we witness flames burning close to performers; inhuman violence realised in the harming of two little animals; a sexual act change into an act of extreme violence; to mention only a few of the play's disturbances and disorders. This creates in its audience a mixture of repulsion, anger, pity and fear. One might suggest that the piece is not attempting to promote thought in its audience but, rather, to provoke emotional reactions in order to achieve a modern catharsis.

This disturbance in the audience is what García actually wants; emotional disturbance instead of thought and emotional understanding and emotional encountering instead of meditation!

García hyperbolises violence, and the internal and external manifestations of it, in a manner which is ultimately harmful to the audience. The fact is, however, that his play awakes rough senses which are dormant within us. He stimulates them within us and, in this way, he attempts to find a kind of psychological equilibrium in within his audience.

Certainly the audience in this play could be like the family which, in the performance, enters the stage in the midst of moral and sexual violence. The members of this calm, passive, and also disgraced and confused family, who witness distorted and degenerate erotic action on stage, remain silent as they sit in a car.

In his previous play, García harms a lobster in a fearful way a lobster. The creature is alive for 20 minutes in front of the audience, but is broken in to pieces and eaten by the performer. Maybe everyone perceives this action as an unbearable violence and is opposed to it. But García could say that he is one person doing this crime, but we (the audience) are nearly 200 people who do not react against this crime!

In *Arrojad mis cenizas sobre Mickey*, when a member of the audience goes onto the stage to protest against the harming of hamsters, the performer quietly takes the hamsters and puts them in a basket. Perhaps García is attempting to provoke such reactions from his audience. Perhaps he does not want the audience to be like the family in the play, who come on stage and are only indifferent viewers.

So, if the play is committing a crime, it implies that the silence and acquiescence of the audience colludes in and continues that crime. The question is: why do so few audience members react against a violence on stage which they find objectionable?

In addition to these cultural and moral issues, Rodrigo García's play relies upon a clearly established structure. We encounter several acts and narratives which do not come in chronological order. Rather, they stand beside each other, their content replicated and repeated.

There are fine performances from the actors, whose playing represents foolish violence in a manner which as cruelly humorous and as serious as possible. The performances rely on energy and sensation, and also on harmonious forms and shapes which contrast radically with the inhuman elements in the play. Ultimately it is difficult to say that one has enjoyed this production, because it awakes in us feelings of agitation and revulsion. However, it seems that its assault upon our psyches and emotions achieves a kind of modern catharsis, provoking the inner energy in members of the audience.

Syrian hamsters do not swim: *Arrojad mis cenizas sobre Mickey* Grzegorz Konat

Syrian hamsters do not swim. We cannot know if Rodrigo Garcia knew this when creating his 2006 show *Arrojad mis cenizas sobre Mickey* (*Scatter my Ashes over Mickey*), in which the poor rodents fight desperately not to drown in the aquarium into which Garcia drops them repeatedly. Whether or not he knew is, in fact, a matter of little importance; even if it was a central concern of many people in the Wrocław audience for this production. It would be much more relevant to ask the Argentinian originator what he reads. Everything Garcia does creates Debord-like spectacles (or, maybe, contrarily, rejections of Debord), which expose, deride and totally condemn the socio-political spectacle that is going on permanently around us.

This appears to be the root of all of the problems any audience faces when attending his performances. As Roland Barthes once wrote, “what the public wants is the image of passion, not passion itself”. This truth, however, seems not to be the artist's main concern. Whenever interviewed, Garcia emphasizes his somehow ambivalent attitude towards spectators' reflections and feelings, especially those experienced outside Melpomene's temple. However, although Garcia gives the impression of caring little for his audience, one might take the liberty of this innuendo – his stance is a subtle, subversive marketing technique.

Meanwhile, let Barthes once again bring us food for thought: “The petit-bourgeois is a man unable to imagine the Other. If he comes face to face with him, he blinds himself, ignores and denies him, or else transforms him into himself”. Witnessing people's reactions during the show (empty bottles flying onto the stage) and, more significantly, the investigation instituted by the Polish public prosecutor's office following the performance, we can point out, perversely, that the “petit-bourgeois spectators” gathered in Wrocław's film studio denied and ignored themselves, portrayed on the stage, rather than the Other, which was this time apparently absent. The same could also be said of those audience members who struggled for a lobster's human and civic rights during another Garcia's performance – *Accidens* (*Matar para comer*).

