

ERASMUS+ Artistic Entrepreneurship
notes of an explorer

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1. Die Große Stille

In the early 1980's, the German director Philip Gröning wrote to the prior of the Carthusian Monastery "La Grande Chartreuse" located in the mountains near Grenoble (France) asking the permission to make a video inside the monastery, for a documentary about the life of prayers, work and contemplation of the Carthusian monks. There was no answer until 15 years later when the prior called the director saying "We are ready".¹

The *Great Silence* (Die Große Stille) is a documentary in which even the banalest thing, like a chair, a table or a glass becomes an important tangible presence. The precise aim of the director is to offer to the contemporary society the picture of a possible alternative existence.

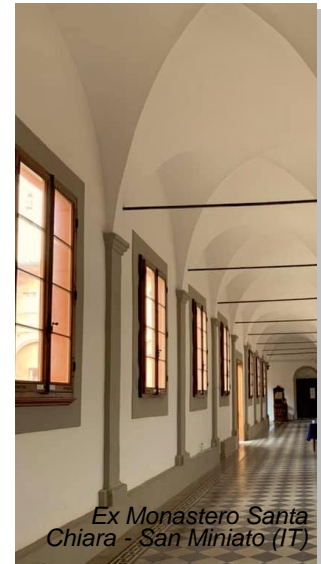
This documentary was recommended to me by my Portuguese colleague David Antunes during the meeting Erasmus+ in San Miniato (IT). We were hosted at the ex-monastery "Santa Chiara" to carry out the workshops and meetings we had planned months before together with other European colleagues.

In the great rooms, in the corridors, in the cloister, we could still perceive the austerity and silence that for centuries dwelt in those spaces and that in some way positively influenced our stay on those weeks.

A few months later, thinking back to the experience of Erasmus+ and Gröning's documentary, I recognized a subtle similarity between the life of Carthusian monks and my being a teacher in a theater school.

Although there are some occasions to talk and collaborate with colleagues, for most of the time in the Theater Academy I organize the lessons by my- self, following a program in which I set goals, I develop methods and subjects of teaching, and also experiment models and new exercises with the students. This process not only requires me certain patience and constancy in maintaining the foundations of the teaching methods but also in following the learning by students.

Fortunately, I've never experienced boredom or frustration doing my job. In fact, I'm proud to say that I feel satisfied and happy to be able to teach in a theatre school that also offers me the opportunity to experiment.



¹ *Il Grande Silenzio* review by Maria Pia Fusco (Repubblica , 7th April 2006)

In spring 2016 my colleague Michael Jackenkroll involved me in the organization of a workshop for teachers of European theatre schools belonging to the *École des Écoles*. On that occasion, I first understood the importance of being able to share not only teaching methods but also impressions, ideas and questions with colleagues from other countries and cultures.

A few years later, joining the “Erasmus+ Artistic Entrepreneurship” working group opened my point of view even more towards perspectives of exchange and comparison with different international theatrical entities.

The research path, taking part in meetings and workshops in which new forms of experimentation are encouraged, gave me the possibility to share a new vision to frame alternative methods of teaching.

While comfortably living with my “Great Silence”, I realized that I was not the only one who felt the need to open myself up to new exchanges, to fill myself with enthusiasm, share my knowledge and improve my skills by drawing upon the experience of other colleagues.

To share the teaching research with other European colleagues, makes me look at the “school of the future” in which teachers and students, constantly in dialogue, can engage in a process of learning and experimenting, which corresponds more and more to a specific requirement: to become artistic entrepreneurs.

2. My yellow is not your yellow



One of the turning points of the research theme “Artistic Entrepreneurship” was the Copenhagen meeting in November 2018.

On that occasion the colleagues of the Danish Academy organized in-group meetings, workshops and a “reflection room” (coordinated by Rikke Lund Heinsen). Various artistic, creative and playful modes of communication that emerged in this meeting could be adopted and applied in teaching and in the transmission of knowledge.

