

"theatre and education at centre stage"



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**Hellenic Theatre/Drama
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member of International Drama/Theatre & Education Association (IDEA)

6th International Theatre and Drama Education Conference

Athens March 2008

Workshop

"Maschere demoniache tra sacro e profano

dal Mimo al Clown alla Commedia dell'Arte"

Credo che la sperimentazione dei diversi linguaggi artistici, in particolare all'interno dell'arte del teatro, sia quel modo innovativo di lavorare (sulla scena e nella scuola) che ci aiuta a capire quanto ogni tecnica contenga le altre (il Mimo contiene il Clown, il Clown ha in sé la Commedia dell'Arte, la Commedia dell'Arte contiene la danza e la musica), e quanto, proprio per questa ragione, i diversi linguaggi artistici possano interagire tra loro.

Attraverso la sperimentazione dei linguaggi sulla scena, abbiamo la possibilità di raccontare la storia della nostra tradizione in modo innovativo, creando, durante il percorso di studio, una metodologia adatta, così che le diverse tecniche possono trovare un giusto equilibrio, cioè una corretta sintesi delle diverse espressioni artistiche nella messinscena di un racconto.

Nel nostro caso, la storia è ispirata dalla tradizione di quei riti che i diversi gruppi etnici, non solo in Europa, esprimono attraverso le ricorrenze di fine stagione o della fine dell'anno, con l'obiettivo di augurare all'intera comunità prosperità e fortuna per il futuro.

Le storie possono ispirarsi alla tradizione, ma dovrebbero essere sviluppate in modo contemporaneo, cambiandone i contenuti. Ad esempio, i personaggi delle maschere nella Commedia dell'Arte rappresentano alcuni tipi fissi, ossia stereotipi sociali, che nella tradizione del XVI secolo identificavano **Arlecchino** come il servo sciocco, **Pantalone** come il *Pater familias* o il ricco tirchio, **Balanzone** come il dottore falsamente erudito, **Brighella** come il servo intrigante. I *canovacci* (gli intrecci) riguardavano storie semplici, per lo più intrighi d'amore, e spesso si riferivano alla società di quel periodo.

Oggi possiamo riprendere la tradizione delle maschere della Commedia dell'Arte del XVI secolo (studiare e mantenere i caratteri e le tecniche di messinscena), e cambiarne i contenuti, ossia l'antico *canovaccio* può essere trasformato in una drammaturgia nella quale è raccontata la società contemporanea. Questo processo di "trasformazione" si sviluppa attraverso l'interazione dei linguaggi dell'arte teatrale (modo innovativo di creazione artistica) e un nuovo criterio, cioè una metodologia adatta a raggiungere la sintesi dell'insieme dei linguaggi usati per la performance.

Si tratta dello stesso percorso creativo che abbiamo applicato allo spettacolo **"Hellequin et Dame Luque"**, visto alla fine del workshop **"Devil masks between the sacred and the secular - From the Mime to the Clown to the Commedia dell'Arte"**.

Il canovaccio in chiave contemporanea dello spettacolo "Hellequin et Dame Luque" si ispira a un favoletto della letteratura francese del secolo XIII inerente ai riti nuziali, nel quale Arlecchino sposa una vecchia *strega e bagascia*, Dame Luque. Ma la sequenza scenica del canovaccio cerca di ripercorrere, attraverso l'improvvisazione degli attori, anche la tradizione, la poesia e la magia di una rappresentazione teatrale dal titolo *"Jeu de la feuillée"*, scritta da Adam de la Hale (poeta, giullare e musicista) nel 1276, in occasione del Calendimaggio o di un'altra festa avente uguale

carattere propiziatorio. Tale rappresentazione riguardava il convito delle fate: a un tratto si ode un suono di campanelli, che annuncia l'approssimarsi della masnada di Arlecchino, e i personaggi che agiscono sulla scena vorrebbero, per la paura, scappare in casa. Arriva Croquesot (primo servo di Re Arlecchino), il corriere-buffone, e poi appare la fata Morgana col seguito di altre due fate, Arsilla, buona e benefica, e Magloria, cattiva e dispettosa. Croquesot reca alla regina delle fate il messaggio d'amore di Re Arlecchino, e la fata lo incarica di salutare il suo signore: in questa notte fatidica avverrà l'incontro dei due personaggi del mondo sotterraneo, dalla cui unione sarà assicurata l'abbondanza delle messi e la fortuna della comunità.

