

DISCOVERING  
NEW LIVES



Developing the  
**PRACTICE OF  
THEATRE IN  
THE PRISONS  
OF EUROPE**



A hand-drawn graphic consisting of a vertical orange line and a horizontal orange line that intersect. A horizontal black line is drawn across the text, passing through the intersection of the orange lines.

DISCOVERING  
NEW LIVES

# INDICE

THE PROJECT 7

## INTRODUCTION

Acting new lives or how to raise the curtain in prisons | by Julio Rodriguez 8

Theatre in prison as a training ground for social reintegration | by Stefania Carnevale 10

## TEATRO DEL NORTE

Theatre workshop in the Asturias prison | by Etelvino Vázquez 17

ANTECEDENT 18

PROJECT "ACTUANDO VIDAS NUEVAS" 22

• The body 23

• The emotion 27

• The voice 32

REHEARSE A PLAY 39

JOURNAL OF PEDAGOGICAL WORK 40

## TEATRO NUCLEO

Theatre workshop in the Ferrara prison 'C. Satta' 49

*OTHER LIVES THEATRE PRACTICES IN EUROPEAN PRISONS* | by Horacio Czertok 50

• The work of Teatro Nucleo 50

• The prison workshop 56

TO BE OR NOT TO BE... AN ACTOR

*IMPRESSIONS OF THEATRE WORK WITH NON-ACTORS* | by Marco Luciano 70

• From performance to web series 82

• The exercises 85

## LIVES TEE

Theatre workshop in Pécs prison | by Géza Pintér

89

### PRISON THEATRE IN HUNGARY

- The main lines of the Hungarian prison system in the second half of the XX century 90
- Theatre in prison in Hungary in the last 30 years 92
- The story of the prison in Pécs 95
- The initial period of theatre in prison activities in Pécs 97
- Methodological summary - social skills 98

### FROM WOYZECK TO VOJCEK THE CREATION OF THE PERFORMANCE

- Meeting the group and choosing the subject 105
- Vojcek - the particularities of the play 108
- Difficulties and challenges 111
- Reactions by the spectators and creators 112

## ZONE 3

Theatre workshop in Berlin prisons | by Sabine Winterfeldt

115

### INTRODUCTION TO ZONE3 E.V. CULTURE - INTEGRATION - EDUCATION

- What kind of theatre 118
- Methodology 119
- Practice examples in different institutions 123
- In and out, audience inside, inmates out. How the law permit this 126
- Our sensations and motivation 127
- Being a woman in this system 128
- Success or failure - what does that mean in our work with inmates 129
- Inmates experiences and commentaries to our work 131
- A vision of "theatre-in-prison" state of the art in Germany 132
- Influence of European exchanges in your work 134

### EXAMPLE IN PRACTICE: DIE RÜDEN

- Play in prison - Theatre work in a protected surrounding using the example of DIE RÜDEN 135
- The place 135
- The play 137
- The project 139
- The process 140
- Conclusion 146



# THE PROJECT

We present this work in the hope of being able to contribute to the development of the practice of theatre in the prisons of Europe.

We have used the opportunity offered by the Erasmus+ programme to be able to meet in our workshops, at the same time teachers and students, and study the modalities with which this activity is carried out. The first beneficiaries of this project are the inmates with whom we operate in our prisons, who have been able to experience in turn the new practices that we have been able to introduce. To benefit also, the recipients of the

action of the theater in the prisons, which impacts on the whole society, destined to receive the inmates once the sentence has been served.

The problems faced by the theater in prisons are quite similar, each partner has managed to give adequate answers -which is why he continues to work.

This work wants to account for such responses, ranging from the technical specific to the type of relationships that need to be woven either with the inmates or with the staff in charge, and indeed with society as a whole.

**THE THEATER DOES NOT GROW IN A GLASS CAPSULE,  
IT LIVES AMONG THE PEOPLE AND LIVES FROM  
THE RELATIONSHIPS IT MANAGES TO ESTABLISH**

# INTRODUCTION

## ACTING NEW LIVES OR HOW TO RAISE THE CURTAIN IN PRISONS

by Julio Rodríguez

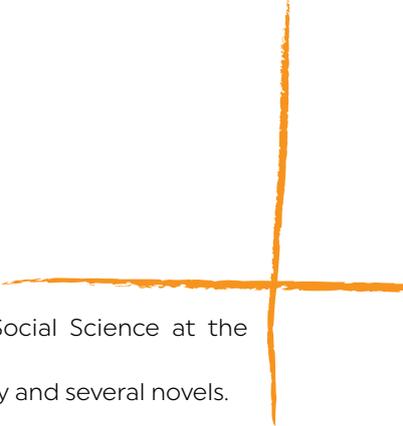
The prison is an inhospitable, suffocating, cold place. The theater, on the other hand, is refuge, expansion, warmth. That is why it is so important to those who live in prisons. Theatre is a balm that allows them to feel free while forming values and acquiring competences, skills, self-esteem. Theater, in a way, helps them to understand, living other realities, their own, giving them the ability to act on it and transform it.

And, for more than ten years, the Theater and Prison Learning Association "Veniamo da Lontano" has been making it possible. Specifically, the last two years in the project "Acting new lives", which has the participation of the companies Teatro del Norte (Spain), Teatro Nucleo (Italy), Üres Tér (Hungary) and Zone 3 (Germany). The work carried out in the prisons by Ho-

racio Czertok, Etelvino Vázquez and the rest of the theater professionals who make up the project generates a space of freedom where inmates can express themselves, communicate and actively participate in a collective activity, promoting not only group work and cooperation, but also individual responsibility and commitment.

A space that gives them the opportunity to abandon for a while the routine and laziness of the day to day in prison, which allows them to live other lives, put themselves in the shoes of other people, thus developing their capacity for empathy, their active listening, their assertiveness. The inmates who participate in the project rehearse every week with conviction and discipline until they acquire enough ease and, finally, here is the magic of the theater, on top of the tables, being others, they can be themselves.

For all these reasons, let us raise the curtain on prisons, let us not fail to do so, to generate self-esteem in inmates and internally, to strengthen bonds inside and outside of prison, so that they can do something to be proud of. To provide them, in short, tools that allow them to transform their reality and take one more step, perhaps the last, towards the long-awaited reintegration.



**Julio Rodriguez** - Professor of Social Science at the University of Oviedo  
Author of several books of poetry and several novels.

# THEATRE IN PRISON AS A TRAINING GROUND FOR SOCIAL REINTEGRATION

by Stefania Carnevale

The Italian Constitution says that punishments "shall aim at re-educating the convicted" (article 27, para. 3 Italian Constitution). These vivid, significance-packed words enshrine the duty of the state to regard punishment not only as a way of paying offenders back for the crimes they committed but also and primarily as a process of resocialisation. Satisfy our innate sense of justice by penalising conduct that violates shared norms is not enough. The punishment must be imposed with a view to preventing future criminal behaviour. When a crime is punished by imprisonment, the re-educational goals of the Constitution imply that the purpose of this period of separation from society is to have people re-enter it with the capacity to keep to the rules. Detention, therefore, from the moment it begins, must have the aim of reaching a positive conclusion, by degrees.

This is why offenders are subject to a "prison treatment programme" while serving their sentence, so that the imprisonment is transformed from a vacuous limbo of suppressed liberty into time spent usefully, with a wealth of opportunities for change. This detachment from the outside community could be compared to a sort of period of gymnastic training for developing a range of abilities, tendencies, critical attitudes and skills.

According to the opening clause of the Italian Penitentiary Act, this treatment, in order to pursue the goal of social reintegration, must encourage "autonomy, responsibility, socialisation and integration" in sentenced offenders (article 1, para. 1 Penitentiary Act). These are the training objectives aspired to in the Constitution and these are the muscles that need to be toned up during detention. Prison, by its very nature, brings a kind of muscle atrophy to these

functions unless appropriate measures are taken to counteract the noted contraindications of imprisonment: tendencies towards infantilisation, passivity and indolence. There is of course a huge distance between the *magnificent utopias* of the rules and the reality of a prison, which almost always proves them wrong. But dwelling for a while on the tools preselected by the law for resocialising prison inmates is a worthwhile exercise all the same.

The equipment to be used for warming up, shaping and defining the autonomy, responsibility, socialisation and integration muscles is described in another provision, entitled "Elements of the Treatment" (article 15 Penitentiary Act). The main ingredients of this re-educational fitness plan include "education", "vocational training", "work", "cultural, recreational and sports activities", "contacts with the outside world" and "relationship with the family". The act also states that these activities should encourage and enhance the individual attitudes and skills needed for social reintegration (article 13 Penitentiary Act). Theatre in prison is amply capable of training all the muscles that the Constitution and Penitentiary Act ask us to maintain, build or reawaken with a view to social recuperation. Theatre activities are the complete gym workout routine, covering and accounting for all these factors.

Reading, thinking, discussing and studying, all *cultural activities* of undeniable substance, are essential to working on a script and staging a performance. Workshop participants don't just listen to other people talking; they get actively involved in analysing the characters, reconstructing the environments and dramatising and realising the content of the works to be performed.

Theatre in prison, therefore, is also *education*; an experience described by a former inmate as "school to the power of 2". The participants don't just learn about literature, history, poetry and languages; in the preparatory sessions and the times in between they live them, they embody them. Memories are trained, discipline is observed; not the muscular discipline of prison rules but the active – and perhaps even more demanding – discipline of learning. They get used to the rigour of the script, within whose bounds they must stay and yet move around; they have to find their own particular spot within the set confines and, in doing this, often see their ideas, prospects and knowledge broadening, thanks precisely to limits imposed by the words to be recited.

Theatre, if done properly, is also *vocational training*. Theatre workshops in Italian prisons are done properly and rigorously, despite the invariably poor facilities and despite being at the mercy of lots of variables and unforeseen occurrences. Getting to the final show is a continuous challenge, in which you learn not only how to be an actor, but also a scriptwriter, a costume designer, a sound and lighting technician, an assistant director and a problem solver. The idea that all the participants can become future artists is unrealistic and therefore harmful if encouraged. But theatre brings people into contact with abilities, skills and attitudes that can orient them towards making life plans in keeping with their aspirations and capabilities. The repercussions of getting involved in a committed, constant way, of learning how to work as a group and of helping and supporting one another can only be positive, in the context of any prospective reintegration.

When it comes to preparing for a public performance, theatre inevitably becomes *work*: a schedule has to be set, involving completion dates, intermediate stages, fatigue, obstacles to overcome and expectations to meet, exactly like in a work situation. And theatre groups create a product, to be sold to customers, who pay for their tickets.

The fact that theatre includes the physical exercise of a *sports activity* is beyond question. Movements and coordination are of central importance. In a performance you run, jump on to tables, dart about the stage, lift each other up and sometimes fight each other. The theatre room is almost always the biggest area available in prison buildings, known for their cramped spaces, dark corridors and narrow stairways. Going from a cell of just a few square metres or from the exercise yard (a high-walled concrete quadrangle) to the theatre room means being able to move in ways not possible elsewhere. For a few hours you can enjoy being in a spacious and much more welcoming room; welcoming because it is designed to welcome, as against all the other spaces in the prison designed to divide and separate.

Theatre is definitely a *recreational activity*: people get together, enjoy themselves, socialise, make music, sing. The performances I saw had all these ingredients, ably mixed. Working on a performance thus becomes a legitimate escape from the repetitive routine and stifling atmosphere of a prison wing. The staging work calls for integration among different, distant

cultures and life stories, mixed and matched in ways unlikely to occur in anywhere but a prison, for the purpose of creating something together. Theatre is thus re-creational in a finer sense of the word: it actually re-creates the actor-detainees by means of characters, plots, relationships and interweavings that mirror their own, often dramatic, lives.

Psychology, in its various forms and applied in highly specialised ways, plays an important role in prison treatment: by law, sentenced offenders are subject to "scientific personality assessment" (article 13, para. 2 Penitentiary Act) designed to probe into the causes of the criminal behaviour and, hopefully, suggest a remedy. The approach is "vertical", which means that the prison assesses behaviour in order to make judgements about trends and results in the re-educational process. Theatre too involves continuous guided psychology, but "horizontal", or rather, applied with the aid of people not subject to its power. Questions about the past and answers about the future can flow freely as an effect, albeit indirect and not openly sought, of the theatre activity, but in a way more akin to the kind of psychology applied outside total institutions, where participation is voluntary and no judgements are made. Acting in or watching a theatre piece basically means coming out of yourself and at the same time entering within yourself and others, in depth, to discover that nothing human can be alien and that we can therefore be all things. We are no different to prisoners and prisoners are no different to a Prince of Denmark – "I am Hamlet" is what all the actors shout in the *Family Album* web series. When you go on stage you express yourself, you shout, you say what you think and you manifest suffering and anger with great power, but without that bitter recriminatory air which often, understandably, characterises people deprived of their liberty. A voice framed within a drama, channelled within a structure and sublimated within literature reaches out and outside powerfully.

Theatre, in fact, is also a significant channel for *contacts with the outside*, with the society that those deprived of their freedom are required to integrate back into. The final performance, with an audience coming into the prison or the actors going out to perform in a theatre is, in terms of its immediacy and intensity, a unique way of getting to know the world of detention. What we know about confinement usually reaches us, quite rarely and in a diluted form, via journalistic accounts, bits of documentaries, trimmed-down letters and made-in-jail

craft products. But actually seeing the faces and the bodies and hearing the voices directly is an incomparable way of reminding the collectivity about the often disregarded existence of the people detained, and of their progression towards possible reintegration. Performances, both in and out of prison, are exceptional occasions for shedding light on the secluded places of criminal enforcement and for collectively seeing their inhabitants, for once, as bearers of something positive.

Theatre thus also becomes an opportunity for *contact with the inside* of otherwise inaccessible places. When, as is often the case, we go into a prison as an audience for a performance, what we see becomes a kind of training for our atrophied muscles, those of complexity and doubt. The audience too takes an important step when it walks through those unknown places, hears their noises and smells their smells, gets looked at in ways they wouldn't outside, realises that one of the sounds is somebody singing heartbrokenly, or that a face is highly expressive, or seems friendly or tremendously sombre. Otherwise the inmates remain as an abstraction; men and women identified exclusively by the crime they committed. But when they act we can believe in them again, sense their multifaceted humanity and be aware of their resemblance to free people. They are Hamlet and so are we – so obvious and yet, at times, a discovery.

Finally, theatre is a way of maintaining a *relationship with the family*. Relatives, who often live a long way from where their loved ones are serving their sentence, are not always able to come to the performances. But a performance, when it does happen, is one of the rare festive occasions in prison life and a chance to show off a proudly achieved result. In this sense the *Family Album* series has a double value; not only does it delve into family relationships but also, thanks to the video fragments of prison life posted online, keeps the links with the outside alive, as well as bringing reassurance to those whose chances of having direct contact with the inmates have become few and far between.

For these many reasons, theatre in prison helps to fulfil, in a highly nuanced way, the sacred principles of Article 27 paragraph 3 of the Italian Constitution regarding the re-educational purpose and humanity of punishments, in that it can both demonstrate and give value to the irrepressible dignity of the people serving their sentences.

In a pandemic, giving breathing space to this constitutional norm is vital. The fundamental governing principles of prison life are languishing in a kind of enforced apnoea, and they are suffocating. For over a year now prisons have been closed, distant, separate places where time, mostly stripped of the usual re-socialising activities, is an emptiness to be endured. Ideas such as the web series, that can keep interest in the prison world alive in these times, and reach a much bigger audience than a theatre room can hold, are like oxygen to the Constitution. They are precious instruments, giving us the opportunity to look not only inside a prison but also inside ourselves, at our ideas about prison and the imprisoned. And perhaps change them.

**Stefania Carnevale** is Associate Professor of Criminal Procedure at the University of Ferrara, where she teaches Criminal Procedure and Criminal Law Enforcement. She is co-founder of the Interdisciplinary Study Laboratory on the Mafia and other sorts of Organised Crime (MaCrOLab) and coordinator of the Collective Security and Individual Guarantees laboratory at the University of Ferrara's Centre for European Legal Studies on Macro-Crime. She is a member of the academic

board for the PhD in Studies on Organised Crime organised by the University of Milan. She is part of the National Conference of Rectors' Delegates for university penitentiary centres formed by the CRUI (Conference of Italian University Rectors). She has been a member of the Prison Reform Commission set up by the Italian Ministry of Justice Legislative Office (2017-2018). She has been Guarantor for the Rights of Persons Deprived of Liberty for Ferrara City Council (2017-2020).



# TEATRO DEL NORTE

THEATRE WORKSHOP  
IN THE ASTURIAS PRISON

[TEATRODELNORTE.BLOGSPOT.COM](http://TEATRODELNORTE.BLOGSPOT.COM)



TEATRO DEL NORTE |

THEATRE WORKSHOP IN THE ASTURIAS PRISON

# ANTECEDENT

by Etelvino Vázquez

Teatro del Norte is a theater company that was created in 1985 in Lugones, Asturias- Spain. It is a theater company that was mixing creation and plays on the stage for every kind of crowd, adults and youth audience, with theatrical pedagogy: seminars, meetings, demonstrations, etc.

Since 2010, Teatro del Norte has been in charge of the Theater Classroom at the University of Oviedo.

Also Teatro del Norte has performed in Spain, Portugal, Holland, France, Italy, Romania, Montenegro, Moldova, Egypt, the United States, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Mexico, El Salvador and Peru.

In 2010 Horacio Czertok, director of the Nucleo Theater, with whom in the eighties, Etelvino Vázquez, director of Teatro del Norte, had participated as a student in some of his courses and meetings, called Etelvino to tell him if the North Theater wants to be part of the Theater and Learning Association Prison it called "Veniamo da Lontano".

In that moment this experiences was incomprehensible for Etelvino but he felt that Nucleo Theatre has been very important for his training, so he said yes and Teatro del Norte begins to be part, as an apprentice, of the Theater and Prison Learning Association "Veniamo da Lontano".

Until then, the relationship between the Teatro del Norte and the Penitentiary had been limited to a short course in 1985 and three performances, financed by the Caja de Ahorros de Asturias, on the occasion to the patron saint of Penitentiary.

But these plays did not have much impact for us or for the inmate who attended them, because they were more interested in meeting to each other, especially with women, than seeing the show.

In July 2011 Horacio told us that the project has been approved and that we are part, as apprentices, of "Veniamo da Lontano"

In September 2011 we had the first meeting with the Asturias Penitentiary, it was thanks to Carlos Martinez, a prison official worker, a theater lover who had participated as a student in several courses with Teatro del Norte. In the Villabona Penitentiary, the Drug Free Therapeutic and Educational Unit, UTE, was created in the eighties. It is created by two educators, Faustino and Begoña.

There are three mixed modules where the interns are responsible for their own sentence. The UTE has a reinsertion of 60% compared to the traditional prison that has a reinsertion of more or less 20%. The UTE model is implemented in 18 Spanish prisons with very good results. The inmates are all young and connected to drugs

At that September meeting we had all kinds of facilities and support from educators and UTE official workers.

In December 2011 the first Veniamo da Lontano meeting was made in Ferrara. In there, we meet all the participants of the Learning Association with the coordinator, Horacio Czertok. All the other theater groups had already participated in a previous edition, except the University of Lieja and us, but they did not work in penitentiary.



It was a meeting that we really learned what "Veniamo da Lontano" was, means, and what kind of engagement would be make.