Participants in the Erasmus + project come from different countries and cultures, each one with their own histories, languages and traditions, even in the field of theatre.

Although the commonly adopted English language allows the participants to express themselves and communicate, to translate a concept is not enough to be understood by a colleague from another country, at least in some moments.

During the workshop “Artistic response, methods of theatrical co-creation” conducted by Inger Eilersen, the group was able to experience an alternative way to communicate.

Through the elaboration of some studies on Elettra the participants could express their creativity and artistic vision by performing short theatrical actions. The result of this playful method allowed everyone to express their knowledge and ideas by putting them on stage, in a practical way, with actions, gestures, movements, and settings.

The group defined the importance of expanding the possibilities of non-verbal communication. Using different expressive and artistic methods one could overcome the limits of the language that often rely on particular articulations and complicated descriptions.

3. Le cicale di San Miniato

*“Ma oh come strillavano le cicale
su la collina di San Miniato nel luglio del 1857!”*

Le risorse di San Miniato, by Giosuè Carducci

According to Plato's myth (Phaedrus 258) cicadas were human beings who were so passionate about music that they forget to feed themselves, and willing even to die to continue singing. The Muses, to reward these men's love for music, decided to turn them into cicadas, the insects that could spend their entire short existence singing.

During the three weeks spent in San Miniato, the singing of the cicadas has continuously accompanied the Erasmus+ activities. We could hear it coming from the fields and gardens surrounding the ex monastery Santa Chiara. Early in the morning it came through the windows and then radiated into the salons, corridors throughout the day.

The singing of cicadas is a courtship. Their sound, produced by the vibration of a complex and powerful system of foils and air chambers in the abdomen of the insect, is how the cicada can attract itself to another specimen of the same species. Although the difference is imperceptible to the human ear, each lure is unique.

I would interpret this constant presence of the "Love Call" of cicadas as a possible natural representation of the environment which has hosted about fifty artists, researchers, teachers and students from different parts of Europe, sharing an extraordinary path of meetings, exchanges, experimentation and research.

Like wanting to resemble the behavior of nature, each of the participants was able to find the resources to express their artistic sensitivity, creativity and talent and consequently represent an attraction for the other.

It's a relationship of exchange, interaction, influence that, in the artistic field, is expressed through the affinity of intellect, emotional perceptions and personality.

If we understand this particular attitude of the sensitive soul, we will be able to observe the immediate understanding between a musician and a dancer, between a costume designer and an actor, between a stage designer and a director,...

It is a process of "seduction" because we are not enough for ourselves, on the contrary, we *need* the Other.

We need to make it feel that we are there, that we have our own internal tension, a movement in the soul that vibrates like violin strings and it needs to express itself. We feel something important to share with each other and at the same time we perceive the lack of something equally vital that we could receive from the other.

It's not a shout to be heard, it's a song to manifest our desire for an encounter, a call to no longer be alone.

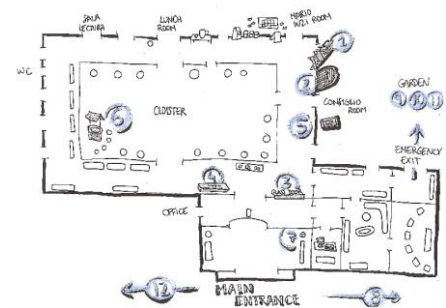
4. Something Elze

During the meeting in San Miniato, my colleague Jamie Bradley from Guildhall School in London and I organized a workshop entitled “Grand Tour”, inspired by historical idea of the Grand Tour that the young elite of the 18th and 19th century undertook by visiting across different cities and Countries of Europe to discover history, art and architecture. Our workshop involved two groups of students gathering ideas and impressions of the participants together to develop an exploration of the contemporary meaning of travel.

The preparation of this activity, which has excited Jamie and me since the first moment, has been enriched not only by our ideas of artistic research but also by our respective cultural affiliations (England and Italy). In the months before the meeting, we exchanged detailed notes about the working directions, themes, methods and exercises that we would have liked to experience in our project.