Lo sviluppo del soggetto della nostra storia parte dalla tradizione per ricomporre l'analisi ironica del rapporto di "coppia", inteso non solo come gioco a due delle maschere demoniache, ma anche come conflitto interno al gioco di coppia *uomo – donna* nel quale gli opposti, le attrazioni, le distensioni, le malizie e le sporcizie, generano la lite atavica e inevitabile per la sopravvivenza delle proprie individualità.

L'osmosi dei linguaggi che interagiscono sulla scena (dal mimo al clown alla Commedia dell'Arte), tra silenzio e rumore, determinano invece la ricerca e la sperimentazione continua, da parte della Compagnia, di quelle forme e di quei contenuti che più di altri sono consoni all'evoluzione e all'innovazione della Commedia dell'Arte "contemporanea".

E' all'interno di questo contesto storico-tradizionale, innovativo, che il lavoro dell'attore (degli allievi partecipanti al workshop) diventa globale: l'attore è mimo, è clown, è danzatore...

Lo stesso percorso di studio e di lavoro pratico sulla scena che l'attore della Commedia dell'Arte è abituato a sviluppare come allenamento quotidiano all'arte scenica e alla propria cultura antica e moderna. Un allenamento che tiene presente del moto continuo della vita, del rapporto misterioso tra il corpo e la mente, tra la persona e il carattere della maschera, tra l'uomo-attore e il personaggio. Lo spazio in questo caso diventa un elemento fondamentale: esso si muove e si trasforma se è l'attore stesso che riesce a modificarlo in ogni momento con variazioni su tema: l'improvvisazione guidata (controllata) su un tema dato (per esempio), dentro cui il gruppo costruisce una drammaturgia che prima diventa scrittura scenica, e poi copione. Ecco che allora la maschera riconquista il suo significato primitivo (l'animalità, il diabolico - buono, ironico, burlone - la velocità, l'intensità espressiva) con la propria energia comunicativa, pedagogica, composta dalla forma e dal contenuto di ogni parte del corpo e della mente: la maschera non è solo "l'oggetto" calzato sul viso dell'attore, ma è anche e soprattutto il bagaglio culturale, tecnico, formale e artistico di chi la usa sulla scena, e cioè: dell'attore e della sua esperienza artistica e personale.

L'allenamento è anche inteso come affiatamento del gruppo di attori-allievi in uno spazio vuoto ancora da costruire: una costruzione dello spazio fatto di suoni, energie più o meno intense o fragili, fraintendimenti, disegni geometrici dei corpi, giochi di parole da riordinare e ricomporre in significati che diano un senso al carattere delle maschere di ognuno, fatto di individualità diverse che hanno bisogno di interagire tra loro tramite la sperimentazione della maschera globale sulla scena. Questo il percorso faticoso ma affascinante, per riscoprire i principi fondamentali della tradizione (storia, cultura, espressione formale) e rimetterla in discussione, riscriverla, percorrendo un itinerario che non è legato a nessun tipo di stereotipo collettivo tradizionale (in generale), ma che invece viaggia nella contemporaneità del nostro tempo (storia, cultura e problematiche sociali: comunicazione, relazioni interpersonali, cooperazione...).

Mario Gallo
Associazione Culturale Teatro ricerche (Italia)

6th International Theatre and Drama Education Conference
Athens March 2008

Workshop

"Devil masks between the sacred and the secular

from the Mime to the Clown to the Commedia dell'Arte"

I believe that the experimentation of the different languages in the art, inside the theatrical art in particular, is that "innovative" way to work (on stage and in the school) that helps us to understand how much each technique contains the others (the Mime contains the Clown, the Clown contains the Commedia dell'Arte, the Commedia dell'Arte contains dance and music), and how much, just for this reason, the different art languages can interact.

Through the experimentation of the languages on the stage, we have the possibility to tell the story of our tradition in an innovative way, creating, on the way of study, a suited methodology so that the different techniques can find a right balance, that is, a fair synthesis of the different artistic expressions in the staging of a tale.