At Christmas 2011, I was able to attend the Christmas Festival organized by the inmates of the UTE and which their family members could also attend as spectators. In addition to dances and songs, they represented a work created by themselves. They took about what happened when they arrived at the UTE and until they left. The play was directed by Carlos Martinez, our friend.

After the work I had a meeting with everyone who had performed, and they told me that they wanted to do something with them as soon as possible.

**On February 2012 we began our work at the UTE by an introductory theater workshop.** The inmates were asked who wanted to enroll in a theater workshop, but then the educators determined who could or could not attend based on their profile.

## **FROM THAT MOMENT ON WE CARRY OUT TWO TYPES OF ACTIVITIES:**

### **PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITIES**

Workshop for 20 students. It would be a weekly job with two hour in each session.

Number of hours of the course: 20 hours

The course was taught by Etelvino Vázquez and David González, body expression and oral expression: work with the body and emotion, work with the voice.

---

**WORK WITH THE BODY:** ways of walking, of moving in space. Body parts. Body composition.

Work with masks.

**WORK WITH THE VOICE:** articulation, emission. Work with the tone, with the intensity, with the quantity and the timbre. Oral expression with different texts.

**IT WOULD ALSO WORK WITH IMPROVISATIONS AND GROUP DYNAMICS.**

---

This course would serve to consolidate a group which to made a play.

## REPRESENTATION OF A THEATER WORK

Representation of a play where each actor in the group has a role and can show their theatrical qualities. It will be a simple work, but with a current matter, that could be understandable and defensible by all members of the group, and also have not complications about the assembly.

After the *Veniamo da lontano* project came a second project, *Rompiendo límites*, and then a third, *El Arte de leer*, where we were partners again. This Projects was awarded to the Nucleo Theater.

Teatro del Norte has been awarded by the project *Actuando vidas nuevas*.

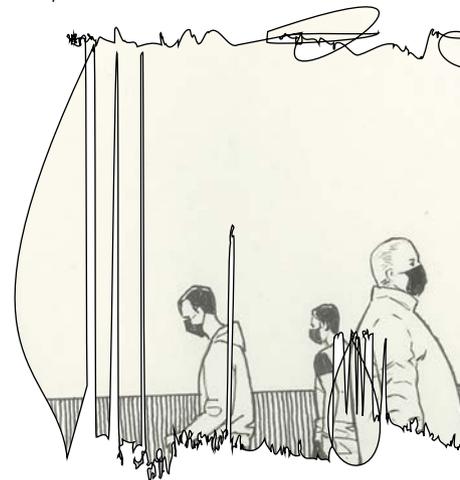
Even without knowing if there would be a project or not, in February 2019 we started a new workshop in prison and the result of that workshop is the show "Historias para ser contadas" by the Argentine author Osvaldo Dragun. This show was represented on December 17 and 19, of 2019 for UTE 1 and UTE 2, and there were be able for families to see the representation and meet the inmates again.

We can not select the inmates who are going to participate in the Theater Workshop, the educator does it and tries to made that each year the participants are different. You always start with a group of 20 inmates but finally there are about 12/15.

First we do a few days an acting training and then we rehearse a show that, until now, was only performed for the UTE colleagues.

Throughout these almost 20 years we have represented this plays:

- ↪ *Historias para ser contadas* by Osvaldo Dragun
- ↪ *Europa! Europa!* about an emigrant arriving in Europe
- ↪ *Sueños Negros* about poems by the Asturian poet Ángel González
- ↪ *Sonidos Negros* on poems by García Lorca
- ↪ *A los hombres del futuro* on poems by Bertolt Brecht



This work with the interns of the UTE has not only been important for them because they improve their self-esteem, their individual and group commitment, their cultural level, their relationship with their colleagues, etc. It has also been very important for Teatro del Norte, both on a personal level (for the two people who go to penitentiary weekly) and on a theatrical level, as it has forced us to find very different theatrical solutions and acting incentive to get the show works with the public.

This approach of the Professional Theater to the penitentiary, within the European project *Actuando vidas nuevas*, will improve the self-esteem of the participants and their expressive ability, both corporal and vocal. The

activity will propose a dynamics on group with the interns, which will teach them to collaborate with each other, listen to each other, and collaborate with each other. Theatrical activity is opposed to individualism and encourages collaboration and understanding.

Unfortunately for us, Asturias does not have a transfer from penitentiary, depending on the Central Government, this means that our work in penitentiary is invisible to Asturian society.

# PROJECT *ACTUANDO VIDAS NUEVAS*

The Theater Workshop of "Actuando vidas" began in February 2020 in the Asturias penitentiary by Etelvino Vázquez and David Gonzalez.

Once again the educator selected the interns to participate in the Theater Workshop, some of their own free will and others forced. The educator's rules are always: shy intern, intern with a bad relationship with other interns, intern with expression difficulties, intern with emotional blockage, intern with bad diction...

But we cannot make a selection of who has to participate or not in the Theater Workshop. We have to work with the interns that we have.

We also know this same procedure in other of our pedagogical activities such as Teatro del Norte. In the University Theater Group we have to work with the students who join the group, whether or not they have theatrical attitudes. The same happens to us with the Gijón Sphere Group, which is made up of blind and partially sighted people. No selection can be made. The same happens to us in the many courses we teach and where we cannot choose the students either.

The issue of student selection is of no concern to us. Each one will work according to their natural gifts and their ability to learn.

**Our working method is fundamentally based on the study of the three principles that sustain the acting building:**



## THE BODY

There can be theater without voice, without words, but there cannot be without body and emotion.

The body is the base and at the center of the acting activity. Aspiring actors and actresses have to work on Body and Energy, and on Body and Presence.

The body's presence in everyday life is governed by the principle of getting the most with the least effort. In a representation situation, the Presence is governed by the opposite principle: achieving the minimum with the maximum effort.

Hence the enormous importance of the use of energy throughout the body. Energy in space and energy in time.

### **The body, in relation to Energy, we can divide it in two blocks:**

- ↪ Energy Center: feet, legs, pelvis
- ↪ Center of Expression: trunk, arms, neck, face.

All acting work consists of shaping the body with Energy and Expression. This blend of Energy and Expression shape the Presence of the Actor and Actress

The principles of "Theater Anthropology", studied by Eugenio Barba, generate this new presence of the actor.

Principle of Balance. Principle of Opposition. Principle of Omission. The body in mime. Mime divides the body in to a force center (the pelvis), a personality center (the chest) and an expression center (hands, arms and neck).

### **The body according to Lecoq is divided into:**

- ↪ The tragedy (arms to the sky)
- ↪ The Jester (arms down)
- ↪ The melodrama (arms open parallel to the ground)

### **The body according to Decroux shows us the relationship that arms and legs have (what we have more mobile) with respect to the trunk:**

- ↪ By consonance (everything collaborates with the trunk)
- ↪ By complementarity (everything collaborates except a part. Example: the Discobolo)
- ↪ By contrast (nothing works with the trunk)

### **After this first level, we work with the Body itself:**

- ↪ Differentiate the parts of the body
- ↪ Mobility of different parts of the body

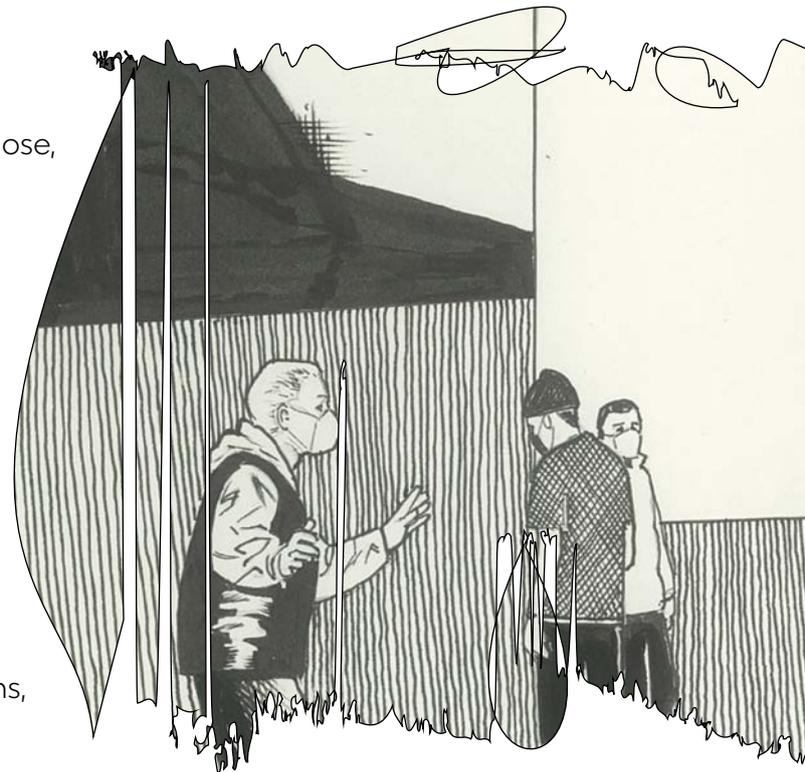
- ↘ Different positions of the body.
- ↘ Open and closed body - introversion and extroversion.
- ↘ Hard body and soft body.
- ↘ Fast body and slow body.
- ↘ Body disassociation.

### Body in space:

- ↘ Go from one point to another point in a straight line.
- ↘ Go from one point to another point on a curved line.
- ↘ Go to the roof
- ↘ Go to the ground.
- ↘ Go walking with different ways of walking.
- ↘ Be driven by different parts of the body: nose, pelvis, chest...
- ↘ Go open (extrovert), go closed (Introvert)

A separate motion is the work with the trunk as the motor and promoter of the action. Also the work with arms and hands as the center of expression. For each of these principles there are numerous exercises that students perform, both individually and in pairs.

There are also exercises with sticks, with ribbons, with fabrics, with fans, etc.



### **The next bodywork has to connect with conflict, but on its first level, on its primary level.**

- ↪ Conflict or opposition with the different parts of the body (The legs want to go to the ground, the trunk wants to go to the ceiling)
- ↪ Conflict between two actors using a stick, a tape, where one is the Protagonist and the other Antagonist.
- ↪ Very simple conflicts but which will later help the actor understand the complexity of conflicts in plays.

The expressive possibilities of the body, inseparable from energy, become visible with the "dance", following a music. Space and time (rhythm) are present in the actor's movement. Energy in space could be energy in time. And energy in time that becomes energy in space. "Dancing" the actor performs a kind of personal improvisation, with his own body, with his energy and his expression.

Work with the body is essential for anyone who wants to approach the theater, whether you are a student at a theater school or a prison intern.

### **The next work with the body is the work with the mask.**

The mask only lives with the body. The mask gives a degree of freedom to those who use it, since they feel protected behind it.

The first work with the mask is the work with La Comedia del Arte and its characters: Harlequín, Pantalone, Dotore, Colombina, Enamorados.

Each character in the Comedy of Art is a complex body structure that demands control and precision from the actor. And then there is the use of the mask with his neck, arm and hand play. This work that they do with David González goes to a second phase with the work with neutral masks or masks that have nothing to do with the Comedy of Art. The characters are people of today, and from those typical characters, one begins to work with improvisation. They improvise the characters of the Comedia del Arte and improvise the other characters with masks.

With improvisation, a fundamental tool of the actor, the student get to the top of his individual expressiveness. Where it manages its creative threads and no need for an author or a director. It is the fundamental work of the actor with himself/herself.

## THE EMOTION

Working with emotion is essential for any aspiring actor, but extremely complicated and complex for a prison inmate.

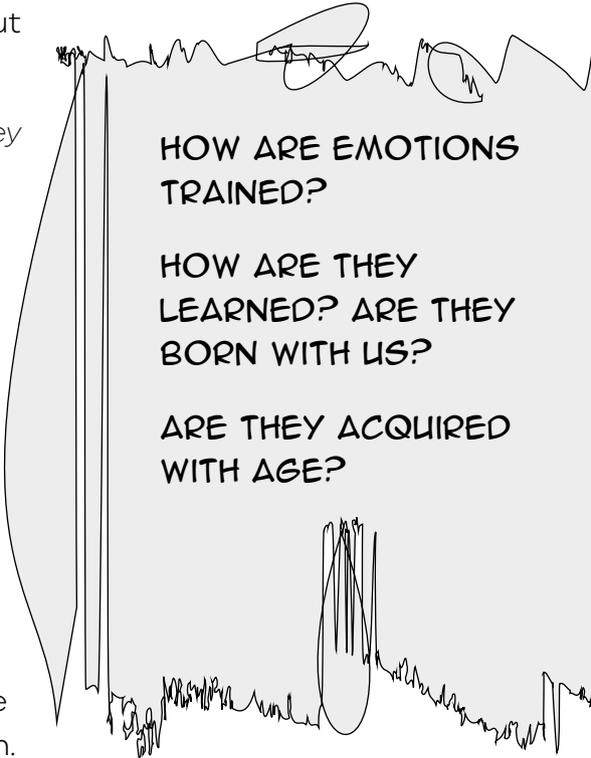
*How are emotions trained? How are they learned? Are they born with us? Are they acquired with age?*

The emotional system is very present in all the activities of the inmates. Emotion always in the foreground, no matter how much they hide, are ashamed, or try to show a strength that they do not have.

With the emotions we work the same as if we worked with the body. The body, together with the voice, is controlled by the will, the emotion is not. Stanislavsky has already realized this and is going to move from emotional memory to physical actions, creating the method of physical actions. The body as the motor and driver of emotion.

If in the first Stanislavsky proposed to work from the inside out, we propose to the students to work from the outside in.

This does not imply that at the same time, and almost without realizing it, we also work from the inside out. This is very much determined by the age of the students. With older students it is easier to work from the inside out, as they already have a more defined personality and a more developed emotional memory. Working from the outside in, what we teach students is fundamentally the understanding of emotions, focusing



**HOW ARE EMOTIONS  
TRAINED?**

**HOW ARE THEY  
LEARNED? ARE THEY  
BORN WITH US?**

**ARE THEY ACQUIRED  
WITH AGE?**

on the six basic emotions that, mixed together, give rise to the emotional framework of the characters. A framework that does not have the complexity of everyday life.

The brilliant intuition of Antonin Artaud, famous French poet and playwright, when around the year 1932 he writes –premonitory– that:

Breathing accompanies feeling, and you can enter into feeling through breathing, provided you have been able to discriminate that respiration corresponds to which feeling.

*Alba Emoting*, the method created by the neurologist Susana Bloch, by showing the specific respiratory pattern for each of the basic emotions, effectively meets the "condition of having managed to discriminate which respiration corresponds to what feeling ". In addition, by demonstrating experimentally that it is possible to generate emotion from breathing, Susana Bloch confirms that it is possible to "enter the feeling through breathing".

It may seem that in the theater the emotion, to be credible, must be the same on stage as in everyday life. But with very little that we move our point of view towards other theatrical forms different to the naturalistic realism of Euro-American theater, we find other forms of emotion, unconnected to everyday life, but just as credible: How cries in classical ballet, in Italian opera, in flamenco, in the Japanese Nô theater. Always pure convention. And it can only be this way since on stage the emotion is always re-felt (felt again) and not felt for the first time, otherwise the stage would be the door of the madhouse.





Whenever we get excited, three types of phenomena happened in us: physiological phenomenon, expressive phenomenon, and subjective phenomenon.

- ↘ Physiological phenomenon have to do with the body and its postural pattern depending on each of the emotions.
- ↘ Expressive phenomenon have to do with the center of expression: the face. Each emotion has a postural pattern of the face.
- ↘ Subjective phenomena have to do with the eyes and, obviously, with the inner images of each one.

Physiological phenomenon are the most visible, as they always involve positional changes in the body and breathing.

Subjective phenomenon are the least visible, but very important to act, for example, in the cinema.

Since the theater is not the same as everyday life, but much more condensed and distilled life, the emotions that the characters can feel can also be condensed into 6 large families: Anger, Fear, Sadness, Joy, Eroticism and Tenderness.

These emotions never happen one by one, but appear combined with each other, giving rise to the emotional framework of the different characters. Each of these emotions is reflected in the body, in the breath, in the expression and in the eyes. Some tend to stress the body and others to relax it. Some have the proximity and others the distance. The act of learning the postural pattern of each one of them is for the student as if it were a matter of doing body-respiratory exercises.

- ↘ **Anger:** Air enters and leaves through the nose. Tense body. Clenched fists. Frowning space between the eyebrows. Low chin. Low gaze. We tend to get closer.
- ↘ **Fear:** The air comes in with a big blow of the diaphragm. Tense body. Eyes and mouth wide open. The arms and hands tend to protect the face. We tend to jump and walk away.

- ↘ **Sadness:** The air enters through the nose in different strokes and tensing the body. The air comes out by opening your mouth wide and saying A. The body tends to relax. Shoulders drop. The eyelids fall without closing. The head tends to fall. The lower jaw relaxes and shakes.
- ↘ **Joy:** The air enters through the nose and leaves through the mouth strokes of the diaphragm saying A. The body tends to relax. The head falls forward or backward. The eyelids relax. The knees do a spring movement with the whole body. We tend to get closer.
- ↘ **Eroticism:** The air enters and leaves through the mouth that is always open with the rictus of laughter and saying A. The body relaxes. The head falls back. The eyelids relax. The pelvis, totally relaxed, moves. The hands tend to touch the head, the chest.



- ↘ **Tenderness:** Air enters and leaves through the nose. Mouth closed but with a grimace of laughter. The body relaxes. The eyelids relax. The head falls to the side. The air in and out hums something quiet. The arms tend to hold a child in their arms.

These emotions live in the various theatrical characters, according to the different situations to which they are subjected. It is very difficult for a character to be made by a single emotion, that is why in a situation of representation, as in life itself, they are very mixed.

The dominant emotion in each situation is the one that determines the scene, but we often see that the characters, even though it is clearly a scene of joy, for example, are tinged with other emotions. What does this mean? That chemically pure emotions do not exist.

Emotions are responses to a stimulus. If the answer lasts a long time, it becomes a state of mind. Sadness if it exist a long time turns into depression.

When it comes to acting, this method allows the student to determine which is the dominant emotion of his character and will act with a clearer guide.

This method of Susana Bloch is the one we use so that, working from the outside in, the students know the mechanism of each of these 6 basic emotions, their physiological and expressive phenomena, and can face their characters much better.

The subjective phenomena that become visible above all from the gaze are closely related to work from the inside out.

**In addition to using sensory memory and sensitive memory, with the prison students we also use other methods to work on this inner emotion:**

- ↪ Method of speaking: Talk about your family (real or imaginary), your children, your loves...
- ↪ Method of writing: write a letter to the father (real or imaginary), write about shame...
- ↪ Blindfolded, interact with another classmate.
- ↪ With eyes open action / reaction. Get closer, get away.
- ↪ Move without touching.
- ↪ The emotion from dancing to music that has a great emotional charge.
- ↪ One reads a text and the other moves from emotion.

All are small exercises to get the internal world of the intern to mobilize.

A great vehicle of emotion, both from the inside and from the outside, is the body.

Unfortunately the emotion cannot be controlled with the will, but working from the outside the will can control the corporal-respiratory patterns. Curiously, on the day of the performance, in front of his colleagues from Penitentiary's Modulo, the emotion flows with great presence among the inmates who perform, which makes the show more intense and content. This emotional plus, which obviously cannot be controlled with the will, and which the performance gives, makes many inmates burst into tears at the end of the performance.