True, there is nothing new in these, or any other of Garcia's performances. True, one can find *Scatter my Ashes* pointlessly chaotic, aggressively violent and somehow unbearably simplified as far as forms of artistic expression are concerned. We can even, without major exaggeration, also criticise the Argentinian artist for too much repetition of his visual metaphors, as well as in the subjects quite literally exploited in all the shows produced throughout his career. However, if this can be said of Garcia's art, it is, ironically, equally true of what Barthes calls, “the bastard form of mass culture”, which is the spectacle that Garcia is struggling against. “A humiliated repetition... always new books, new programs, new films, news items, but always the same meaning...”

Repetition? Yes! But never boredom. This indisputable virtue of the Argentinian's performance relates strongly to what he is presumably counting on, a “revolution”. One way or another, his art brings us to the mental and physical turbulence of revolutionary movements. All in all, nobody, literally nobody, in the audience, no matter how anxious, angry or distressed, can stay bored. Guy Debord gave us that lesson, “boredom is always counter-revolutionary. Always.”

The silent killer in our midst: *Il tempo degli assassini*

Daria Dimiu

During the Premio Europa per il Teatro, it was possible to see *Il tempo degli assassini* (*The Time of the Assassins*), the very first performance ever directed by Pippo Delbono, one of Italy's most unconventional artists. The show carries within it the nuclei of the distinctive artistic voice of Delbono and his company.

The performance impresses with its freshness, in spite of the 22 years which have elapsed since its opening night. As the main character, Pippo Delbono tries, from the very beginning of the show, to convince us that we are witnessing a complete improvisation, a staging with no plot or story. In the stage director's own words, the show is born from an imperative, vital, consuming desire to shout aloud the rage that life usually implies.

Delbono himself seems like a regular guy, followed all the time by bad luck. He declares that he is always losing things, such as a key chain, his spectacles or a tiny puppet, and even asks several people from the public for help. From his own personal misfortune, things grow and get worse.

When the second character (played by Pepe Robledo) appears on stage, both men – dressed alike, in well-cut and perfectly ironed grey suits – act like victims of an invisible enemy, perhaps their own destiny. Standing in front of the public, in a surrender position, their arms over the heads and their own black neckties covering their eyes completely, they seem to point to us, theatregoers, as if we are reflected in a mirror. All aspects of life, as bitter they might be (such as a sad Argentinian song about a girl's murder and the announcement of a friend's death), are presented with a touch of irony or combined with brief comical moments, to first sweeten the atmosphere and, then, to bring it to a more bitter phase.

The performance presents through combined artistic means (singing, dancing and words) the universal wounds human beings often bear silently within themselves. Movements and gestures, filtered through music (typically famous songs) underline the emerging emotions. With few elements of scene design (two neutral wooden chairs, a beer bottle turned into flute or a smoking gun), the performance combines light, sound and gesture to build a narrative about responsibility and suffering.

The central line – “everyone kills what he loves” – contains in its brevity the principal, ultimate truth of our limited, narrow existence. Visually, this entire and bitter philosophy is being concentrated in the short scene of the seemingly lost puppet, a tiny red Pinocchio, revealed from a pocket, whose limbs are moving faster and faster whilst its puppeteer's tone evolves from recital to prayer and screams.

Pippo Delbono has continuously changed. Although his style continues to be well known and recognizable, a definition of his theatrical work is difficult. His carefully studied and long-time established shows seem all to be steps on an inner ladder, concerned with human suffering. His poetical theatre has its own grammar, the aim of which isn't getting answers, but posing ever-growing questions.

The Wild Void: *Questo buio feroce*

Iulia Popovici

A thin, skinny figure with a strange monkey mask, almost naked in the middle of a large, white room: the first image in Pippo Delbono's *Questo buio feroce* (*This Wild Darkness*) – with the previously homeless non-actor Nelson Lariccia on stage, anticipating the core moment of the performance, his unplugged solo version of Sinatra's "My Way" – is striking and somehow pathetic, but not surprising. Delbono's life and that of the members of his company; his homosexuality and his HIV positive condition; and the casting in his shows of mentally or physically challenged people with no formal training in acting; these are all intimate parts of his theatre. Actually, they are part of a whole meta-theatrical legend surrounding Pippo Delbono's productions, which he obstinately emphasizes and the audience is usually familiar with.

Loosely based on Harold Brodkey's book *This Wild Darkness: The Story of My Death*, the diary of the author's battle with AIDS (Brodkey contracted the disease in 1993 and died in 1996), from which it takes the title and not much else, Delbono's production is an emotionally driven performance on the artist's own fear of death, finally materialized in a parade of black and white, expressionistic characters, which look like they have emerged from a collaboration between Federico Fellini and David Lynch. A parade of fallen angels and lost souls, which is, in fact, a wake, a premonitory meeting of one who's about to die with the world left behind. Extremely visual, the performance is a procession of tormented bodies – from the hydrocephalic Bobò to Pippo Delbono himself, exposing his condition as a patient in never ending sessions of physical suffering, medication and blood collection.