Supported by a certain intellectual affinity, the exchange of ideas to plan the workshop was immediately solidified by a lively and cheerful synergy of intentions. This particular experience, previously unknown to both of us, has taken us to the artistic research following an established track to experiment with a new possible exploration of the concept of the Grand Tour.

During the workshop our ideas took shape. We were both extremely careful and intrigued by the application of each other's teaching methods. Sometimes we have led the exercises alternatively so that we could observe each other's work carefully.



Students creativity has played the most important role of the entire experience: each of them has been able to enrich the creative process through personal insights and developing shared ideas.

An important aspect of the whole experience was the presence of our Lithuanian colleague Elze Gudaviciute during some sessions of the workshop.

In a comfortable atmosphere of sharing collective research, each colleague of Erasmus + project could take part workshops and encourage exchanging impressions on ideas and working methods.

Elze has been more than an attentive audience in our workshop. Though she had asked Jamie and me about the possibility to attend some sessions, with a dedicated attention and respectful

silence she sat in a corner of the working room and observed the progress of the activities, writing down in her diary some notes that she would later discuss with Jamie and me. Her reflections about the Grand Tour workshop provided us with a basis for very deep and detailed analyses. We could analyze the different levels we faced while teaching: the artistic vision, the interdisciplinary relationship and the human behavior between the participants.

Thanks to the constructive criticism made by the expert eye of Elze, who is an established actress, director and teacher, we clearly defined the path of exploration on the theme of travel, of real and conceptual places and the ability to transmit the participant's experience.

During my time in San Miniato, I learned also the importance of a trusting fellow traveler who observes me in the specificity of my work and who can generously offer their experience and viewpoints to help me to improve myself.

5. Que vient après? / What comes next?

The theme developed in February 2019 during the meeting at the ENSATT in Lyon was “The theatre school of tomorrow”. Among the many activities proposed, the French colleagues led the research group to explore a possible application of current methodology used in the Information Technology called *Hackathon*.



For many of us, this new word, whose sound evokes almost an Egyptian deity, has become synonymous with timing, efficiency and teamwork in project management.

During the Hackathon Sessions in Lyon, we set up some working groups of 5 or 6 people formed by teachers, researchers and students from the different schools involved in the project.



Following a “dynamic timing”, each group has developed a particular aspect of the theme of the meeting, developing ideas, potentialities and possibilities of application.

Looking at the notes of the Hackathon, my group drew up a plan of the physical and conceptual spaces related to the subject “the theatre school of tomorrow”. We recognize that a multitude of versatile ideas came up in our talks. Notes, drawings, sketches, diagrams, lists, drafts represent the need to communicate an idea and bring it in a shareable dimension.

Each meeting with the Erasmus+ group of teachers and researchers represented an important step in the path of Investigation and experimentation that has connected us for more than a year. It is an intense research experience from an artistic, didactic, personal and emotional point of view.

At the end of every Erasmus+ meeting, in the moment to say “good bye”, each member perceives a little feeling of sadness. But everyone can read in the eyes of the other the incentive to keep going. After the meeting in Lyon, a flame that burns in the soul of the group made us say “What comes next?”.

The feeling of frenetic curiosity and exciting expectations accompanied us at the end of each stage of our research. We will probably feel it even after completing the Erasmus+ experience.

Something has changed for each of us as individuals, teachers, artists, and researchers. Returning to their “Great Silence”, everyone will now be

able to perceive with greater attention the need to stop for a moment and reflect on “What comes next?”.



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Since 2013 he teaches Commedia dell'Arte, Mask and Body Dramaturgy in Hamburg Theatre Academy (Hochschule für Musik und Theater).

Since 2016 he's member of École des Écoles, an european network to develop exchanges, methods, research between different european Theatre Schools.

Every year, during a few months, he develops his studies and researches traveling in Europe, Asia and Center America.