Working with the emotions of the inmates without entering privacy, without using their personal situation, that is the challenge and the difficult, but, at the same time, it produces a great emotion in us to see them act, to see that we fulfilled our mission. Seeing that theater is always "healing", both for them and for us.

## THE VOICE

Of the three elements that make an actor- body, emotion and voice- the voice is undoubtedly the most difficult for the inmates of the Asturias Penitentiary Theater Workshop.

They are youth, so their bodies have not great problems for them, they consider emotion very personal and they try at all times not to express their emotions. The voice, which together with the body, can be controlled with the will, has many technical elements that are difficult for inmates to assume.

Some of them come with many respiratory and joint deficiencies. Others with bad habits for use the voice (tobacco, for example). Some bring accents from their origin region that is very difficult to remove. Some of them have not volume and have a voice that not travel between bass and treble. And, finally, the inmates read very poorly and have low reading comprehension. That is the reason for carrying with words with the internal ones: saying synonyms, augmentatives, diminutives, words that are related to an established topic, speaking saying only one word at time, etc. Something that not only stimulates their articulation, also their memory and their knowledge of Spanish.

The word is the air, if there is no air there is no word.

### MECHANISM OF THE VOICE: PHONATION AND ARTICULATION

- ^ **Breathing:** Blowing. Erect and relaxed body. Breathing is tension / relaxation
- ^ **Phonation:** vocal cords and their function of producing sound
- ^ **Articulation:** Involved: lips, tongue, lower jaw, cheeks, soft palate.

Move all of this. Words that move him: REÑO, LUNA, CRUDELE

**Exercise:** In front, in pairs, move the face, making faces, and thus mobilizing all the parts of the face and mouth that intervene in the joint. We can talk about an articulatory gymnastics.

### Exercises with phonemes to set the voice

TOR

MAM

BAM

LAM

MA, ME, MI, MO MU

MAÑANA, MEÑENE, MONIÑI, MOÑONO, MUÑUNU

MI MAMA ME MIMA

MI MA ME MI MAMA

The spoken voice is supported by the consonants

The voice sung in the vowels

### The words that begin with a vowel are the most difficult

ANTIGONA

AHORA

ANTES

ANUAL

ANUARIO

ANUALIDAD

Words that have all vowels: Murciélago ( bat), Ayuntamiento (city council)

Phrases with many vowels: *Tengo un murciélago que me ha regalado mi abuelito que se lo han dado en el ayuntamiento, y esto es incuestionable* (I have a bat that my grandfather has given me that has been given to him in the city council and this is unquestionable)

## QUALITIES OF THE SPOKEN VOICE

### The qualities of the spoken voice: Tone, Intensity, Amount and Timbre

#### Tone of voice

Medium, high, low. The tone work is done by imitating animals. Where the animal resonates is where the tone is.

In relation to the vocal tone are the resonators that are in our body where the student can place the voice and thus achieve different tones and coloratures of the voice.

The resonators that the students work on are the mask, which would be the medium tone, the Head, which would be the high tone, the chest, which would be the low tone. To these three resonators we can add the stomach resonator and the occipital resonator of the head.

^ **Middle tone:** the Sheep

^ **Low tone:** the Cow

^ **High tone:** the Cat and the Rooster

#### Voice intensity

Speak loud / speak low. The lowest intensity is whispering.

#### Amount of voice

Speak slow / speak fast

#### Voice ring

The timbre is the color of the voice of each one. It is determined by the main resonator of the voice. It can not be changed.

To speak is to mix these three qualities: tone, intensity and quantity.

## Exercises

- ↪ In pairs, speak in an invented language, with different tones, intensities and quantities.
- ↪ In pairs, one with his hand indicates to the other where he has to place the voice that is repeating a text: medium, low, high.

With these exercises the student loses vocal fear, acquires vocal agility, similar to body, and learns to fight with vocal monotony.

Each character speaks in a different tone, amount, and intensity. The King does not speak the same as the Servant. Hence the importance of vocal agility when acting.

## SPOKEN VOICE TOOLS

**The Spoken Voice has in its articulation a series of tools that are fundamental for good oral expression:**

### The accentuation

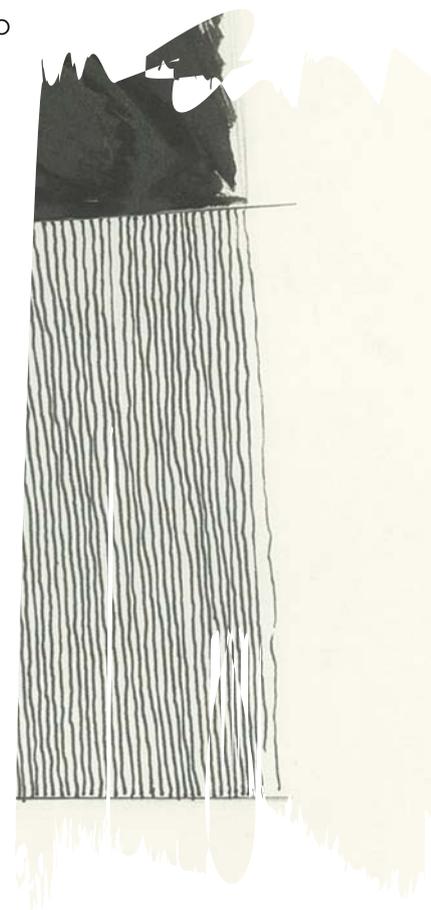
The accent can be grammatical and expressive.

Example of expressive accent: In a sentence, put the accent on a different word each time and we will see how the meaning changes. The phrase: *Existe el silencio de los viejos, tan cargado de sabiduría* (There is the silence of the old, so loaded with wisdom)

### Pause

The Pauses can be; respiratory, logical and psychological.

The logical and respiratory pause is implicit in the text, the psychological one is set by the actor. The psychological pause is placed before or after the phrase or word that you want to highlight. It has to do with the subtext, which is what is thought and not said, what is below the text, and is specific to the intention that the actor wants to put.



## Comma

The comma forces the listener to wait for what follows. The listener is suspended for a second. The grammatical comma of the text can be changed or removed according to the expression and intention that you want to give the text, as long as the meaning of the text is not lost.

## Punto

The period serves to separate the ideas from the text. An idea finishes and there is a point.

## Question

The interrogation is a question. If that question is not heard as such by the interlocutor, there is no desire to answer.

## Exclamation

The exclamation should wake up in the listener a reaction of compassion, interest or protest.

## Affirmation/Denial

The statement affirms an idea for the listener. Denial denies it. Once all these vocal tools are understood, we propose to the student to say a sentence in all these possible ways: affirmative, negative, interrogative, exclamatory, with or without pauses, etc.

The phrase is: *¡No envíes esa carta ahora, puede ser peligroso!*  
(Don't send that letter now, it can be dangerous!)

The intonation (that is, the tone of the voice), with the accentuation of the words are the bearers of the meaning of all spoken text.

## With a text that the students know by heart, we propose this exercises

- ↘ Repeat the text still, walking, jumping
- ↘ Repeat the text with different speeds and intensities
- ↘ Repeat the text with different tones

## VOICE AND BODY

The body is the scaffolding or support for all the actor's vocal work. The body drives the words, the vocal actions. The body accompanies the actor's word with its gestures. Sometimes doing something that contradicts the word, sometimes doing something that favors the word. The body is inseparable from the voice.

When speaking, when saying a text, reason and emotion sustain that text, they become visible through said text.

There are several languages in operation at the same time that the actor acts, and it is essential that the student is aware of this:

- ↪ **Language of words** (as defined by the dictionary)
- ↪ **Voice language** (timbre, rhythm, tone, volume, pauses)
- ↪ **Body language** (eyes, physiognomy, body position)
- ↪ **Body language in space** (movements, distances)
- ↪ **Unconscious language** (everything that the actor thinks or feels but does not have time to verbalize, we can be able to thinking a thousand things per second but not verbalizing them)

If in the spoken word we change some point of articulation - speak with the tongue attached to the upper palate, speak with the mouth closed, change the R for the G, etc. - or if we speak with different accents (Galician, Andalusian, Chinese, Russian accent, etc.) a different voice appears which is the voice of the comic theater, of farce, of the astracanada.



In the roles to be played by the actor and also the inmate, we find three types of text that correspond to the three fundamental dramatic forms: Tragedy, Drama and Comedy.

- ↪ **Subjective text** where the subject of the text is the first person. It is the voice of drama and tragedy. The actor / actress identifies with the character
- ↪ **Narrative text** where the subject of the text is the third person. It is the voice of the Comedy where the actor does not identify with the character
- ↪ **Visceral text** where we do not know who the subject of the text is. It is the voice of the interior monologue in literature and contemporary theater.

In all the texts of plays, the actor/ actress constantly finds fragments where the subjective and the narrative are alternate.

In addition to the three pillars on which the performance is based: body, emotion and voice, the student-intern also has to learn what a conflict is and how it works.

The conflict as the engine of the theater from the Greeks to Samuel Beckett.

## Esercizi

- ↪ Conflict between two actors united by a stick: action-reaction.
- ↪ Conflict between two actors united by a tape, which must always be taut: action-reaction
- ↪ Conflict between two actors, without stick or tape, who do action-reaction only with their bodies.
- ↪ Classic conflict exercises between a Protagonist, who wants to change reality, and an Antagonist who does not want to change it. Obviously the Protagonist and the Antagonist will have their reasons, which may or may not be hidden, and they will also have a social relationship and an emotional relationship.

# REHEARSE A PLAY

For the inmates of the Prison Theater Workshop, rehearsing a play is the hardest thing for them. Keep in mind that some never went to the theater and many only remember a school performance where they participated as actors or as spectators.

The first difficulty they have is understanding and memorizing the text.

The first days of rehearsal are dedicated to doing a work of explanation of the work, word by word, replica by replica. That they understand well the meaning of the work, the meaning of its character. In this phase they read the play several times and gradually make the vocal tone of their character.

The next phase is to rehearse standing up and with the actions of the play. Here the first element is the body and then the emotion and the voice. What is the character's body like? Is it an open character? Is it a closed character? How is it going? How do you move your hands? How does it look? How does it feel? How do you speak? With what tone, with what volume and speed?

Little by little we have to get them to leave the text, not to use it as a lifeline.

We try to put the show on its feet as soon as possible, so that the intern has a global vision of what we are going to do as soon as possible. This global vision forces him to attach their actions, their character.

As the rehearsals increase, they have to face precision, concentration, theatrical relationship with their peers, etc.

We must insist on repeating everything as much as possible and hope that, once again, that repetition will produce miracles.

In general, and although rehearsals always seem scarce, on the day of the performance, in front of their colleagues, they put all their energy and everything they learned trying to bring the work to fruition. And they always obtain it, what gives meaning to their work and ours.

Unfortunately there is only one representation and this prevents us from continuing to go deep into the work started with them. The almost twelve months dedicated to the rehearsal of the play begin and end in a single performance.

Last year they let their family to attend in the show they represented, "A los hombres del futuro" ( to the men of the future), based on poems by Bertol Brecht, and that family presence helps them to motivate themselves and take more responsibility for their work. Family members are very pleasantly surprised.

At the end of each Workshop we must start again with new interns, we can not to go deep into the previous Workshop. But the link with the theater and with us is already established forever.

# JOURNAL OF PEDAGOGICAL WORK

Carried out with the theater workshop inmates, before starting to mount a show.

JANUARY, FEBRUARY AND MARCH 2020

4-2-20

Only 8 come from UTE 1. There is a repeater and another that had been and left it.

We explain the European Project

We ask who will be in September. All but one will be there.

## We start the work:

- 🐾 Game of passing the line: Difference between everyday life and theater.
- 🐾 Go through a cold and a hot space.
- 🐾 Explain that the actor has three parts: body, emotion, and voice. There can be theater without a voice, but never without body and emotion.
- 🐾 The actor's body is the most visible sign of the theatrical event.
- 🐾 Body parts: Strength / Expression.
- 🐾 The body in mime.
- 🐾 Use of arms and legs: according to Decroux, according to Lecoq.
- 🐾 Open and closed positions. Half open and half closed positions.
- 🐾 Open and closed positions and the emotion.
- 🐾 Body in space: go to the ceiling, go to the ground, go from one point to another.
- 🐾 Walk in space: walk fast, walk slow..
- 🐾 Walk in a straight line or zigzag.
- 🐾 Walk and stop suddenly with a slap.
- 🐾 Walk and meet all in the center to a clap.
- 🐾 Walk to one point, stop before hitting and change direction to another point.
- 🐾 Holding hands, in pairs, insult each other saying numbers.
- 🐾 Holding hands, in pairs, caress each other saying numbers.
- 🐾 Action / reaction work with a stick in pairs. Slow and fast
- 🐾 Action /reaction work, in pairs, without the stick. Small and slow.
- 🐾 Move the pelvis.
- 🐾 In pairs attack with the pelvis and with sound.
- 🐾 In pairs, caress each other with the pelvis and with sound.

## 12-2-20

- Warm-up exercise the different parts of the body in static, starting from down to up (ankles, knees, hips, shoulders, arms and neck)

### Movement through space

- Change of rhythm depending on the clap (2 claps faster, 1 clap slower, "stop" we stop)
- Change the way (first we turn the neck and then accompany the rest of the body)
- Different ways of walking (stealthily, limp, pregnant, opening and closing doors, with a cane, in a hurry)
- Walking interrelating (military salute, "seventeenth century" salute, effusive salute, taking off his face haughtily)
- Say the name of a student, this student marks the way of walking and the rest imitate it.
- Say the name of a student, this student gives a rhythm and the rest follow.

### Games

- In pairs, backs close, move without ever losing physical contact.
- I work with oral expression:
- In a circle point to another and say a name of a woman or a man. The one who was pointed says another woman's or man's name.
- Mark to another saying Land, Sea or Air. The signaled has to say the name of an animal of what was indicated, be it Land, Sea or Air.



- ↘ Mark and say names of trees.
- ↘ Mark and say names of flowers.
- ↘ Mark to another and say an adjective that seems to correspond to them.
- ↘ Mark to another and tell him the animal you suggest.
- ↘ Tell a western movie, but each one can only say one word and you have to be logical.

19-2-20

- ↘ Walk through space. Make a Stop at each clap. Get together all in the center at each clap. Walking changing direction.
- ↘ Walk in slow motion
- ↘ Walking with the body of stone, air, iron, water
- ↘ Walking dragged by the nose, by the chest, by the lateral hip, by the front hip, by the ass, by the shoulders that pull up
- ↘ Walk opening and closing the body position
- ↘ Walk and close the body, but without arms, only with the chest
- ↘ Make a plastic box with the body open
- ↘ Make a plastic box with closed positions.
- ↘ Make a plastic painting from a first position, what story is told?
- ↘ Do the same with the voice: One begins by making a sound and the others are added.
- ↘ Make a machine with bodies, movement and sound. They are entering one by one.

### Action /Reaction

- ↘ Action between two with a stick. One pushes the stick and the other reacts to that push, then change.
- ↘ The same with a tape. Here you have to stretch. The tape must always be taut and parallel to the ground.
- ↘ Action / reaction without stick or tape. First small, then big

- ↘ Action / reaction collaborating with the other and not collaborating.
- ↘ Stab the other and the other reacts with his body.
- ↘ Slap the other and the other reacts with his body.
- ↘ Play "Curro Jiménez". In one arm a blanket, in the other a knife. Be surrounded. Defend yourself by turning.
- ↘ In all action / reaction exercises, what matters is STOP. At that moment the energy in space becomes energy in time, and is retained ready to explode when the action start again.
- ↘ I work with emotion from the outside to inside.
- ↘ I work with the 6 basic emotions: Anger, Fear, Sadness, Joy, Eroticism and Tenderness.
- ↘ Learn the patterns and work with them.
- ↘ I work with emotion from the inside out
- ↘ Sensory memory: Exercises.
- ↘ Sensitive memory: The room of my childhood.
- ↘ Words and body response: Action-Reaction

26-2-20

### Rehearsal

- ↘ Warm-up exercise the different parts of the body in static, starting from down to up (ankles, knees, hips, shoulders, arms and neck)

### Movement through space

- ↘ Change of rhythm depending on the clap (2 claps faster, 1 clap slower, "stop" we stop)
- ↘ Change the way (first we turn the neck and then accompany the rest of the body)
- ↘ Different ways of walking (stealthily, limp, pregnant, opening and closing doors, with a cane, in a hurry)
- ↘ Walking interrelating (military salute, "seventeenth century" salute, effusive salute, taking off his face haughtily)

- ↘ Say the name of a student, this student marks the way of walking and the rest imitate it.
- ↘ Say the name of a student, this student gives a rhythm and the rest follow.

## Games

### Face mask set:

2 rows facing each other, the first in a row puts on a face mask and walks in the direction of a partner from the other row, as he approaches, he changes his face and when he arrives in front of the partner, the classmate copies the mask that the other inmate is given. The inmate leaves and changes it to the next peer, so on.

### Game questions and answers:

2 rows facing each other, questions in low and answers in high.

### Game "what are you doing":

A circle is formed with a person in the center who is performing an action (for example, shaving) one of those in the circle approaches to this person and asks, What are you doing? and the inmate answers something other action that this intern is taking about (for example, playing tennis) the person who came from the circle stays in the center playing tennis and so on.

### Mimic game:

Guess a trade, no speaking

### Games in pairs:

Mirrors, reaction action (with strings), invading the space of the other but no touching.

The Comedy of Art is explained and the characters of the Comedy of Art are made: Pantalone, Dotore, Arle-

**IN ALL ACTION / REACTION EXERCISES, WHAT MATTERS IS STOP.**

**AT THAT MOMENT THE ENERGY IN SPACE BECOMES ENERGY IN TIME, AND IS RETAINED READY TO EXPLODE WHEN THE ACTION START AGAIN.**

quin, Colombina, Enamorados. First they make the mold of the character without a mask, then with the mask. They read the letter they have written to their father and what they have written about La Vergüenza. We talk and read a little other texts. They need to work their voice.

4-3-20

All come, except one who has been discharged.

We work for an hour with the Voice

- ↘ Breathing work
- ↘ Phonation work
- ↘ Articulation work
- ↘ Voice Qualities: Tone, Intensity, Amount and Timbre
- ↘ Work with the resonators: Mask, Chest and Head
- ↘ Then we do a first reading and a first cast of Europe, Europe, the show that is going to be done.

11-3-19

- ↘ Not everyone is coming today. Those from UTE2 not attending to class.
- ↘ We work a little voice. We review emotions.
- ↘ Then we read Europe, Europe and set a cast. Now they have to start studying the text, which is always the most difficult thing.

After confinement, on July 29 we started our work again in the Theater Workshop. The meeting with the students was very exciting and their attitude to us was very affectionate and respectful.

We will start rehearsing the show *Europa! Europa!*, which tells what happens to an African migrant in Europe, and we will represent her next December at Christmas activities.