In our case the story is inspired by the tradition of the rites that the most part of the ethnic groups, not only in Europe, express through the off-season or year-end recurrences, with the aim to wish to the whole community prosperity and luck for the future.

The stories to tell can inspire to the tradition, but can develop in a contemporary key, changing the contents. As an instance, the characters of the masks in the Commedia dell'Arte represent a few fixed types, that are social stereotypes, who in the tradition of XVI century identified **Harlequin** as the artful and silly servant, **Pantalone** as the *Pater familias* or the rich - stingy, **Balanzone** as the false learned doctor, **Brighella** as the intriguing servant. The *canovacci* (the plots) pertained to simple stories, largely love intrigues, and often they wink to the period society.

Nowadays we can take again the tradition of the masks of the XVI Century Commedia dell'Arte (study and keep the characters and the performing technique), but we can change the drama and the contents (the ancient *canovaccio* can be transformed in a drama in which the contemporary society is told). This process of "transformation" develops through the interaction of theatre art languages (an innovative way of artistic creation) and a new criterion (an suitable methodology) to reach the synthesis of the ensemble of the languages used for the performance.

This is the same creative course that we have applied to the performance "**Hellequin et Dame Luque**", seen after the workshop "**Devil masks between the sacred and the secular - From the Mime to the Clown to the Commedia dell'Arte**".

The performance is inspired by a tale of the French literature of the XIII Century in which two devil masks, king Harlequin and fairy Morgana, meet together.

Through the improvisation of the actors, the sequences of the *canovaccio* attempt to recreate the tradition, the poetry and the magic of a play titled "Jeu de la feuillée", written by Adam de le Hale (poet, jester, musician) in 1276. The latter would have been written in occasion of the *Calendimaggio* (Festival of Spring or Mayday) or any another festival celebrating the beginning of a cycle having an equal propitiatory character.

The play is concerned with a banquet of fairies prepared under a green gazebo typical of the Breton tradition. Suddenly, the sound of bells is heard, it announces the approaching of the band of Harlequin, and now all the characters on stage would like, for fear, to run home. Croquesot arrives, the courier-jester (first servant of king Harlequin), and then fairy Morgana appears followed by the other two fairies, Arsilla, good and beneficial, and Malgoria, bad and mischievous. Croquesot brings to the Queen of the fairies a love message from King Harlequin, and the fairy instructs the servant to greet his master: during this prophetic night the rendez-vous of the two characters takes place in the underworld, from this union, abundant crops and luck for the community will be assured.

The development of the subject of this story departs, as a pretext, from the tradition in order to re-compose an ironic 'study' of love relationships that are intended not only as a two player game between demoniac masks, but also as a conflict internal to the game of the man-woman combination. These games of opposites, attractions, relaxations, malice and dirt generate the atavistic quarrel inevitable for the survival of one's own individuality.

The "transformation" or "innovation" that makes the performance contemporary is the tale about the meeting-clash between a man and a woman, in a society where the relationship between the two sexes are more and more complex and far from each other. We maintain the tradition of the artistic techniques and change the content (the meaning of the story) in the meeting-clash between the opposite sexes, nowadays.

Inside this innovative, historical - traditional context, the work made by the actor (by the participants to the workshop) become global: the actor is mime, clown, dancer... The same course of study and practical work on the stage that the actor of the Commedia dell'Arte is used to develop as a daily training to the scenic art and to his/her ancient and modern culture. A training that bears in mind the continuous movement of life, the mysterious relationship between body and mind, between the person and the character of the mask, between the man-actor and the character. In this case the space become a fundamental element, it moves and changes if the same actor is able to modify it in every moment with variances on the theme: that is, the guided (controlled) improvisation on a certain theme (for instance), inside which the group works on a dramaturgy that become at first writing on the stage, then plot. Here is the mask retake its primitive meaning (the animal nature, the fiendish - good, ironic, hoaxer - the speed, the expressive intensity) with its communicative, pedagogical energy, made by the shape and the content from each part of body and mind: the mask isn't only an "object" on the face of the actor, but is, even and above all, the cultural, technical, formal and artistic awareness owned by who use it on the stage, that is, the actor and his/her artistic and personal experience.