As in most of his previous (and following) performances, Delbono uses his own (amplified) voice as the catalytic, prophetic element of the performance. His person and autobiography are in the centre of *Questo buio feroce*, multiplied in each and every character found on death row, in each and every story of little joys and universal sorrows that these condemned express, with all their being, on stage. Balanced between self-pity and pure exhibitionism, Delbono's performance takes advantage of the audience's expectations and its indulgence of the theme and of the Italian artist himself.

A part of the complex exploitation of the sentimentality of spectator is the (long) scene in which Nelson Lariccia sings "My Way" (usually, making his way through the public). This is, finally, the most politically correct and the least theatrical scene in the performance (with the possible exception of the demonstration of Bobò and an actor bearing the signs of Down syndrome, dressed as buffoons in a bad circus scene).

The impression is of (yet another) Delbono production marked by Fellini's (and Passolini's) heritage, a sequence of impressive visual frames and touching music (Charles Aznavour, etc.), dealing, in its statement, with some of the most sensitive subjects of our time – AIDS, how we forget about our sick loved ones, dignity in suffering and death. But theatre is not always and necessarily about the four-walled white room of one's mind.

Between life and theatre: *Questo buio feroce*

Milena Mihaylova

Questo buio feroce (*This Wild Darkness*) is a performance about death seen through the eyes of life. We witness the thirst for life and vitality through the eyes and soul of the Italian actor/director Pippo Delbono. He faces us with the misfortunes of humanity, with the joyless world of pain and illness, but also with the strength and the vivid energy of the human spirit. The human spirit that transcends the physical death and is incessantly asking questions, looking for the sense of existence. It is embracing life, peering in it, going through joy as well as through suffering, because that's life... And after the end of life Death is coming. It is expecting all of us, that's why it is important how we choose to live our lives. It is important to feel life, to be truly in it, to have faith, to love all human beings in order to be able to find light at the end of the tunnel, too...

All these thoughts came in my mind after I watched the Pippo Delbono's performance which is based on the autobiographical novel by Harold Brodkey (who died of AIDS), *This Wild Darkness: The Story of My Death*. Delbono recognizes his own life in it, his own struggle against this perfidious disease and that inevitably breaks the dividing line between "theatre" and "life" on the stage.

In this production, besides Delbono, there is the participation of so-called "handicapped people" and some homeless men (the deaf-and-dumb Bobo, Gianluca - afflicted with Down's syndrome, former beggar Nelson, etc.). The audience can feel real life, total authenticity in the performance, because of the presence of these non-actor performers on the stage. They are themselves, but they are acting too. Their gestures and facial expressions are genuine, and their faces are marked with silent suffering/loneliness.

Delbono is authentic too and having strong influence over the public because of his powerful human energy on the stage. His emotions are brought out not through the traditional psychological theatre (words are only one of the components of his theatre/life), but through his interest in anthropological theatre and life of the body in the theatre of the East. In the performance Delbono is endeavouring to take hold of inner energy, inner life of the spirit, of humanity through dance, gestures, through silence on the stage (influenced by Artaud and Eugenio Barba).

"The gaining/conquering of the sensuousness" is important for him - even through the expressiveness of the voice modulations/intonations, lighting, music ("My way" by Frank Sinatra - sung by Nelson in the performance, "Emmenez-moi" by Charles Aznavour, etc.) that are showing the spiritual condition of the character/human. The dancing half-naked body of Delbono is actually "speaking" on the language of his soul.

At the beginning of the performance his gestures are sharp, tensed, his mimics are tormented, his eyes are full of pain and anxiety. His soul is wounded, but at the end of the show it is already calm, even smiling. Delbono's is a vivid soul that has the will to struggle against death, to accept it without fear, even when everything seems to be so dark.

Time is passing through Pippo... The ominous image of Death is near by too. Human figures are walking in slow cadence on stage, wearing imposing costumes from different epochs and with painted in white faces, some of them even look beautiful, but distant as well, as though they are telling us that the whole world is dead, that death has different faces, it can happen anytime, everywhere, it can come even before the leaving of this world. Beauty can die, too...

These figures are part of one strange, seemingly glossy, colourful, but actually cruel and dark carnival; the carnival of life which is often forgetting about ordinary people, about humans and humanity in general. But in the Delbono's performance there is goodness, poetical presentation of human suffering, even humour. There is also light in it. Bobo and Gianluca are reminding us about that, dressed in the colourful costume of the character of Commedia dell'arte Harlequins, they are staying in front of the audience and are expressing life, sincerity and positive energy, in spite of everything. So life is going on. With hope...