# TEATRO NUCLEO

THEATRE WORKSHOP  
IN THE FERRARA PRISON 'C. SATTA'

TEATRONUCLEO.ORG



TEATRO NUCLEO |

THEATRE WORKSHOP IN THE FERRARA PRISON 'C. SATTA'

# OTHER LIVES

## THEATRE PRACTICES IN EUROPEAN PRISONS

by Horacio Czertok

### THE WORK OF TEATRO NUCLEO

Normally, a professional is defined as he/she that does what they do for a living. Our theatre cultivates the opposite: he/she that lives for what they do. We as actors have always trained people wanting to be integrated. What then generates and determines the conditions in which the training is 'actualised', as well as the actors/actresses in our group, is the context we find ourselves **ACTING IN**; be it a therapeutic community, a drug addiction therapy group, a psychiatric patients group, an inmates group.

"Professional" training, as proposed by the conventional school, is training in the art of feigning excellently. Depending on the type of school, this can mean the ability either to feign another identity in a credible way – interpretation, we call it – or to portray it with no attempt at verisimilitude. Stanislavsky, however, upsets all this when says to the actor "I don't believe you". As we know, he was against both these alternatives. Rather, he tells actors to delve into their memory for meaningful fragments of their own life experience capable of determining true feelings; feelings which, after being studied and developed, can be assigned to the character. Maybe he had read Spinoza who, in his 18th Proposition, wrote: "so long as a man is affected by the image of anything [...] the emotion of pleasure or pain is the same, whether the image be of a thing past or future". Stanislavsky wrote: "the character has a past, a life story, a subconscious that generates his gestures", and these are what determine the emotions that bring life to the way the actor relates to the other characters and are perceived as real by the audience. This is the 'system', even though Stanislavsky never agreed to this definition. In North American praxis it was to become the Method, by which actors were to be trained to give the impression of being real in their expressions. *Esse est percipi*: real to the extent that our sensory system perceives them as such. And so we believe them, as the trueness of the emotions generates the sense of authenticity.

Stanislavsky, given his classical education, is likely to have read *Ars Poetica*, in which Horace declares that *aut agitur res in scaenis aut acta refertur*; an episode may be either portrayed upon the stage or reported as having taken place elsewhere. His system is exactly the right strategy for dealing with an either/or situation such as this, because actors who can create authentic characters and make performances lifelike need appropriate dramaturgies and

**NORMALLY, A PROFESSIONAL IS DEFINED AS HE/SHE THAT DOES WHAT THEY DO FOR A LIVING.**

**OUR THEATRE CULTIVATES THE OPPOSITE: HE/SHE THAT LIVES FOR WHAT THEY DO.**

stagings. In this sense, we can safely say that Stanislavsky did not invent a new theatre, but rather interpreted this remark of Horace technically and linked it to the possibility of being realised.

The Stanislavskian approach brings our pupil-actors into organic contact with their inner world. The pupil, for the sake of the character, searches inside himself for emotions that are often slumbering deep down, or else moving just below the surface, entangled and covered with the rules of social behaviour. In the protected theatre workshop environment, the pupil allows himself to accept and experience them, and can therefore get to know them. Actor training thus becomes an indirect but effective form of emotional literacy. A specific benefit of the theatre work is that it teaches us not how to lie convincingly but, rather, to discover how we already are lying, and to realise that what we call identity is a character constructed over the years. By going through the actions that take us to the creation of a character, we realise how we got to create the thing we call "I". And how it can be changed.

Ever since the beginning of my life in theatre, in Patagonia in the 60s, the need to train ourselves as actors capable of putting into effect our stage ideas has always been clear to me. It all started with the arrival in my city – Comodoro Rivadavia – of a drama teacher, Jesus Panero de Miguel, sent from Buenos Aires by the Ministry of Culture to teach us theatre. He was a committed Stanislavskian. In a few weeks we managed to form a theatre group and that gave me the chance to create and direct my first performance. The investigation then intensified with Renzo Casali and Liliana Duca and the *Comuna Baires* group that we formed, having learnt the Method from William Layton, an Actor's Studio dissident who had settled in Spain. Theatre we saw as a tool for investigation and creation, *Comuna* not only as theatre but also as a permanent workshop and the Method as a way of creating the "New Man" of our and Che Guevara's dreams.

A kind of theatre for which, we believed, it was necessary to train special actors; actors that exuded authenticity, not dreaming of an artistic career but rather seeing theatre as a militancy in life that transcends bourgeois forms of politics and theatre. Actors capable of relating to audiences that are undomesticated and authentic, as authentic as the actors themselves try to be. The encounters were always explosive, high-density human events. It wasn't so much what was said in them – we spoke very little in our performances – but what they were able to generate. A theatre of actors, just as Stanislavsky was an actor, and my teachers Jesus and Renzo were actors. It matters little to a director how actors get results; that's their business. Achieving authenticity on stage means putting yourself entirely on the line and risking profound identity crises, because suffering and rejoicing with the character with the intensity and truth that the relationship with the audience demands (which is what gives a sense to the scene) is a game with no hiding place. The audience desires and expects your all. The actor wants to encounter the audience in the truth of that desire, and that truth burns like glowing iron. The director steers the game and watches it closely, but the actor is the one that burns. So what is needed is a director-teacher capable of empathising with her actors, and who cares as much about the process as the end results.

Added to the sense of vocation and the density and strength of mind that this game requires are all the existential difficulties of its intended goals. We do theatre in complicated places, before non-professional audiences: streets, squares, disused factories, hospital yards, prisons. The actors have to be machine operators, electricians and cleaners as well as actors. When they get to the place first of all they have clean it, organise the spaces, unload the equipment, construct the set and assemble the technical systems. And we actors will always be anonymous. All that will be

**A KIND OF THEATRE FOR WHICH, WE BELIEVED, IT WAS NECESSARY TO TRAIN SPECIAL ACTORS; ACTORS THAT EXLUDED AUTHENTICITY, NOT DREAMING OF AN ARTISTIC CAREER BUT RATHER SEEING THEATRE AS A MILITANCY IN LIFE THAT TRANSCENDS BOURGEOIS FORMS OF POLITICS AND THEATRE.**



remembered of our presence is the performance and the characters; in this kind of context the names and identities of the artists are unimportant. We pass through like a meteorite, with nothing but the light and emotion of the impact remaining in people's memories, perhaps indelibly. Very few drama school graduates have got what it takes to choose all this, or even understand why it is needed, and the theatrical attitudes they have been taught will be difficult to unlearn. So, our theatre work always starts from the training. We are, after all, in search of fellow creators. Many answer the call, few find a vocation in it and even fewer want to work on it with us. And it definitely won't be us, the teachers, who choose them. The pedagogy consists of generating a propaedeutic environment where the participants all have an equal chance. The process is always in the participants' hands: it is they who decide how much time, courage and energy to put into it. The scope is always collective, the process always individual. Each single person can-must discover their own creative capacity, the force required to transform neuroses and experiences into poetic material. Nobody else can go through this process for you, on your behalf. And nobody forces you to do it. There is no coercion. But if you do start, you have to keep to your own game, and this is exactly what the function of the teaching is: seeing that you keep to the rules of your own game and implacably pointing out all the distancing, subterfuge and lying that will inevitably come into play.

Lying is something we already know how to do, just as we know how to be authentic; like when we were children, before being conditioned by cultural constraints. We live in a theatre of social conventions, finely analysed by Goffman. What we discover in our workshops is how we are already doing it, how that theatre conditions and distorts our relationships and how, with the use of technique and through the mask of the character, we achieve authenticity. We mastered the acting game when we were children, but now in the workshops it can re-emerge to let our truths out. "The truth hurts", the song goes, but technique helps us to bear its pain and get to its pleasure. Jung tells us how man aspires to the truth and is willing to make any sacrifice to achieve it. The character, always in an extreme situation and at the pinnacle of his own truth – Hamlet's, Tancredi's, Vladimir's, Francis' or Don Quixote's – breathes freely.

One man is all men. Theatre is the ingenuity by which we can become all men and, in the process, understand what kind of man we are. The contexts are different, the situation of the aspiring actors the same, some more conscious of it than others, but the desire is for that: a crossing, a passage from the current condition of what is perceived as uncommunicable suffering and pain to the joy of overcoming it, through communication. The problem, the secret, is communication. At the origin of theatre lies communication, or rather, making a given situation common to others, to the audience. A propitiatory rite, a belonging ceremony. The aim is not to report the facts of it but to understand its nature by means of the collective consciousness, or conscience. *Thus conscience does make cowards of us all*, says Hamlet. Cowardice can be understood as fearing and respecting something inconceivable, such as death; a kind of knowledge that must be born in a collective setting. It is not the anagnorisis at the end of the ultimate solitary experience, the illumination of the single individual. Rather, it is a form of the knowledge discovered and developed by the Greeks, where the presence of the entire community was necessary to make that leap, from myth to history, to law, by means of catharsis. Catharsis as thematised by Aristotle: "bringing the spectator close to his own passions (catharsis of the feelings) produces purification (catharsis by the feelings) through their feigned expression on stage rather than in reality"<sup>1</sup>

The most interesting participants in theatre workshops of this kind, those who put the most into it and are enriched by the experience, are psychiatric patients, people in desolate suburbs, former drug addicts, prison

**AT THE ORIGIN OF THEATRE LIES COMMUNICATION, OR RATHER, MAKING A GIVEN SITUATION COMMON TO OTHERS, TO THE AUDIENCE. A PROPITIATORY RITE, A BELONGING CEREMONY.**

**THE AIM IS NOT TO REPORT THE FACTS OF IT BUT TO UNDERSTAND ITS NATURE BY MEANS OF THE COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS, OR CONSCIENCE.**

• • • • •

1 Umberto Galimberti, Nuovo dizionario di psicologia, Feltrinelli, Milano 2020, pp216.

inmates. On the subject of participants, Grotowski once told me how bemused he was by the attitude of lots of people who came to him to “learn the Grotowski method” in order to make themselves more marketable, showing very little interest in the ethical implications of his work and thus classifiable *a priori* as handicapped – morally handicapped. With our participants, there is no risk of this.

In this sense, the inmates' answers when we ask them why they wanted to join the theatre class are both significant and enlightening. It's a question we always ask in seminars, often getting replies such as: “to express myself, to help my career, or my therapist told me to”. But for the vast majority of inmates, the answer is “to be respected”. We've been asking new arrivals this same question for fifteen years and the answer has always been more or less the same: respect, dignity. We always find this moving, them imagining that they can find these things in theatre. And so we keep battling on to make sure the activity exists in prison. But what we say to them is always the same too: if you want respect and dignity you have to earn it.

---

Theatre is a serious thing and you've got to put **HEART AND SOUL** into it, with rigour. Otherwise what you'll get is charity, the applause of pity.

---

## THE PRISON WORKSHOP

Prison, with all its repressive horror, is egalitarian, and this is quite a paradox. Detainee-actors can face the audience from this ethical standpoint: they live in an egalitarian system whereas the spectators live in capitalist society. Prison is a break with capitalist life, in so far as no money circulates and everybody is equal, all with the same rights and duties.



In our workshops in prison, just like in the ones we do in the theatre, there is no rigid dividing line between what we can call pedagogy and the production of performances. We always work with the creation of a performance in mind, also because the composition of the group

is continually changing due to changes in the prison organisation: permits, early releases, transfers, etc. We are a team and which of us actually play in the match is a question of chance, just as choosing the script to base our first performance on in 2006 was a question of chance.



## FROM SHAKESPEARE TO BECKETT

I had suggested Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, because once when we were sitting in our circle, a group of middle-aged gentlemen earnestly playing around with phrases and modulating words, an image of imperial senators came to mind. So we got some sheets and made togas, and they looked pretty convincing. Then, one day, I had some photocopies of Beckett's *Godot* with me. Without thinking, I put them down on a desk and an inmate, Franco, an obscure individual who up to then had kept himself detached from the group and seemed irritated by its dynamics, picked them up and started reading out loud. There was a silence. The words cut into us like knives. Vladimir and Estragon, or rather, several different Vladimirs and several different Estragons materialised before us in that austere room that served as a theatre. The cadenced themes in the script, ringing out one after the other, were very familiar to them: the passing of time and the difficulty of getting it to pass, remembering, waiting. In prison you're always waiting for something: interviews, permits, court proceedings. Extremely naturally, the inmates made the metaphor their own. Shakespeare was put aside. With each rehearsal, the Beckett-like scenario gained substance. In the open rehearsals, attended by other inmates and guests from outside, the audience involvement was intense. Everybody fully grasped the irony and the laughter at the contradictions was continuous, with evident comparisons being made to prison life. We used prompters, the prompter being a key figure in traditional Italian theatre, and this made it possible for us to extend and vary the group's repertoire. The prompter function also had other important implications for our work. First of all, it allowed more actors to take part. The prompter-actor

roles weren't completely interchangeable, of course, but the demands of prison life meant that inmates often weren't available, and the negative effects of this were offset by the fact that the prompter, who knew the part, could enter the scene when necessary. The work was always discussed in sporting terms, right from the start, and in this sense the prompter wasn't on the bench waiting, but actually taking part by suggesting the lines. They all have to read, and they all do, which is no small thing; we could call it a secondary benefit of the theatre practice. The disadvantage of not having the mnemonic techniques of professionals has been transformed into a series of advantages: the incentive to read, getting to know the script, being prepared to enter the scene when necessary, strengthening



the feeling of being part of a collective exercise. And then, the fact that the voice travels from the mouth of the prompter to that of the actor gives the word a chance to sink in more deeply. The acoustics in the room are less than perfect and the actors haven't been trained to control their voices. The word emitted by the prompter is neutral, almost a whisper, and the audience hears it too, which prepares them to listen. The actor is aware of this and uses it, so that the audience can appreciate the way the word acquires meaning and specific value. It could be said that this makes everything less natural and limits actor-audience empathy. It is of course feigned, as theatre always is, but, paradoxically, the estranging effect of the prompter helps to divert attention to the theatrical action. The audience's sense of wonder is triggered and captured not by an illusion of naturalness, but because de-

spite – or perhaps due to, who knows? – the evident artificiality they can empathise with the characters. And this is exactly where we wanted to get to. Bolstering our actors' vanity is of no interest to us. We want the audience to connect with Estragon, not Francesco; with Vladimir, not Franco. So Francesco and Franco have to shrink their ego and make room for the character. It is an exercise in humility.

Beckett always said that the best performance of *Godot* was in San Quentin Prison. And Roger Blin told me of the difficulties he had when first putting the play on in Paris: more than two exhausting years trying to find "suitable" actors – nobody convinced Beckett – who didn't "portray" or interpret the part but just "were" it. In this first experience with the inmates we learnt a possible methodological approach. We were worried that the script might be too difficult and out of reach for these people with no "adequate" cultural education, but we were proved wrong: by their passion and hunger for Beckett, by the astonishing way they used the words to construct the characters and by the way this guided them in the interplay with the audience.

## 2009 FROM WOYZECK TO UOZEC

The next project we began with neither script nor proper dramatic structure. Rather than working on a performance, we proposed a *cantiere* (work-in-progress): the *Cantiere Woyzeck*. It was time to move on from the work on characters we had done with Beckett to start looking at the dramaturgy, because actors can change character, and the fact that change is possible, and can even be a pleasure, is one of the key elements of theatre work in prison. But the important thing is to understand what the circumstances are that drive and often

WE WERE WORRIED  
THAT THE SCRIPT MIGHT  
BE TOO DIFFICULT AND  
OUT OF REACH FOR  
THESE PEOPLE WITH NO  
"ADEQUATE" CULTURAL  
EDUCATION, BUT WE  
WERE PROVED WRONG:  
BY THEIR PASSION AND  
HUNGER FOR BECKETT

determine change: coming from within a person to the outside, and coming from the outside, as given by the circumstances, to within the person. Changes affect circumstances, and circumstances fundamentally transform "characters".

In this sense Buchner's script, *Woyzeck*, was the right choice. The story behind it greatly interested our detainee-actors right from the start: in about 1820 Buchner read in the newspaper about a barber who, driven by social pressures and jealousy, killed his wife and was tried and sentenced to death for it. As a theatre script it is incomplete – loosely structured in recombina-ble scenes whose content and order can be changed at will – and excellent for understanding the mechanisms of theatre. We worked on it for four years with dozens of actors and produced no less than eight different versions, two of which we managed to take out of the prison, to the Municipal Theatre in Ferrara.

The structural lightness of Buchner's script and the variety of the situations – a circus, a barracks, the streets of a village – stimulated different possibilities, adaptations and styles. As an opening we devised a kind of cabaret, at the end of which that particularly detestable animal, soldier *Woyzeck*, object of mistreatment and target for all kinds of jibes from his fellow soldiers and officers and the throngs of entertainment-seeking cabaret goers, was presented to all. There could be many nuanced interpretations of all this, but we left them to the audience. The different scenes became dress rehearsals, attended on each occasion by groups of detainees, whose reactions we studied and discussed and then incorporated into the creative process. This enabled us to greatly increase the number of participants in the workshop.

We worked on the situations using improvisation. At that time the inmates in the group were also in the prison band, and spent a lot of time rehearsing their songs. At the heart of this was Pepè: excellent voice, intuitive stage presence and great charisma. The group didn't take to





our proposal immediately. They went along with it out of respect, but would have liked – and asked for insistently – a proper script, with clearly assigned roles. They weren't happy improvising, and in this were no different to any other amateur theatre group, which we didn't fail to point out. Then, when we got down to working on the characters, they started enjoying it. Poor soldier Woyzeck and his relationships were clear to understand, seen through the prism of prison relationships. Nobody wanted to do Maria though. And this was how it was for about a year until, one day, Pepè, previously not very involved in the theatre activity, decided – without saying a thing, as often happened in the workshops – to take the role. This didn't mean being a transvestite, but rather working on the female which, we insisted, is to be found in all males. So, in the middle

of an improvisation involving one of the Woyzecks, a captain and the doctor, enter stage left Pepè, humming a tune. He's brought a bucket and a sheet with him and he's doing the washing, complaining because Woyzeck neglects her. The perfect byplay. Forget about the captain and the doctor, just look at this Mary. Then she drags in Lorenzo, another Neapolitan, and it's like being in one of those tiny street-level rooms in the Spagnoli district of Naples. In comes Woyzeck, and they act out the betrayal situation with the drum-major. Pepè-Maria says she's pregnant again, flaunting her large belly, and it surprises no one because by now she really is Maria. She is duly murdered. Then comes the stroke of genius: the dead Maria has been covered with a sheet by the other actors, and the covered bulk could be thought of as a pregnant woman. Re-enter an inspired Lorenzo, who rallies the others, shouting that they have to save the baby. A kind of funereal birth is enacted and enter Pepè-Maria Charlie, a smallish lad who becomes the baby, in the arms of Lorenzo. I am stunned. I think of Bakhtin, of death giving birth to life, of these inmates finding an incredibly authentic and theatrical way of resolving an otherwise banal, obscene murder scene. The laughter is suddenly cut short by the tragedy of it. Luckily, I have the video of that whole improvisation and I often use it in

lessons. In another improvisation a new character appears, a priest, not in the original script. Thus the trio that incites Woyzeck to commit the murder and then condemns him to death is: captain, doctor, priest.

From then on, with Pepè involved, the work became more substantial. We had moved on from Woyzeck the literary figure to Uòzec, as our actors called the wretched main character. A year had gone by since the start of the project; but this is the time it takes in theatre workshops.

Two significant contributions to the history of possible dramatic compositions for Woyzeck: a murdered Maria who gives birth to life, and a priest who adds religion to the other tortures. This is what theatre has given to prison, and prison to theatre.

The project was awarded the Medal of the President of the Italian Republic.