The training is also meant as the harmony among the group of actors-students, in an empty space to be build up: a construction of the space made by the sounds, more or less intense or frail forces, misunderstandings, geometrical drawings of bodies, plays on words to collate in meanings that gives a mean to the character of the everybody's masks, made by different individualities that needs to interact through the experimentation of the global mask on the stage. This is the hard but charming route to rediscover the fundamental principles of the tradition (history, culture, formal expression) and call it into question again, rewrite it, covering an itinerary that is not tied up to any general traditional stereotype (in general), but that instead travels in our contemporary time (history, culture, and social problems: communication, relationships, cooperation...).

Mario Gallo
Cultural Association Teatro ricerche (Italy)

Workshop description

The general aim of this workshop is to transmit the knowledge of the tradition of the propitiatory rites (the Calendimaggio, the Carnival, the Lent ...) in the European culture.

The theoretical and practical course (literary, poetic and theatrical) will be developed through a theatre activity in which the psychophysical action of the participants will be the main part.

The participants will work at the same time on the technique of the Mime, the Clown and the Commedia dell'Arte, using music and dance too, to acquire the knowledge and the consciousness of the tradition element, and afterwards to turn the contents in an innovative scenic action.

The main purpose of this workshop will be to transfer to the participants a possible methodology for the creation of a performance in which the different languages talk among them, trying to find a right expressive balance between the style (the different techniques: Mime, Clown, Commedia dell'Arte) and the content (the Calendimaggio, the Carnival, the Lent... the tradition).

Mario Gallo

Theatre actor, director and educator/Cultural Association Teatro ricerche (Italy)

Devil Masks between the Sacred and the Secular: From the Mime to the Clown to the Commedia dell'Arte



MARIO GALLO

Theatre Actor, Director and Educator/Cultural Association
Teatro ricerche, Italy

I believe that the experimentation of the different languages in art, in theatrical art in particular, is an “innovative” way to work (on stage and in the school) that helps us to understand the extent to which each technique contains the others (the Mime contains the Clown, the Clown contains the Commedia dell’Arte, the Commedia dell’Arte contains dance and music), and to what degree, for this reason alone, the different art languages can interact.

Through the experimentation of the languages on the stage, we have the possibility to tell a story from our tradition in an innovative way, creating, on our course of study, a suited methodology so that the different techniques can find the right balance; that is, a fair synthesis of the different artistic expressions in the staging of a tale.

In our case, the story is inspired by the tradition of rites that the majority of ethnic groups, not only in Europe, practise throughout seasonal and yearly recurrences, with the aim of wishing the whole community prosperity and luck for the future.

The stories to be told can aspire to the tradition, but can develop in a contemporary key, changing the contents. As an instance, the characters of the masks in the Commedia dell’Arte represent a few fixed types that are social stereotypes, who, in the tradition of the XVIth century, identified **Harlequin** as the artful and silly servant, **Pantalone** as the Pater familias or the rich miser, **Balanzone** as the fake learned doctor, **Brighella** as the intriguing servant. The *canovacci* (the plots) pertain to simple stories, largely love intrigues, and often wink at the period of that particular society.



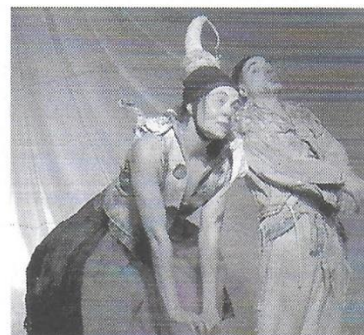
Nowadays, we can take up the tradition of the masks of the XVIth Century Commedia dell’Arte (study and keep the characters and the performing technique), but we can change the drama and contents (the ancient *canovaccio* can be transformed into a drama in which the contemporary society is revealed). This process of “transformation” develops through the interaction of theatre art languages (an innovative way of artistic creation) and a new criterion (a suitable methodology) to reach the synthesis of an ensemble of languages used for performance.

This is the same creative course that we have applied to the performance “**Hellequin et Dame Luque**”, seen after the workshop “**Devil masks between the sacred and the secular – From the Mime to the Clown to the Commedia dell’Arte**”.

The performance was inspired by a tale from the French literature of the XIIIth Century, in which two devil masks, king Harlequin and fairy Morgana, meet.