---

In 2011, on our initiative and after a considerable amount of planning and organising, a **REGIONAL PRISON THEATRE COORDINATING BODY** was formed, consisting of eight prison theatre groups. The body, with the University of Bologna as scientific advisor, is formally linked to the Emilia Romagna Regional Council and the Italian Ministry of Justice.

---

Doing theatre in prison means dealing with a host of continuously occurring problems, both theatrical and legal. The Coordinating Body, as well as discussing general questions and the need to find collective answers, also has to cope with specific issues such as the lack of teaching facilities. Our workshops now have internship programmes, and the Coordinating Body has formed a training school, the only one of its kind in Italy and Europe, to organise the various activities. Also, the scientific advisory work has flourished thanks to the creation of a journal, "Prison Notebooks" (*Quaderni del Carcere*).

The coordinating body decided to generate common themes for the theatre groups to work on and interpret in their own way in their performances.

The first of these was *Gerusalemme Liberata* by Torquato Tasso.

## 2013 FROM THE CHARACTERS AND THE DRAMATURGY TO THE WORD: ANOTHER CHANGE OF DIRECTION

Introducing “uncultured” prisoners to what we call grand style poetry and hoping to get a valid creative result out of it may seem like a childish idea, a kind of provocation for its own sake. But it isn't. The habit illiterate Tuscan farmers have of reciting Dante tercets has always fascinated me, as has the command of Tassian octaves shown in the *Maggi* festivals in the Emilian Appenines, all linked to the desire and ability to improvise poetry, off the cuff. This is no provocation. It is simply trusting in the power of poetry, which, before becoming grand-style, aloof and out of reach, was popular. My theatre has always been popular, and to me, a true Gramscian, popular means reclaiming the centrality and importance of cultural action. Strangely, the word has been made synonymous with ugly and ugliness, but my cultural points of reference, Gramsci of course, and Bachtin, – not only allow me to make this inversion of meaning but constitute the very basis of it.

To proceed with this new project, centred on Tasso and his *Gerusalemme liberata*, we yet again changed our approach and the methods we used with the actors. The part of the *Gerusalemme* we decided to work on was the *Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*. Here we find the essence of the tragedy: a battle with neither respite nor repose against a person who appears to be a mortal enemy and who gives as good as she takes. She falls and drowns in her own blood, and when pity prevails over the joy of victory you find you've killed the person you most loved in the world. In addition to Tasso there is



Monteverdi, who for the first time ever uses actors that both sing and act and music that is also theatrical: the birth of opera. Once more, it's a challenge, but we know our actor-detainees well and we think they're up to it. The trust we have in each other acts as a support,

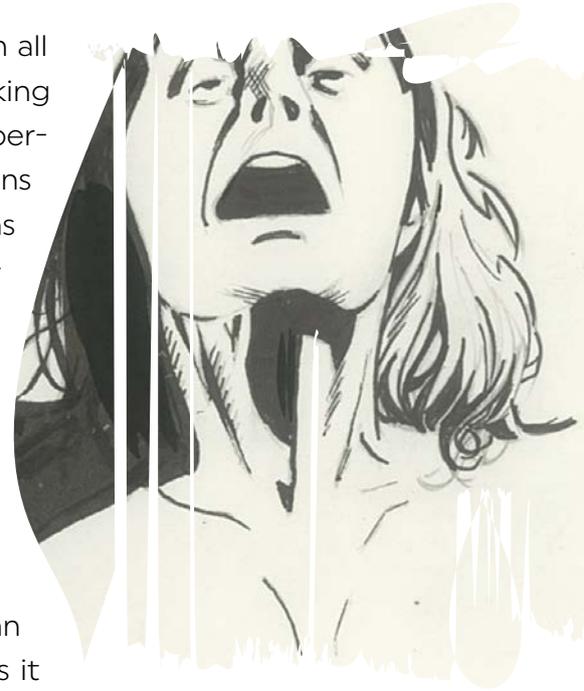
although little is ever said about it. In fact nothing is ever said about it. Our job is to set the challenges and there's to meet them and that's all there is to it. When I read out the script for the first time, after a brief introduction, there's an incredulous silence. They don't understand a thing; also because more than half of them don't speak much Italian and the Italians themselves know very little about their own language. Couldn't we simplify it? – somebody bravely suggests – couldn't we use modern Italian so that we can understand it? Thus follows a memorable discussion about understanding, history and narration. What is there to understand? The story is over and told very quickly, but much more comes out in the discussion. We kill the things we love (a brief aside on Wilde, he too quite familiar with prisons). There's space here for all sorts of things. Also because there are those amongst us who really have killed, and that kind of anger too is brought in. What is there to understand? The complexity of the discussion forces us to reflect on many different levels. We understand the wisdom of the poet from his choice of words and the way he makes the words

work for him, and the way metre and rhythm are used to engender feelings in us. It's all there, in those sixteen octaves, a coded message that we have to decipher. We hear lots of stories in the news, in films and TV series and even in some of the better, well made advertisements, because the best minds of our generation work in advertising, not opera. In the 17th century though this was the only way Tasso had of showing us many things, so every word is impregnated, every word counts.

**WHEN I READ OUT THE SCRIPT FOR THE FIRST TIME, AFTER A BRIEF INTRODUCTION, THERE'S AN INCREDULOUS SILENCE.**

**"COULDN'T WE SIMPLIFY IT?" - SOMEBODY BRAVELY SUGGESTS - "COULDN'T WE USE MODERN ITALIAN SO THAT WE CAN UNDERSTAND IT? "THUS FOLLOWS A MEMORABLE DISCUSSION ABOUT UNDERSTANDING, HISTORY AND NARRATION.**

The Tasso meant that we had to concentrate on the voice, in all its aspects. We based ourselves largely on the band for working out songs, octaves and everything else that was to be in the performance. The band consisted of Italians from different regions plus Cubans, Albanians, Moroccans, Tunisians, Serbs, Nigerians and Cameroonians. One day Dragan wants us to sing a certain song at all costs. Things get quite tense and we all realise that for some reason we have to do as he asks. The band runs through it a couple of times and they're ready for him to start singing. He tries, but he's way out of tune. There's no way he can do it, and the session will be ending in just over fifteen minutes then we'll have to leave. Dragan is getting more and more anxious and worried. The song must be sung. In steps Samuel, a Nigerian. He doesn't speak much Italian but the song is in Serbo-Montenegrin anyway. Dragan writes it down phonetically, Samuel sings it. Dragan relaxes as it takes form falteringly. What the song says, Dragan tells us, is: girl, don't fall in love with me, I'm no good. I'm glad you love me but I'll do you harm. We come away from the theatre with a mixed sense of anguish and freedom: the imperativeness, archaic and urgent, remains clear: that song had to be sung, and we all made it happen. That's why I love these people, these workshops: every time they make me rediscover the sense of theatre. The song wasn't used in the performance, but Dragan took heart.



Lesther has an extraordinary voice. A dense, light voice ranging naturally over four octaves. Inside him he has an instinctive, innate knowledge, the kind you can't learn at school. When he sings he gets right into the stories behind the words, using the power and knowledge of feeling. His feelings are like a compass that guides him with extreme precision, and he knows how to govern the emotions that those feelings trigger, never straying from the score – and he can't read music. Lesther sings boleros and folk songs, his favourite covers and songs of his own composition. He's from Cuba, an adopted child, and went to school but not excessively.

**THE SINGING IS SO POWERFUL BECAUSE LESTHER BELIEVES IN IT, LESTHER PUTS HIS HEART AND SOUL INTO IT, LESTHER SEES AND MAKES US HEAR WHAT IS HAPPENING. WHEN HIS SINGING STARTS EVERYTHING STOPS.**

He neither knows nor cares about anything else. I bring him a CD of Monteverdi's *Combattimento* with the script and tell him to study it. He says it's impossible and that he doesn't understand a thing *no entiendo esta musica* but that he'll try. He works with another inmate, Romano, who plays in the band; a good double-bass player who does a fine basso continuo.

Over the months, octave by octave, Lesther gets to grips with it. So there we are: an actor that can sing the *Combattimento* all by himself, with perfect intonation – the changes, the falsettos, the octave leaps. And with constancy, with perseverance; 23 minutes of singing. The impact not only on the other detainees but also on the prison guards has to be seen to be believed. The singing is so powerful because Lesther believes in it, Lesther puts his heart and soul into it, Lesther sees and makes us hear what is happening. When his singing starts everything stops. Some eyes moisten. We end up torn apart by all that beauty, by the horror – that strikes a chord in all of us in its own way – and by the beauty. I get a teacher from the Ferrara *Conservatorio* to come in and listen to it. He's astounded.

He organises rehearsals immediately and we arrange for a string quartet to come in. Lesther handles the rehearsals as would a consummate tenor; a simple change of tone. The poetry was there waiting for him, he just needed the opportunity.

William is a young goth, classed as dangerous. He had a long familiarisation period, detached, keeping himself to himself, occasionally joining in songs on the percussion. One day, sensing that he's quite "with us", I hand him the script and say: study it, to speak it – Lesther sings it and you speak it. I don't know yet how and whether it will fit into the performance. I can't do it, he says, too complicated; don't understand a thing. Coward. Where's your guts? And there he is a few months later with the *combattimento* almost learnt by heart. Everybody is amazed: him, his friends, the guards, the educators. A teacher, quite moved, tells me she

would never have thought to see the day when one of her pupils would ask her to help him with Tasso. Shortly after that his classification as dangerous – Category 4b – was revoked and he was transferred to a lower-security facility nearer his home where he could study. Did *Gerusalemme* liberate him? According to the educators, yes, definitely: Villiam has changed. Unfortunately, after so much work, we lost a good guy. But isn't that the main point of us being here? Yes and no, like so many things here on the inside. When Villiam left, Dragan offered to take over

and I said, forget about it, you can't even speak Italian. He got down to work. And the big Montenegrin with his mop of hair never gave up with those sixteen octaves, getting really excited when he began to understand the logic of metre and syllabication and the whys and wherefores of a hendecasyllable. We had always known how essential poetry was to this work, but seeing it embodied in this way made us appreciate it in a different light. Dragan had been in the war in Yugoslavia. His story comes into the plot – with discretion. He knows what *combattimenti* means. Now we all help him understand that that war is over, although others have begun. Poetry makes these people dangerous in a gentle way, lucid, tender.

After the performances in prison, before a paying audience, individually checked and screened by the police before being admitted and thus experiencing what it's like going into a prison, we decided to take it to the city's Municipal Theatre. Alongside Lester there will be the *Conservatorio* string quartet and the spinet of Gianfranco, who organised the musical side – although there was really no need; Lester could have sung those octaves anywhere. The performance was a homage to the work itself and to Monteverdi, whose centenary it was, and the presence of the string quartet bears witness to the revolution the composer caused with this music, which counterpoints rather than accompanies the singing. What a luxury, we say,



us and our detainee-actors treading the sacred boards of the Municipal Theatre stage, singing our Monteverdi and reciting our Tasso before an expert audience. A triumph, you could say, met with amazement and strong emotions. These voices, these people: taking scripts and melodies from the classical tradition, determinedly and yet appropriately, and instilling them with new depth and meaning.

## 2015 JARRY. FROM NOBLE POETRY TO SURREALISM

Change is what these workshops are about. Not satisfied with having found a "method" for doing theatre in prison, with the new project we immediately put it all up for grabs again. The veteran detainee-actors guarantee discipline, respect and a properly structured work situa-

tion. They are, in fact, the guarantee that everything functions. They look after the room, props and equipment and even take the lead in the warm-up sessions. They are bearers of experience.

**THE VETERAN DETAINEE-ACTORS GUARANTEE DISCIPLINE, RESPECT AND A PROPERLY STRUCTURED WORK SITUATION.**

**THEY ARE, IN FACT, THE GUARANTEE THAT EVERYTHING FUNCTIONS. THEY LOOK AFTER THE ROOM, PROPS AND EQUIPMENT AND EVEN TAKE THE LEAD IN THE WARM-UP SESSIONS. THEY ARE BEARERS OF EXPERIENCE.**

Prison, a workshop of meanings: surrealism is what we live it and breathe here every day, like Beckett and the absurd. When we first proposed working on Jarry to the inmates, we began directly with a series of improvisations on an episode in which the boss, Ubu, tells his minions to go and seize Poland. There were two instructions: each person had to think what kind of Poland it was that they wanted to seize, going from the abstract to the concrete. Everyone thus became an aristocrat, a captain of his own army. Sitting around the table, a very nice one built by Dragan, alliances and collusions were formed and unformed. Here too, like in *Woyzeck*, there was the problem of playing the woman, Mama Ubu, one of the main characters. Dragan, with his long Balkan *chevelure*, takes the role. He has to practice walking in his size 12 stiletto

heels, which weren't easy to find. In these workshops everything starts from the feet, the walk. The progression from Tancredi to Mamma Ubu was an important development for all. His entrances, floating in on high heels and in a little black dress, organically absorbed in the personality and character of the *Mère*, never fails to amaze. The impression made by this exceedingly male figure bringing life to a woman character is considerable and goes well beyond caricature. Dragan is *Mère* Ubu; there is no doubt about it. And this helps Alcide, cast from day one as King Ubu, to whom he assigns the worst aspects of his own personality so that he is obliged to see them, accept them and laugh about them, which is all you can do with Jarry in full flow. He becomes a bellicose, swaggering, wimp who never fluffs a line. So we have the evil, credible couple, and Ubu is doable. You understand right from the start is that it's going to be a sort of musical – very different to the previous work on Tasso – with singing, dancing and above all laughter. We procure the Janacci song *Ho Visto un Re* (I saw a King) and everything falls into place.

What I always and especially remember about this theatre is the silences, the timely ones. At the height of the action in Ubu: King Ubu at one end of the table, *Mère* at the other, in silence, a wait that lengthens and is extendable, with Dragan doing his hair. When the audience realise that it's not an accidental silence but a choice, they accept it and love it. It is broken by a huge sack dropping suddenly from the rigging and hanging there in mid-air, swinging. *Mère* says *a letter* and we all laugh like mad. She climbs up on to the table and takes out a real letter. These detainee-actors have learnt to work with the audience, to be strong and authoritative so that the audience can get its imagination working and create the situation together with us, invent the moment with us, and celebrate it.

Thinking about how the theatre process can carry on with the making and broadcast of web series. Because of the pandemic, we can no longer go out to perform in theatres nor bring audiences in to see it.

**THESE DETAINEE-ACTORS  
HAVE LEARNT TO WORK WITH  
THE AUDIENCE, TO BE STRONG  
AND AUTHORITATIVE SO  
THAT THE AUDIENCE CAN GET  
ITS IMAGINATION WORKING  
AND CREATE THE SITUATION  
TOGETHER WITH US, INVENT  
THE MOMENT WITH US, AND  
CELEBRATE IT.**

# TO BE OR NOT TO BE... AN ACTOR

## IMPRESSIONS OF THEATRE WORK WITH NON-ACTORS

by Marco Luciano

Ever since 2005, when I first started putting my interest in theatre direction into practice and holding workshops, I have been asking myself this question: **IS AN ACTOR SOMETHING YOU ARE OR SOMETHING YOU DO?** What certificate, testimonial or professional category is there that really attests to this status, implying as it does so many disparate, mysterious aspects of the human "being"?

---

I have always seen being an actor as a temporary life stage, something that switches on and off, a spatial-temporal opening, a poetic-emotional gate that exists within the time and duration – in Bergsonian terms – of the theatrical dimension.

---

We could now go on to discuss the "professional *versus* non-professional actor" question, by no means unimportant, but that would lead us to topics and situations that lie beyond the scope of this chapter.

Just as theatre doesn't exist when it isn't being done, so the actor "is" in the moment she or he actualises, acts, or rather, exercises the function of being a "bridge" between the intelligences and spiritualities of all those taking part in the collective ritual that we call theatre.

Grotowski said "it is not theatre that is indispensable, but something quite different. To cross the frontiers between you and me." I have always seen the term "theatre" here as a clear reference to the actor and the role she has (or should have) in our society and in the communi-

**JUST AS THEATRE DOESN'T EXIST WHEN IT ISN'T BEING DONE, SO THE ACTOR "IS" IN THE MOMENT SHE OR HE ACTUALISES, ACTS, OR RATHER, EXERCISES THE FUNCTION OF BEING A "BRIDGE" BETWEEN THE INTELLIGENCES AND SPIRITUALITIES OF ALL THOSE TAKING PART IN THE COLLECTIVE RITUAL THAT WE CALL THEATRE.**

ties she encounters. A temporary state, we said, but not – I would add – transitory; something you train for all your life but which becomes incarnate on very few occasions. Not always, in the thirtieth repeat of the same play, are "actors" still capable of being Actors. So what do you train for? To project your voice? To scan a script rhythmically? What do you train your body to do? To recite (or interpret, if you like) hanging upside down? Another misunderstood term in the interminable string of labels that always makes me smile is 'physical theatre'. What is there in theatre that isn't physical? The word? The emo-

tion? The memory? Obviously, this isn't the way things are. The chemistry moves both within us and outside us, recreating and altering fragrances and images from past ages which, while perhaps never experienced directly, are so true; a process supported by tiny electric shocks, synapses, that tear back through time to take us to worlds we thought had disappeared. These pathways, these emotional relays, tone up the muscles of the feelings and prepare us for the appearance of the Actor. What we train for is to surprise our souls; the alternative is aerobics, jogging, exercises in style.

From 2014 to 2017, in a scheme pioneered by the Turin ASL 1 district health authority and the association *Mente-Locale*, I held a series of permanent creativity workshops, attended by psychiatry service users and some young students with an interest in theatre who had heard about our teaching methods in a seminar. A very heterogeneous group, almost random, and this set me the immediate tricky task of finding some common ground to bring them together. We began with the usual routines for people new to theatre or young would-be actors: physical and vocal exercises, dramaturgy of the actor, improvisation on a theme. But the reaction of this set of people, not yet a group, was different. I realised that this approach wasn't going to work and that a change of plan was needed. So I made the teaching more



fluid to start with, touching on themes and poetics that allowed me to get to know them and them me, raising political issues and proposing things that had more of a destabilising effect. I proceeded by trial and error, but I needed a chink to open to let the neuroses out; a crisis. We started talking about the family, anonymously writing down things that we would never have dared to say openly and then mixing up the letters and working on them theatrically. In this, I saw "non-actors" opening their hearts as they sat there sweating, talking to the mirror with another person's words. The shock of encountering a self different to that of their ideas and image both exhausted and excited them. It was like the eruption of ardour and joy that occurs when one stumbles unexpectedly on an unknown world – as in a first kiss or a last goodbye. Something that happens as if by chance and strings together a series of unconnected and organic "actions",

fanned by a wind of deep rebellion ... like a fire ready to flare up. And I, the first spectator, despite my clumsy attempts to resist, allowed myself to be swept away by these waves of authentic humanity. I had to learn to distance myself, to control the fire so that it didn't go out or burn us alive. Like primitive man, I realised that, for me, tending that fire represented a new stage of my artistic life.

These goals could not remain as chance consequences of a certain psycho-emotional state, a certain kind of light, a certain temperature, a certain way of arranging people in a certain space. I felt a deep need to find a code, a paradigm, some rules; or at least a more or less

treadable path to take together with these people that would lead us to the construction of a repeatable choreographic, musical and emotional score – a performance. We had to develop special working methods, adaptable to the ever different proposals of the “non-actors”. We had to structure training courses that could cater for and cover the different physical and expressive possibilities and creative processes that were in some way traceable to recognisable codes, whilst being sure that we could express our ideas. We had to set the boundaries and feel free to create within them. That was what they wanted, and so did I. That, we decided, was the terrain where we could meet, the place where we could form links, share horizons, discuss visions, put them into practice and actualise them.

In this group there was a young man called Jacopo, a medical student with a group therapy and sheltered apartment therapy background. He had no actual psychic disability or pathology, but suffered from emotional hypersensitivity and had a terrible fear of expressing himself. He was chronically shy, with permanently downcast eyes and a feeble voice. Whenever the group’s attention was on him during the work he went into a profound crisis; his back muscles blocked and he turned stiff and tense, breathing hard and fast in mainly shallow gasps. He couldn’t speak. The words of Artaud came to mind... *“voluntary breathing incites the spontaneous reappearance of life”* ... and it made me think of the struggle in this boy’s inner life. Or perhaps the breathing wasn’t really voluntary? But if this was the case, why did he keep on coming to our workshops? I asked both him and myself this several times. Despite the evident strain, Jacopo was always there. In that period we were working on the theme of social alienation, searching – by means of guided improvisations and ideas nurtured by the actors in their own time – for nodes of conflict in the relationship between the rhythm of life in a metropolis and the flow of time in nature. Breathing – again – was central to the tonal and choreographic development which, in a precise, repeated sequence, progressed through a typical day (wake up, have a coffee, get dressed, go out, miss the bus, etc.). We had no script as yet and so, as I usually did in these situations, I asked the actors to be authors and poets as well. Jacopo suggested a poem of his about a simple summer walk.

RIIIIING  
SO  
OPEN  
GET UP CAN DRESS PASS  
GO SEE DOWN LEAVE  
BYE  
LOOK AHEAD BEND GO STRAIGHT STOP  
RED  
CAN PASS DAY  
SWEAT RUN  
SEE JUMP GO SHOUT  
HELLO  
NOEONE  
SOMEONE  
FAR  
HELLO  
COUNTRYSIDE PASSING CITY.  
ROOFS TERRACES BALCONIES  
PORTICOES ROADS SIGNS SERVICE  
ROADS GREY HOUSES RED HOUSES OLD  
HOUSES NEW HOUSES  
FORWARD TO TAKE OFF BACK TO GO  
BACK  
BACK  
NO BACK NO  
NO PERHAPS  
NO LATER  
NO  
NEVER  
ANOTHER TIME  
THAT SOFA THAT CHAIR THAT TRASH  
THAT BLACK FACE THAT GRIMACE DOWN  
DIRTY CROOKED WRECKED SLEEPY FACE  
BETTER NOT TO

TORPOR TO CLIP THE WINGS OF MY  
STOPPERED TURBID-SOULED BODY  
NO  
FORWARD  
DAY CAN SEE  
STUPOR TASTELESS DELIGHT  
ANXIETY BITTER IN THE MOUTH  
BITTER ON THE SKIN  
THE VOICE SOUR  
THE WORDS DEAD  
TOO LOW SILENT  
SILENT SILENT SILENT SILENT  
NO  
LATER  
PERHAPS  
ANOTHER TIME  
TREES TREES TREES TREES TREES  
TREES OAKS LIMES BIRCHES TREES  
TREES TREES TREES GREEN GREEN  
GREEN GREEN GREEN FORWARD SKY  
ROOFS CLOUDS SUN HOT RUN SWEAT  
JUMP BREATHLESS THIRSTY BREATHE  
COOL POURING WATER LAUGH  
LAUGH  
DRINK  
SMILE  
NEVER TURN BACK  
LATER  
PERHAPS  
BYE

In the poem, in the very way it was shaped, you could see the street; no punctuation, verses either long or very short, like a person's breathing when they go through different emotional stages. And that **NEVER TURN BACK** epitomising so much his way of taking on the challenge of theatre.

Again, the word **BREATHE** made me understand that this was the key to getting him to work on the piece. We started by dividing it up into single words. Inhale before each word and speak it in a single exhalation, then speak sets of words in a single exhalation, and so on until the sequence of breaths gave Jacopo a rhythmic frame of reference within which he could find the colours and sounds he wanted and needed. With each rehearsal his voice, charged with memories and images, got stronger and stronger, and the structured breathing made his body more "present" and powerful, like the bag on a rudimentary but incredibly evocative set of bagpipes. One day, in an improvisation on Jacopo's monologue, as the other workshop members repeated the "everydayness" sequence at a faster and faster rhythm, one of them started to sing in long, low notes; an old, sweet dance tune from the 80s by F.R. David, that went:

WORDS DON'T COME EASY TO ME  
HOW CAN I FIND A WAY TO MAKE YOU SEE I LOVE YOU  
WORDS DON'T COME EASY  
WORDS DON'T COME EASY TO ME  
THIS IS THE ONLY WAY FOR ME TO SAY I LOVE YOU  
WORDS DON'T COME EASY.

I could sense theatre barging into the room; we all could. The work of a group, of the group, had transformed the fragility of individuals into a distinct creation, transforming insecurities into a precise language; a recognisable, organic and living poetic.

Jacopo's difficulties had been taken up, incorporated and re-worked, by all – theatrically, of course. They were ready for the surprise. They had already seen the Actor emerging in him. In the process Jacopo had overcome the previous self-determinations constructed in his imagination. He had overturned them, because starting on the difficult road to being an Actor

actually means determining yourself as a person. A never-ending road, all the way to the horizon. As Sartre said, "Choosing to be an actor is choosing to be a permanent centre of derealization", and knowing that this joyful, tough search is never-ending is probably one of the soundest and most reassuring reference points of all for anybody wanting to be an Actor, like Jacopo.

Only rarely have I come across this courage, this humbly insatiable explorer's approach, when working with "conventional" actors, who tend to repeat on stage the things they already know how to do. This is because they have been forced, both by themselves and by their technique, into rigid, tinselly, stylistic characterisations which, while definitely useful as emotional armour, also have the effect of distancing them from the audience. The audience pulls back when it senses a falsehood. For a director with my kind of pedagogical approach, the way to avoid falling into this trap is to take the responsibility for removing the safety net of certainties and exiting the comfort zone. Often it's not worth the bother, because the process is a painful one that strikes highly personal chords, a kind of death-defying feat which, I think, isn't always theatre's job.

---

What we call **NON-ACTORS** are people searching for something, regardless of any psychological or social implications. People who, at a certain time in their lives, come across theatre and see it, perhaps not rationally, as a tool of freedom and intimate revolution, and embrace it as a harbinger of personal and political change: a place of **BEING** and also of **DIGNITY**.

---

I had been working with Teatro Nucleo for several years when, in May 2018, Horacio asked me to stand in for one of his detainee-actors in a performance of "The Rise and Fall of Ubu" in Ferrara Municipal Theatre because the actor who normally played Brodin hadn't been granted a furlough. There was one rehearsal, on the same day as the performance, before the debut on stage with the inmates. When I got to the theatre they were already there, Desmond, Lester, Edin and Alcide and the others, and they greeted me without any formalities, unceremoniously but respectfully. They asked me if I'd learnt my part. I told them the truth, that I hadn't read it yet. I saw a mixture of terror and anger in their eyes, an anger they couldn't give vent to

or direct at anyone. It was a big part. But they didn't complain for a moment. Alcide said "let's get rehearsing then". I was the Actor and they the non-actors. It was nine in the morning and after just one hour, after improvising the scenes a few times, stitching things together and sorting out the dynamics, we decided to do away with the script. We talked. Papa Ubu asked something and Bordure replied, Mama Ubu winked at me and I touched her on the shoulder. They weren't feigning, they weren't acting, so I didn't have to keep to the "behaviour" codes that click into place between actors in a first rehearsal. We were simply present, and in those few hours of rehearsing we worked at it together: my 20 years experience as an actor fed into their creativity and powers of expression, and I in turn was fed by their truthfulness and the rough grace of their poetry. They let me go two hours before the start of the performance. They knew by then that there was nothing to worry about, that we had switched into an intense, practical and reciprocal listening mode. The performance went very well. After eating a kebab on the stage of Ferrara Municipal Theatre, a necessary sacrilegious act after the tension of the ritual, they came over to thank me, in a way that would make you think I had saved their life. And that's what it was to them, their life. What they didn't know, though, was what the looks of Edin Mama Ubu, the dancing body and sublime singing of Lester, the authoritativeness and stage presence of Alcide Papa Ubu and the graceful whiplash irony of King Wenceslas Desmond had given to me, an Actor. They made me appreciate that doing theatre, away from the diktats of the grand theoreticians, can transform your soul, or the entire universe, in the blink of an eye.

It was with this renewed faith in Theatre that I began my work as a theatre director in Ferrara District Prison, in September 2018, at the start of the three-year project on the *Fathers and Sons* theme proposed by the Emilia Romagna Regional Prison Theatre Coordinating Body. In the summer of that year a number of things had happened to unsettle the group, related not to the theatre work itself but to the



legal situation of some of the participants. At first the workshops were very poorly attended; only three or four of the regulars remained. Despite the great success of UBU, there was a sense of defeat. Probably, the kind of specific script work needed for the UBU project had led them to having a highly "role-oriented" approach, and the absence of some of the main cast members had left them feeling betrayed and at the same time distrustful of any new arrivals. We had to introduce the *Fathers and Sons* theme and find a way of getting them passionate about a new story – which we hadn't even decided on yet. They wanted a script, with "parts", and we were offering them choral improvisation exercises and suggestions for things they could write about. They wanted a pre-packaged dramatic structure and we were asking them to bring ideas – poems, folk songs and stuff they had written themselves – for us to work on as a group. At first it was complicated, but we were convinced it was the right button to press. Developing things collectively was an inherent part of our theatre practice; but here we had to prove, in a way that was evident to them too, that an enjoyable and profound working dynamic could be reconstructed using this approach. Meanwhile the attendance had grown slightly to more than ten. What came to our aid was the suggestion of a Cuban inmate who had been attending the workshops for a while. He knew by heart *La Muralla*, a poem by Cuba's national poet Nicolás Guillén, and he wrote the words down for us. It starts like this:

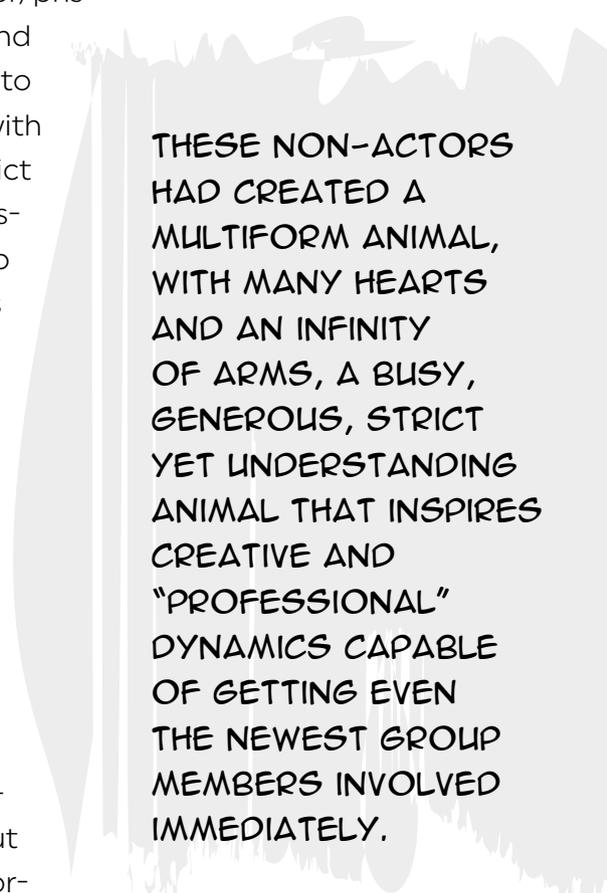
PARA HACER ESTA MURALLA  
TRAÍGANME TODAS LAS MANOS  
LOS NEGROS SUS MANOS NEGRAS  
LOS BLANCOS SUS BLANCAS MANOS.

It had nothing to do with the set theme, nor with the idea that was emerging to work on the figure of Hamlet, but in terms of creative dynamics it was like the crack of a starting pistol. The group, in one of those strange combinations of sensitivities that sometimes occurs, became *la muralla*, the wall; both physically and theatrically. They opened and closed to let in the people they wanted and keep out the ones they thought were no good. The first scenes in what was to become *Family Album* were created on the basis of images drawn from the poem. They were all "chorus" scenes, where each person defined his space for expressing him-

self, and this soon became a struggle to defend these spaces. They are all Hamlet, each in his own language, and they are all Ophelia, watching, dancing and weeping, and they are all the murderers of the king and they all sing his praises. The workshops were constructed day by day on the basis of the practical proposals put forward by the group, protected and strengthened by this band of kids who play happily while their father/prison sleeps. The game is the most serious thing that exists and it needs rules if it is to carry on, and everybody must keep to them. These non-actors had created a multiform animal, with many hearts and an infinity of arms, a busy, generous, strict yet understanding animal that inspires creative and "professional" dynamics capable of getting even the newest group members involved immediately. More than thirty inmates now attend the workshops regularly, and it is they themselves who promote the activity in the prison. They and the actual activity.

This particular characteristic, this "ethic", generates artistic ideas, naturally and sometimes unexpectedly, which need to be harnessed and channelled in order to bring to the fore the dramatic focuses that we intend to emphasise. In this kind of dynamic the possibilities for a director in terms of interpretation of proxemics and construction and development of poetic actions are infinite. Working with this group of non-actors allowed me to probe much more deeply into an idea that I have been nurturing for some time about the active spectator, who chooses what to watch in a performance, in the certainty that the focuses in a scene can be many provided they are well balanced and organised.

The roughness and kindness of these "loutish" bodies, the undefinable grace of these discordant and linguistically distant voices and the uncoordinated but constant and precise



**THESE NON-ACTORS  
HAD CREATED A  
MULTIFORM ANIMAL,  
WITH MANY HEARTS  
AND AN INFINITY  
OF ARMS, A BUSY,  
GENEROUS, STRICT  
YET UNDERSTANDING  
ANIMAL THAT INSPIRES  
CREATIVE AND  
"PROFESSIONAL"  
DYNAMICS CAPABLE  
OF GETTING EVEN  
THE NEWEST GROUP  
MEMBERS INVOLVED  
IMMEDIATELY.**



rhythm all led me to intensify my search for "unbalance" in the acting and expression of the actor, seeing it as a source of beauty and perfection. The admirable poetry of the unfinished.

Once the pattern of the workshops was established, we set about concretely organising the dramaturgy by putting the sequences and material developed in the first phase in order and reading through some theatre scripts. We started with Heiner Müller's "Hamletmaschine". This choice, I realised afterwards, was not made by chance. The theme we were working on was *Fathers and Sons*, and the script was a study of

the Hamlet story through certain dramaturgical nuclei: the concept of guilt, the breaking of a legacy to assert one's identity, revenge and pardon.

Heiner as a child had "betrayed" his father the night the SS came to arrest him.

Out of fear, or who knows why, he pretended to be asleep when his father came to his bedroom door to say goodbye. It was the last time he saw him.

This action strongly permeates the political vision and artistic choices of Müller's Hamlet, in which there is an accusation almost of weakness against the father for letting himself be arrested; a kind of anger – perhaps to mask the sense of guilt and inadequacy that grows in the author's soul.

The title of the first part of Müller's work is *Family Album*.

For me this is an incredibly strong image. I sense immediately that this was the direction we needed to take in building our dramatic structure: like leafing through a family album, with stories and characters appearing and disappearing.

In the south of Italy, letting somebody look through your family photos – your parents' wedding, your sister's baptism, your son's first communion – is a sign of great respect and trust, like saying "you're part of the family".

And this was how the succession of scenes and events in the performance came to be immortalised.

A page on King Hamlet's ghost, another on uncle Claudius, another on Hamlet, another on Ophelia, another on actors coming from afar, and so on, transforming atmospheres and signals.

The last scene, obviously, is the family portrait, the photo at the end of the party, when all the tragic deeds have been committed and all the ties loosened, and the masks fall. The game is over and the pretence no longer holds... "I am not Hamlet. I am not acting a part any more..." the actors say in chorus as they await the final flash.

This simple idea made it possible for the detainee-actors to move within a framework that was precise and yet open to proposals. It provided concrete references for their creativity, triggering off an enthusiastic and highly productive theatrical process. The first *Family Album* study was performed in April 2019 in the "C. Satta" District Prison of Ferrara before an audience of students from the Ludovico Ariosto High School and the Criminal Enforcement course at the University of Ferrara Law Faculty. It was an important moment for both the group and the performance. The feedback and comments from the young audience helped us sharpen up a number of points that needed clarifying, and on the basis of these we reconstructed parts of the performance, readapted some of the scenes and rewrote some of the parts. We started looking for a less narrative-based *logos*, carried along more by metaphor than by "anecdotes". *Family Album* then made its debut in the 2019 *Internazionale* Festival, in a performance in Ferrara Prison theatre before an audience of 100. For us, this is not yet a finished product; we are in fact looking for more ways of opening up the 'rehearsals' to oth-

er inmates who don't normally attend the theatre course, and also to people from outside. Bringing together the inside and outside worlds, one of the main reasons for doing theatre in prison, has become an essential tool for the artistic growth of our work on Hamlet.

## FROM PERFORMANCE TO WEB SERIES

The debut, which should have been in April 2020 in Ferrara Municipal Theatre, has been impossible so far because of the health emergency.

But the creative process could not be interrupted. And so, just like in the first phase of the lockdown, when we found a way of continuing to work on the performance by means of an exchange of letters with the inmates in the "Exercises in Freedom" project, we now reinvented the theatre workshop by adapting it for video. In the "Exercises in Freedom" letters there were lots of things written by the actor-detainees that helped us to recompose the dramaturgy in a more organic way. Some of the images were so clear and solid that they seemed more like a screenplay than a theatre script.

The idea of a series of drama short films about our work on Hamlet came to us almost by chance.

The actor-detainees had continued working on their "tasks" and exercises, despite the fact that there was no actual performance, and some of this work had reached such a good level that we decided to capture it on film. We got permission to take a camera into the prison and started filming. All of a sudden something clicked in the group: a passion was ignited for this kind of work. For them the camera was an "escape" hatch, a window that their children, wives, mothers and brothers and sisters could see them through. A crack, in black and white, through which the city and the world could enter. But the passion was also for the performing art in itself, for "doing what an actor does". It was a new way to test out the newly acquired techniques and incorporate them into a new form of language.





Everyone started working on sets, takes, and camera movements.

The decision to film in black and white was a joint one too. I had big doubts about it. Using shades of grey to immortalise what happened in a prison seemed rhetorical; there was something banal about it. But as the force of the acting began to emerge I realised that no colours were needed to enhance the nuances of those expressions and the perspectives of those faces. The absence of colour allowed the colours of their souls out.

The **ACTION** call brought a profound, sacred silence. Those not directly involved held their breath. Everybody knew that the time for filming was short and everybody sensed the urgency of having to capture the action in a form that could be relayed and appreciated outside. The pleasure of making a film, especially now, in a health emergency, when family interviews are reduced to a minimum and prison life is more isolated, was something concrete and serious.