Through the improvisation of the actors, the sequences of the *canovaccio* attempt to recreate the tradition, the poetry and the magic of a play entitled, “*Jeu de la feuillée*”, written by Adam de le Hale (poet, jester, musician) in 1276. The latter would have been written on the occasion of the *Calendimaggio* (Festival of Spring or May Day) or any other festival celebrating the beginning of a cycle, of an equally propitiatory character.

The play is concerned with a banquet of fairies held under a green gazebo, typical of the Breton tradition. Suddenly, the sound of bells is heard, announcing the approach of Harlequin’s band, upon which all the characters on stage feel the urge to flee in terror. Croquesot arrives, the courier-jester (first servant of king Harlequin), and then fairy Morgana appears followed by the other two fairies: Arsilla, good and benevolent; and Malgoria, bad and mischievous. Croquesot brings the Queen of the fairies a love message from King Harlequin, and the fairy instructs the servant to greet his master. During this prophetic night the rendez-vous of the two characters takes place in the underworld, and from this union, abundant crops and luck for the community will be assured.



The development of the theme of this story departs from the tradition as a pretext to re-compose an ironic ‘study’ of love relationships that allude to not only a two-player game between demoniac masks, but also an internal conflict in the game of the man-woman combination. These games of opposites, attractions, amusement, malice and dirt generate the atavistic quarrel, inevitable for the survival of one’s own individuality.



The “transformation” or “innovation” that makes the performance contemporary is the tale about the meeting-clash between a man and a woman, in a society where relationships between the two sexes are becoming more and more complex and further apart from each other. We maintain the tradition of the artistic techniques, and change the content (the meaning of the story) in the meeting-clash between the opposite sexes, nowadays.



Within this innovative, historical/traditional context, the work done by the actor (the participants in the workshop) becomes global: the actor is mime, clown, dancer... The same course of study and practical work on the stage as that of the actor of the Commedia dell’Arte is applied in the development of a daily training session in scenic art and in one’s ancient and modern culture – training that bears in mind the continuous

movement of life, the mysterious relationship between body and mind, between the person and the character of the mask, between the man-actor and the character. In this case, space becomes a fundamental element: It moves and changes if the same actor is able to modify it at every moment with variances on the theme; that is, the guided (controlled) improvisation on a certain theme, for instance, inside which the group works on a dramaturgy that becomes, at first, writing on the stage, then plot. It is at this point that the mask assumes its primitive meaning (the animal nature, the fiendishly good/ironic hoaxter, the speed, the expressive intensity) with its communicative, pedagogical energy, made by the shape and content of each part of body and mind: the mask isn't just an "object" on the face of the actor; in fact, it is the cultural, technical, formal and artistic awareness gained by those who use it on the stage; that is, the actor and his/her artistic and personal experience.

The training is also the process by which the harmony among the group of actor-students in an empty space is built up. A construction of the space is made by the sounds, more or less intense or frail forces, misunderstandings, geometrical drawings of bodies, and play on words, all of which collate in meanings that give meaning to the character of everybody's mask, made by different individualities that need to interact through the experimentation of the global



mask on the stage. This is the hard but charming route by which to rediscover the fundamental principles of the tradition (history, culture, formal expression) and call it into question again, rewrite it, covering an itinerary that is not tied up to any general traditional stereotype, but rather travels in our contemporary time (history, culture, and social problems: communication, relationships, cooperation...).

The Athens2008 workshop

The general aim of this workshop is to transmit the knowledge of the tradition of propitiatory rites (the Calendimaggio, the Carnival, the Lent ...) in European culture.

The theoretical and practical course (literary, poetic and theatrical) will be developed through a theatre activity in which the psychophysical action of the participants will be the main part.

The participants will work simultaneously on the technique of the Mime, the Clown and the Commedia dell'Arte, using music and dance too, in order to acquire a knowledge and consciousness of the tradition element, and afterwards, to turn the contents into an innovative scenic action.

The main purpose of this workshop will be to present the participants with a possible methodology for the creation of a performance in which the different languages talk among themselves, trying to find the right expressive balance between the style (the different techniques: Mime, Clown, Commedia dell'Arte) and the content (the Calendimaggio, the Carnival, the Lent... the tradition).



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