All this, for me, is summed up in a single word: **PROFESSIONALISM**.

I realised that it was no longer just a question of capturing the workshops on film. A creative artistic process was emerging, in the form of cinema.

Our sessions lasted 90 minutes. Anyone who's ever had anything to do with video work, even as an amateur, will tell you that this is very little – almost zero – time for doing good quality takes and sorting out the lighting and audio capture, and without being able to rehearse.

The actors have to repeat sequences several times in relation to camera movements, in order to work out the positions in relation to the camera and the other actors in the scene. These things take time.

But there wasn't this time, so during the week they studied what they would have to do on the Thursday, imagining the movements and the spaces while they were in their cells, or preparing their food, or walking along the corridors.

HERE, ONCE AGAIN, THE IDEA OF THE PHOTO ALBUM CAME TO OUR AID. EACH EPISODE IS AN EXCERPT THAT ILLUMINATES DIFFERENT ASPECTS AND MOMENTS OF THE VARIOUS CHARACTERS THAT ANIMATE OUR DRAMA. CHARACTERS THAT APPEAR AND DISAPPEAR IN BLACK AND WHITE WITH THE CHANGES OF FOCUS FOR THE DIFFERENT SEQUENCES. VOICES THAT SING, HUM AND BECOME SILENT.

When ACTION was called they were always ready. Only rarely did we have to shoot a scene more than twice, and when this happened it was usually my fault or because of camera problems. Every time I come out of the prison I'm grinning like a little boy, thinking how these men have matured as actors in these years of workshops.

Their emotional intelligence, their childlike astuteness, their nothing-to-lose attitude and their being perfectly rooted in the present while at the same time capable of living in an imaginary elsewhere (something they've had to learn for their survival, I think), make them undeniably professional actors.

It was with these qualities in mind that I had to structure the course. A precise, functional format had to be found capable of containing both the strengths and weaknesses of the creative process and the context it was happening in. The dramaturgy had to be adapted to the artistic product that I could see emerging, in a web series of drama short films.

Ten episodes, about 4 minutes each.

Here, once again, the idea of the photo album came to our aid. Each episode is an excerpt that illuminates different aspects and moments of the various characters that animate our drama. Characters that appear and disappear in black and white with the changes of focus for the different sequences. Voices that sing, hum and become silent.

The black and white also helped us to look closely at another aspect an actor's work: memory – always a delicate question, especially in a detention facility. At times it was like reawakening dormant childhoods; a series of briefly sketched images of family life, partially lit and sparsely staged and yet powerfully defined by the acting, in a constant search for ways of relating to the camera, to the space.

## THE EXERCISES

Amidst the disaster of a health emergency that makes doing theatre impossible, we took advantage of the circumstances to try out a creative, educational approach that allows you to work on details and depth of expression, or rather, on the more intimate aspects of theatrical experience.

We planned a workshop routine that coincided more with what the group members were actually going through at the time, orienting the exercises towards the construction of a practice in line with the work we intended to do.

The exercises on the composition and construction of the choreographic sequences, which comprise the bulk of the actor dramaturgy work in prison, have all been devised in relation to the camera.

**When we construct a theatre piece, such as a short monologue, we usually suggest developing it on the basis more of the physical than the rational memory:**

- ↪ The actors choose a short passage, either in their own language or in Italian.
- ↪ After studying the passage briefly to ascertain the clarity of the narrative nodes, we move on to the practice.
- ↪ We suggest picking out seven words or small sets of words and then, using these words (and, obviously, the images they evoke), we work out seven repeatable movements.
- ↪ We demand great precision here: in defining where the movement starts and ends and in specifying which part of the body gives origin to the stimulus that breaks the inertia.



- ↪ We ask the actors to write down or draw the sequence of movements on a sheet of paper.
- ↪ After this we ask them to position the words they have chosen somewhere on their body, such as the place where the movement originates.

The result is a **PHYSICAL SEQUENCE** which, on the one hand, provides the actor with **SPATIAL POINTS OF REFERENCE** and makes him sure about what he has to do, and on the other personalises the **WORD** and generates a dialectical relationship with the **TEXT** – a physically conflicting relationship with the images they have chosen.

The created sequence becomes a **CODE** that allows us to develop the actor's work, limiting the risks of psychological and intellectualised interpretations.

- ↪ We can proceed with the exercise by, for example, asking them to expand the movements in a certain direction, reduce them in another, speed up the last two, and so on.
- ↪ The exercise on a particular passage or a creation can be developed limitlessly. On reaching the seventh word, more words can be added, and so on until an entire dramaturgy is constructed.
- ↪ This way of working on the words of a passage can also be applied starting from images taken from pictures or sculptures.

As far as working with the camera is concerned, this kind of exercise was very useful in that it allowed us to focus on certain aspects. For example, in a sequence enacted by Ophelia we could focus on the eyes and left hand alone, without interfering with the creative process and the progression memorised by the actor. The physical code allowed us to adapt the acting and artistic expression to the context in which it was performed.



**The same exercise can also be used for creating collective choreographies, or choreographies for two actors.**

- Whether or not the materials are the same as the original ones is of no importance. When the actors have constructed their individual sequences we ask them to choose three of the movements and pass them on in the group.

In this way the underlying substrate of each person's imagination blends with that of the others, creating a **COLLECTIVE DRAMATURGY** no longer tied to the narration of the reference material alone, and this often brings substance and complexity to the performance.

Another very important aspect of this exercise is that the detainee-actors take charge not only of the **LEARNING** but also of the **TEACHING**, thus breaking with the pattern of being merely recipients and triggering a **SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY**, so necessary for fully appreciating the **FREEDOM** given by theatre work.



# ÜRES TÉR

THEATRE WORKSHOP  
IN PÉCS PRISON

URESTER.HU



# PRISON THEATRE IN HUNGARY

by GézaPintér

In the first chapter I would like to summarize the legal background of prison system in Hungary in order to understand when and how the theatre activities become possible inside the prisons.

## THE MAIN LINES OF THE HUNGARIAN PRISON SYSTEM IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE XX CENTURY

In this part we want to present only the main trends of the development of the Hungarian penalty system.

After the second world war, in the fifties the Sentence Execution in Eastern Europe was characterized by political conceptual principles, ignoring the human rights. This has been

changed first in 1961 when the V. law has changed the Codex Csemegi, then in 1963, the Institution of the Sentence Execution has been moved from the Ministry of the Interior to the Ministry of Justice in order to harmonize more the sentence execution with the normative legislation.

The regulation of 21st of 1966 marked out as main principle the "Re-education" of the convicted people.

In that time, it was a qualitative change, that the conducted person was endowed also with rights not only with obligations. This change was a contribution to step out from the classical sentence execution into the modern one, when the conducted become a subject of the execution instead of a deeply subordinated object of it.<sup>1</sup>

More than 10 years later arrived the next step, in the regulation of 11th of 1979.

The new law underlined that the main goal of the execution is the "Re-integration" of the conducted person into the society. This was more practical [...] and entered in a movement of the western-European societies to transform the prison into a more human place, instead of a place with its suppressive function, and it set goals on the development of the prison's educational role.<sup>2</sup>

The new law permitted in a larger way to keep relation with the outside world as well.

In 1989 the socialist regime felled down, therefore European convergence continued and generated many new reforms: abolition of the death penalty, liberation of approximately 10 thousand people from prisons, the compliance of the European Convention of the Human Rights.

A new chapter of the modernization started with the XXXII. law in 1993: "the main goal during the enforcement of the legal sanction is 'the promotion of the re-socialization' with the prevention of new crime."



1 Lőrincz József – Nagy Ferenc, *Börtönügy*, Büntetés Végrehajtás Országos Parancsnokság, 1997, 69.

2 Lőrincz József – Nagy Ferenc, *Börtönügy*, Büntetés Végrehajtás Országos Parancsnokság, 1997, 42.

So, the primary aim of the sentence execution was to support the re-socialization instead of the re-socialization.

Main principles of the Hungarian sentence execution:

- ^ **PRINCIPLE OF NORMALITY** the time spent inside the prison must be similarly to the outside life.
- ^ **PRINCIPLE OF OPENNESS** the prison must ensure the relation with the outside world
- ^ **PRINCIPLE OF RESPONSIBILITY AND SELF-ESTEEM** what can be supported by regular activities. For all these principles can be served by individualized educational processes. In this case the cultural activities can have a great rule specially the theatre activities.

## THEATRE IN PRISON IN HUNGARY IN THE LAST 30 YEARS

The first great example was in the Prison of Szeged in 1992, when the so called Standing Time's Theatre was founded. The company had to stop after one year and could restart to exist only in 1996 with the direction of Anita Anna Kovács. They produced two productions, first in '98 the King Ubu than in '99 the Passio.<sup>3</sup>

Kovács Anita Anna had to stop her work in November of 1999, because the huge success of her work scandalized a large number of people in the outside society. The company was carried on later by a prison officer in a different way giving more focus to re-educational function of prison theatre instead of its artistic potential producing a comedy in 2005.

• • • • •

3 Tóth Katalin, *Csillagtúra*, Záródolgozat, Kaposvár, 2002. Kaposvári Egyetem Csokonai Vitéz Mihály Pedagógiai Főiskolai Kar. Kommunikáció szak

Other important initiative was the work of Utca-SzAK Alkotóközösség, which organization with the lead of Balázs Simon started to work in different prisons since its foundation in 2007, e.g.: Rákospalotai Nevelőintézet.

After that another example happened in the north of Hungary, in the prison of Vác, with the lead of Lilla Rada, who also realized a documentary film about the prisoners who created a performance with the title Iron curtain using dramas from Slawomir Mrozek<sup>4</sup> in 2010.

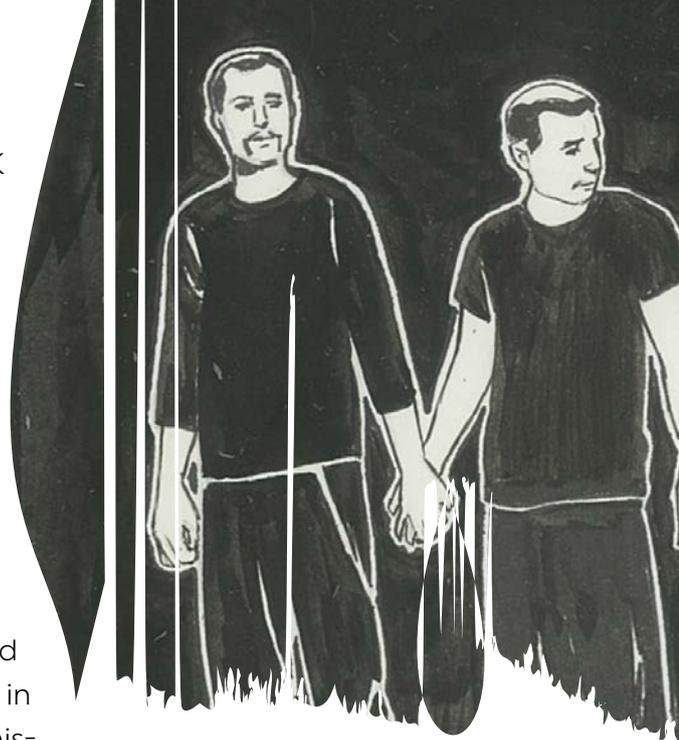
When the first European prison theatre project started which involved the University Theatre of Pécs (JESZ) in 2008, the idea to make theatre in prison was still a missionary dream. During the following years a great revolution was in progress in Hungary regarding the theme. Somehow a great interest was in the air, and more and more people started to dedicate themselves to prison theatre activities.

We believe that the four Grundtív project (ESPRIT, VEDALO, New ways to social skills, Breaking limits) participated by different associations in Pécs (JESZ, Üres Tér, Szín Tér) had a general impact. The working team of Pécs created a website: [www.bortonszinhaz.hu](http://www.bortonszinhaz.hu) still available and built up a relation with the University of Pécs involving especially Barbara di Blasio, who became the author of several prison theatre articles in Hungary.<sup>5</sup> The main reference in Hungary, become the Italian model with Armando Punzo on the top. Book of Horacio Czertok the The-



4 <https://www.filmtekercs.hu/sorozat/a-vaci-bortonszinhazrol-keszult-filmet-mutat-be-a-duna-televizio> (Last download in 2020. december 6.)

5 Barbara di Blasio, Gondolatok a börtönszínházról, in Börtönügyi Szemle 2013/3, place of download in 2020. november 28. [http://epa.oszk.hu/02700/02705/00095/pdf/EPA02705\\_bortonugyi\\_szemle\\_2013\\_3\\_029-038.pdf](http://epa.oszk.hu/02700/02705/00095/pdf/EPA02705_bortonugyi_szemle_2013_3_029-038.pdf)



atre in exile was translated in 2013 which also become an input for the growing field of prison theatre. In between 2010 and 2013 several new theatre workshops started to exist on a regular base in many Hungarian prisons in the cities of: Kecskemét, Tököl, Rákospalota in Budapest, Vác, Sopron, Pécs...ecc. In 2013 started the series of the I. Prison Theatre Meeting in Hungary, which was followed by the II. Meeting in 2016 and the III. in 2018. where the prison theatre companies had an encounter in a professional state theatre, in the József Attila Színház.

We can summarize that the process reached a great development in this sector. From 2008 until 2020 almost every prison has given space to prison theatre activity. On the official website of the Hungarian Sentence Execution system the following statement was published:

In every Hungarian prison exist today literature or/and theatre group, which uses the tools of drama-pedagogy to create the chance of a useful free-time activity, what can develop the self-understanding, human-knowledge and emotional intelligence of the convicted pupils.<sup>6</sup>

Re-socialization is in the focus of the prison theatre activities as a place where the prisoner can reflect on his/her own life. On the other hand, one of the crucial potentials of the prison theatre activity, which lead to the self-reflection of the spectator is still less underlined in the articles, studies and books produced on this field in the last ten years.

It is also interesting to notice, that the prison theatre activity in Hungary was always more supported by the right-wing politicians and by the Christian-Conservative artists, this can be also a reason why it had been growing radically after 2010.

Whenever I see the topic of prison theatre comes up in a normal daily life conversation in Hungary, there is a certain light in the eyes of most of the people, as the string of good will, solidarity, curiosity and a sense of collective responsibility swings in the depth of the personal and collective consciousness.

**GE'ZA PINTER'**

• • • • •

6 "Minden hazai börtönben működik irodalmi- és színházi szakkör, amely a drámapedagógia eszközeit felhasználva a szabadidő hasznos eltöltése mellett a fogvatartottak ön- és emberismeretét, érzelmi intelligenciáját is erősíti" in <https://old.bv.gov.hu/akadalymentes/bortonszinhaz-ujratolteve> (Last download in 2018.12.06.)

WHENEVER I SEE THE TOPIC OF PRISON THEATRE COMES UP IN A NORMAL DAILY LIFE CONVERSATION IN HUNGARY, THERE IS A CERTAIN LIGHT IN THE EYES OF MOST OF THE PEOPLE, AS THE STRING OF GOOD WILL, SOLIDARITY, CURIOSITY AND A SENSE OF COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY SWINGS IN THE DEPTH OF THE PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS.

Theatre-making in the Hungarian prisons completely stopped in 2020 but it still has a good prospective, it became a 'normal' tool to support the reintegration of the prisoners.

## THE STORY OF THE PRISON IN PÉCS

The new youth prison was born thanks to an EU program started from 1989. This was the (Poland Hungary Assistance for the Reconstruction of the Economy) PHARE program, what supported the construction of a completely new building in the downtown of Pécs, next to the old prison. The new youth prison was inaugurated in 2006. This building had the possibility to host around 30-40 youth prisoners (under the age 21) in a way that only two pupils had to be in one room, providing modern and hygienic conditions like television, separated shower and bathroom, regular school program for every prisoner and other free time activities.

The prison employed around twelve employees: three educators, one psychologist and eight prison guard. The staff of this prison had an open mentality and supported many new initiatives inside the prison, such as mural painting or theatre activities. The chief educator Katalin Koncz had a main role to support theatre in prison activities in Pécs from 2009 until 2016.

We asked Katalin Koncz in an interview on the 7th December 2020.

**GEZA PINTÉR:** How do you see in retrospective the impact of the prison theatre today?

**KATALIN KONCZ:** In any case, these sessions had an incredibly positive effect on the participants. Although on the one hand it involved extra work for us, because for the sessions held by outsiders to take place, more bureaucratic and organizational things had to be done. But beyond all that, I feel most importantly, those who stayed in a rehearsal process all the way through were forced to do a significant amount of work (text learning, choreography, practice... etc.), which then resulted in rewards. This is key, especially for detainees aged 18-19, who have not yet experienced the potential for hard work and have not necessarily found themselves in a life situation where they could directly experience its positive feedbacks, i.e., the experience of success. Many of their peers envied them later, it was good to see that. At the same time, there were those who only took part in the sessions for a while, which I think is also not in vain, since in this genre the process is often even more important than the result.

**P.G.:** Are there one or two memorable moments that have survived from this period to this day?

**K.K.:** Of course, a lot, but to name just a few, it was like that when two inmates fought in a session led by Márk Kőrösi during the rehearsals of *Vojcek*. Of course, they were given discipline, one of them had to be banned, but I knew for myself that this was a particularly good sign because self-control had dissolved in them and it was a sign of success of the workshop. By this time, they were already beginning to learn how to channel their self-control primarily to create the performance. Another such moment was to see the faces of the few inmates who performed with *Vojcek* at the Pécs National Theater in 2015. They almost soared in joy. Then they asked me, "So, Aunt Kati, was I good on stage?".

**P.G.:** How do you see the rise of prison theater in Hungary in the two thousand and ten years, and what is the situation now and what do you think is the perspective?

**K.K.:** Since 2008, when you started this, the world has changed a lot, today this is seen in the prison as a good practice. There were also three National Prison-Theater Meetings, two of which we attended as semi-finalists. It is certain that the four Grundtvig projects also con-

tributed a lot to this process. The large mural painting made with adults can still be seen today, in fact, it has remained in quite good condition. Now, now, unfortunately, everything has been frozen, due to the covid 19 pandemic, no outsiders can go to jail to visit or hold an occupation. It can also be felt that this has increased the burden on our work and made it more difficult to work with detainees, as the basic normative is to keep in touch with the outside world, cannot held. At the same time, if this period comes to an end, I think we will get back to normal way of functioning and the prison theater may be in great need again all over the country.

## THE INITIAL PERIOD OF THEATRE IN PRISON ACTIVITIES IN PÉCS

In the sentence execution institution of Pécs the theatre in prison did not have antecedent. It started by the Grundtvig project ESPRIT (Esperienza, Prigione, Teatre) in 2009, by Géza Pintér and Márk Kőrösi, thanks to the Janus Theatre University (JESZ) which was the official first Hungarian partner in the partnership coordinated by Teatro Nucleo.

This project was followed by several other Grundtvig projects: Veniamo da lontano (VeDaLo), New way to social skills and breaking limits, until 2016.

The small team started its work and developed step by step, creating a website, involving the University and specially Barbara Di Blasio, who became an important figure, because she established the basis of the theory of prison theatre in Hungary, publishing several books and articles about the theme. The same team also carried out two conferences, one in 2011 (Prison theatre conference) and a second in 2013, Social Theatre Meeting.



During the initial period, many training forms were tried out: clown, physical theatre, literature reading sessions...etc. From 2010 Márk Kőrösi become the leader of the theatre in prison activity therefore the main methodology become the TIE (Theatre In Education).

First performance was the Mechanical Orange in 2011.

Second Performance titled the 'Prison? In 2013, was based on the method of auto dramaturgy in the sense that the participants wrote their own autobiographic texts, and the common narrative was formed by the contribution of every participant. This was the first time, when an actor from outside, Géza Pintér was taking part in the performance together with the prisoners.

Then come Wojcek, created by actors mainly outside of the prison in order to present it inside for prisoners as a participatory drama. After that the performance was further developed together with youth prisoners (three of them) to transform it into a new performance, which was called Vojcek. As a crucial point, Vojcek was presented in the National Theatre of Pécs in 2015. See the next chapter about this period.

## METHODOLOGICAL SUMMARY - SOCIAL SKILLS

"Beauty will save the world"

J. M. DOSTOJEVSKJ

In case of any practical guide is also needed a common theoretical base with common principles, what we create together, through the summary of reflections on our experiences.

From 2012 to 2014 the Color-Space Association was running the project "New way to social skills". Krisztina Katona was the leader of this organization in that time, and her expertise was the mural painting, therefore the same team (Krisztina, Márk and Géza) tried out to work with adult prisoners at the first time aiming to realize not exactly a theatre presentation, but more a performance which is connected to an 'Inauguration ceremony of a wall-painting'. This was an interesting episode during the story of those eight years.

During those time we had to define our work as a new way to social skills.

What is social skill? In this chapter we would like to talk a few words about social skill in connection to disability: especially in the sense of social disadvantage, also like prison population.

Of course, **SOCIAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT** is more a process. First, as a basic principle, we agree with the **LISBON'S KEY COMPETENCES** as those qualities what everyone has to develop as **BASIC SOCIAL COMPETENCES**. What kind of tools can help us for better understanding, for better cooperation for better social skills?

### Lisbon's key competences:

- 1 Communication skill on the mother language
- 2 Mathematic
- 3 Natural sciences, technology
- 4 Digital competence
- 5 knowing how to learn
- 6 Social and citizen competences
- 7 Ability of initiation and contracting
- 8 Cultural consciousness and expressive competence.

These kinds of competences are leading us to the Society based on knowledge, which is the European trend today, (more or less) all European school system agree on that.

In our practice the **COMPETENCE 1**, and the **COMPETENCES 4-8** seem to be more important.



PLAYING IS A NON-PRODUCTIVE ACTIVITY WHICH IS ALWAYS AIMING TO GET THROUGH A KIND OF OBSTACLE WITH THE REPETITION OF THE SAME MOVEMENTS. IT HAS ALWAYS RULES AND LIMITS. THE BENEFIT OF PLAYING IS SELF-DEVELOPMENT AND ENJOY, HAPPINESS. PLAYING IS ONE OF THE MOST DISCIPLINED HUMAN ACTIVITY.

**Basic Abilities to key competences - according to the contemporary education science:**

The Main pre-competence is the **ABILITY OF SELF-UNDERSTANDING**, what can lead to:

- ↘ ability of cooperation
- ↘ ability of analyzing
- ↘ ability of synthesizing

The deviance is a center problem in our working conditions. We intend to help people who have fewer social skills. We would like to notice that the deviance is an alternation of social skill in the context of a kind of majority. The majority create normality. Deviance and normality are in a relative and dynamic relation.

"Curiosity to deviance is a useful phenomenon in our work."

(Horacio Czertok) The social skill never can be a collection of „canonic“ roles about human behavior. It is always an open, dynamic process of human coexistence.

As Foucault says, the deviances are symptoms, they are always working as a feedback on the normality, to raise questions about the society.

"Playing" in the development of basic abilities has a great potential.

Playing is a non-productive activity which is always aiming to get through a kind of obstacle with the repetition of the same movements. It has always rules and limits. The benefit of playing is self-development and enjoy, happiness. Playing is one of the most disciplined human activity.

The playing has a kind of mediator role, it helps to reach a more holistic brain and body function, which open the opportunity for a different way of learning, where the whole personality

is involved. MacLean's terminology<sup>7</sup> that the result of playing is the fourth layer of the brain, "forebrain", which is an abstract level where get realized:

- ^ the self-reflection
- ^ introspection
- ^ self-valuation
- ^ self-control
- ^ self-development

During playing the inmate is going through an experience where he is presented, here and now (*hic et nunc*) and in these experiences he can overwrite his own old self-image.

The highest component of the personality is the **ABILITY OF SELF-UNDERSTANDING** what leads to the **SELF-INTERPRETATING PERSONALITY**. According to József Nagy<sup>8</sup> the increase of this kind of personalities in the modern societies could be a way for solutions, in front of the challenges of the XXI century.

Self-understanding increase the ability of adaptation of the person which open the way to **CREATIVITY** and to something, what we can call here **FREEDOM**.

"Art is the glory of humanity"  
**BANKSY**

Playing is the best way to increase social skills. Learning to create art, is the best way to learn how to play in a high level. Every kind of art is a kind of playing but not every kind of playing is an artistic action.



<sup>7</sup> Maclean, P. D. (1973): *A triune concept of the brain and behaviour*. University of Toronto Press, Toronto.

<sup>8</sup> Nagy József (2002): *XXI. Század és nevelés*. Osiris Kiadó, Budapest.

Art is the highest level of playing, this is the orientation what we prefer in every case when we start a creative playing process with inmates, as a new but also as an old way to social skills.

Art is our final answer. As a major part of the society might assume, that we should teach first profession to the inmates in prisons to help the re-integration into the society. We think, there is no antagonism, but cooperation, skills and abilities what can grow only together. The Mural painting in the courtyard of the adult prisoners and Vojcek were real pieces of art.

PLAYING IS THE BEST WAY TO  
INCREASE SOCIAL SKILLS.

[...]

ART IS THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF  
PLAYING [...]

ART IS OUR FINAL ANSWER.

[...]

WE THINK, THERE IS  
NO ANTAGONISM, BUT  
COOPERATION, SKILLS AND  
ABILITIES WHAT CAN GROW  
ONLY TOGETHER.

## FROM WOYZECK TO VOJCEK THE CREATION OF THE PERFORMANCE

I first saw Büchner's play in Grenoble in the direction of Francois Jaulin. I didn't feel that the problems presented by the play were current in his direction.

After coming home, while reading it with my company we soon realized that this was the ideal drama for us. Its sketchy structure allows us to manipulate it freely, and since the environment of the story covers up acute problems, it's strongly related to the present of Hungary. In recent years we

have been learning a lot about poverty during the prior activity of the company. These experiences can be the base of our performance. We asked Éva Bús to dramatize it, in a way that the three distinct parts of the play are kept according to the sketches of the author, while focusing on the effect that the environment and the individual have on one another, instead of the storyline and the murder.

says **MÁRK KÖRÖSI**, the director.

---

Our interpretation of Woyzeck is played by one actress and two actors. The performance is created in an empty space through the spectators. In the first phase it is performed in a circular space, then anywhere in an undefined space.

The base is given by the acting and by the communication with the spectators, while keeping in mind Peter Brook's article about the communication on stage (Peter Brook: Le diable c'est l'ennui, Boredom is the devil [Journal of Drama Pedagogy 1999/1.]).

The play focuses on the evolution and the changes in human relationships around Woyzeck.

The sketch of Büchner contains current issues which present increasingly urgent problems in today's Hungary. Such as: the relation of the individual and society, and the conditions of deep poverty both from a social and a cultural aspect, or the eternal questions of sin itself, like:

**WHY DOES SIN EXIST?**

**DOES IT REALLY EXIST AT ALL?**

**WHAT IS ITS ROLE IN BASIC CHRISTIAN VALUES?**

**WHOSE PATH IS CHOOSING THE WRONG PATH?**

**OR IS IT ACTUALLY A PART OF THE JOURNEY?**

**CAN YOU BE GIVEN ABSOLUTION FOR YOUR ACTIONS?**

**HOW DOES OUR WORLD SEE SINNERS?**

The performance was created based on these musings in 2014. The audience was a group of high school students on the edge of society who had not yet decided if to choose the journey of their environment or their own. Generally, with these social circumstances children become man and woman sooner, regarding their ability of social interpretation. The play was later performed to the students of Leőwey Klára High School in Pécs. The premiere was followed by an open conversation with the creators and performers.

At the time *Woyzeck* was presented as an optional subject of a high school drama course, since it is easy to track certain dramatic aspects in the story:

- ↘ the creation and the evolution of conflict
- ↘ the effect of the different levels of determination shaping one's destiny
- ↘ the volatility of human relationships
- ↘ the value of humanity and its role in determining one's destiny
- ↘ the complexity of the individual act and the question of responsibility

The request for a prison theatre performance came in 2015. Due to a prior meeting with the group, after some remodeling, re-interpretation of nuances, and the reposition of the focus on the challenges they decided that they were going to be using the same text during the work with the inmates.

The prison theatre variation is the result of a three-month rehearsal process. The keystone to this method was a weekly session in the Prison of Pécs, where they went to perform the play in front of both an adult public and one consisting of minors.

They had been working in the institution for five years while temporarily opening the Prison Theatre of Pécs ([www.bor-tonszinhaz.hu](http://www.bor-tonszinhaz.hu)).

***THE CHALLENGE: IF THEY CAN MANAGE TO KEEP THE ATTENTION OF THE INMATES, WHILE FINDING SOME COMMON LANGUAGE WITH THEM, THEN THE PERFORMANCE CAN PROBABLY ATTRACT THE ATTENTION OF SPECTATORS ANYWHERE ELSE.***

**The challenge:** *if they can manage to keep the attention of the inmates, while finding some common language with them, then the performance can probably attract the attention of spectators anywhere else.*

For this purpose, it was necessary to find a certain universal theatrical semiology other than the text of Büchner which could possibly work abroad, as well.

So, this is how the company production became a prison theatre performance.



## MEETING THE GROUP AND CHOOSING THE SUBJECT

According to the vision of the creators the priority is not the theatre and not even the environment where theatre is created, but the future actors' (in this case the inmates') work with the theatrical material, which doesn't carry a fully dramatized text - even if it's possible to work with that type of text, but the challenges and the main purposes of the artistic work would be different. It is crucial that the actors be able to relate to the subject, and also want to talk about it.

**Drama pedagogy has several methods to survey what the given community is interested in, and can even map the aspects of the subject they find the most fascinating.**

- ↪ At the beginning of a social theatrical creation it is worth taking the typical group interests in consideration through the individuals, and choose the topic of future material this way.
- ↪ To choose the material you need to know the group. To do this properly, apart from starting conversations, you'll need games and exercises - because while you play, you are unable to lie - the player will show their innocent, telltale and defenseless face. On the other hand, the purpose of these games is that you gain the confidence of the group while becoming equal with the other players.

### In our case the director suggested the following methods:

- ↪ name circles and games to get acquainted, going deeper and deeper. Later, games that assume self- and group awareness, and in the last phase, games of trust should be used to ensure group cohesion.
- ↪ Afterwards, during the staging of the material, they trained body consciousness by doing physical exercises. These involved self-, partner- and group awareness elements.
- ↪ The participants liked the games that used free associations throughout the whole stage of creation.

### Choosing the topic of the creation several drama pedagogical methods are available. We chose brainstorming:

- ↪ we wrote a word on a piece of paper, and then wrote different words that had been summoned by that one word (e.g: SIN: punishment, prison, family, love, my father... etc.). Later they could explain why they thought of that word, if they wanted to.
- ↪ The director could soon list certain subjects of taboo which are uncomfortable because they make them leave their individual comfort zone, or force them to face their limits or seem dangerous to them in their current situation.

---

Having met the group, we could enlist subjects which they were interested in and concerned about. In this list, we had the feeling of deprivation of liberty, the drowning power of poverty, the social exclusion of the sinner.

This is how we got to **Büchner's Woyzeck**.

---

Büchner, an author ahead of his time, chose extreme poverty as the subject of his drama. His whole body of work was created in three years, because he died incredibly young. He was probably working on this very drama, which remained unfinished, in the last weeks of his life. He researched the subject of Woyzeck with great enthusiasm, since on the one hand it

THE RELATIONSHIP  
BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUAL  
AND THE COMMUNITY,  
THE VULNERABILITY AND  
HELPLESSNESS OF THE  
INDIVIDUAL, THE INDIFFERENCE  
OF SOCIETY IN THE FACE  
OF THE PROBLEMS OF THE  
INDIVIDUAL, ALL SEEMED TO  
BE GOOD SOIL FOR COMMON  
REFLECTION.

matched his medical interests and on the other hand his sense of justice was pained by a news item of the time that serves as a point of departure for the play: a soldier called Woyzeck killed his love out of jealousy, and he was sentenced to death. The case, analyzed in the magazines of the time, greatly upset the author, and so with the tools of the later called expressionism he presented the poor man as becoming a toy for his environment.

The topic touched the writer so much that he wrote different variations and sketches, but he could not entirely finish his work, but even like this he handed down abundant material to

posterity. There was enough material to create a prison theater performance, while adapting the story and the text to local subject material and circumstances.

The milieu of poverty represented in the play is the most pragmatic for them to unwrap their teatro-esthetical thesis, which is: "poverty is the compass of our art (...) So the poetic meaning of poverty: living on less, and realizing that the economy has an intensifying, filtering power." (Website of the Üres Tér Company, urester.hu)

The relationship between the individual and the community, the vulnerability and helplessness of the individual, the indifference of society in the face of the problems of the individual, all seemed to be good soil for common reflection.

**We performed the 2014 production to the inmates.** Its form of language had an encouraging and unleashing effect on them. Unvarnished things - but in theatrical form, - told (swearing, orders) and done (sexual acts, violence), all made complete the artistic creation of what we call theater.

## VOJCEK - THE PARTICULARITIES OF THE PLAY

There are three inmates, three actors and one musician on the circular form stage. Since the whole cast is present and visible throughout the performance, sitting among the audience, their permanent presence boosts the public being involved.

Only the leading roles are cast, in the rest the actors alternate. Everybody wears all black, they wear commedia dell' arte masks while using the elements of movement of the given *tipi fissi*, except for Marie, Vojcek and Andres.

The inmates wear prison uniform patterned bandanas and masks. Later, this changes. First, they let go of the headpiece, then at the end of the play they abandon their mask, too. Their role is reflected on several planes.

The play begins with the tale of Marie in darkness, disturbed by a noisy, vulgar group who enter the stage - one might think that some drunken spectators broke into the sacred chapel called theater.

Later they interrupt the play several times: they are asking for drugs; they are justifying the violence by some pseudo-scientific banter as the only way to keep the human species from extinction. Gradually they are "taking roles away", getting the same status as the actors.

After Marie tells the biblical exemplar of infidelity the inmates take off their masks and start to talk in their everyday jargon: **AND IN THIS CASE WHAT ABOUT THE CHILD?**

Then we can hear a rap song: Attila József's poem *Tiszta szívvel* ('I have no father, no mother') rapped in English. They sing it with enthusiasm, dignity, furor and defiance, without masks, showing their face.





This cathartic moment is the climax of the play, where the spectators realize: this is not only the story of Vojcek, and not only about the vulnerability of the inmates, this could be anyone of us. We are all vulnerable and humiliated. We are all ordered about by the same nasty overlords.

The guinea pig called Vojcek - is presented by a man in a Pantalone mask: first he talks in English, later in Italian and in French - the musician acts as interpreter, talking into the microphone. This strange ringmaster is irksome, a smart aleck, the spectator feels uncomfortable for a good reason. His patronizing, dumb and objective explanations bother the public. Because there is something in what he is saying! He deserves our full attention, otherwise we fall into his mental traps. He is an indispensable figure to the performance: he frequently stops the play, he comments, he maintains the order, creates new rules, and he is the one who gives life to the stone wrapped in a sheet, which is the child of Vojcek and Marie. Sometimes he is the exact opposite of his own words ("Be natural"). Sometimes discreetly, sometimes in a more forceful manner, but he is the one who leads the story.

**"HERE YOU HAVE VOJCEK. THE FAVOURITE OF EVERY BIG FISH."** - he presents Vojcek, who appears on a small, rotating backstage, which is going to be the site of certain elements of the story, by stuffing it into the smallest space possible, while its movement is going to permanently increase the dynamics of the performance.

The rotating stage is going to have a lot of functions ( Marie and Vojcek standing face to face while turning the small stage erotically, then starting the next movement from the motion of the previous one, or we can see Vojcek lying on it, hardened into stone).

The play starts with a tale-upbeat creating the most powerful focus with the poetic metaphor of poverty, which comes back at the end of the performance, when they all say the first line again. As if the whole story were starting all over again in a cycle (this is the secondary title of the play) which is none other than the recurrence of life. The eternal scheme of hopelessly recurring poverty and abandon.

**"THE GIRL WAS FOUND AT THE LAKE WITH 12 KNIFE WOUNDS IN HER BODY."** - The story is ended by the ringmaster saying this in English, translated by the interpreter, in darkness.

The commedia dell'arte requires great technical presence and discipline from the actors.

The use of the English language and the presence of the ringmaster have an estranging effect because it breaks off the storyline.

Vojcek's mechanical movements throughout the performance symbolize the effort of the man in the rat race of the world, they refer to the vulnerability of the man who wants to live up to everyone's expectations. His being a puppet is the strongest when the members of the choir kick him on the ground, degrading him to a heap of clothes.



**"HE'S A BRUTE. HE'S UNABLE TO REFLECT, TO EXPRESS HIMSELF, OR TO ASK FOR HELP."** - says the ringmaster.

But Vojcek is always asking questions - sometimes in a lower voice, sometimes more loudly, sometimes jabbering, sometimes stuttering - asking himself and the others, which his overlords consider as rebellion. As well as mentally, he is also physically abused. He doesn't defend himself from the slaps, his humiliation, his "Vojcekness" is the strongest here.

The form language that the director suggested was the tense system of

movements with plenty of elements using the body: physical theatre. This made the performance really effective, and (also) emotionally powerful, the creative process bringing about challenges and several difficulties.

## DIFFICULTIES AND CHALLENGES

The prison as a creative space poses several problems. Nowadays more and more law-enforcement institutions realize that creative activities have a good effect on the inmates, so they integrate in their functions artistic and drama pedagogical activities. The lessons should be frequented regularly but systematic work is disturbed by disciplinary problems, the prison's daily routine, and the wavering motivation of the inmates.

Agreeing on the common denomination of notions wasn't easy either. In prison sin and punishment have different meanings, just like the individual and society – just as in the vision of Büchner.

Without „justifying wrong“, he simply presents it, while changing aspects and tones. Either poetically, or scientifically. (Similarly to Bernard-Marie Koltes' *Roberto Zucco*, which has since become a classic). It was difficult to close out **EVERYDAY PROBLEMS** since

In our country this is an acute crisis for society. There is an ever-gaping gap between the middle classes and the poor. The financial crisis, foreign currency loans and unemployment create a more and more uncertain milieu to stay afloat. Whoever sinks, does not speak. Consumerism and the cheap entertainment industry takes our eyes off the current situation and size of the problem.<sup>9</sup>

The other challenge was to follow the **VALUES** that were introduced as the motto of the performance:

We would like to get through Büchner's Sketches together with the public, to get to that universal thought that says that the pure existence of man is a fundamental value.

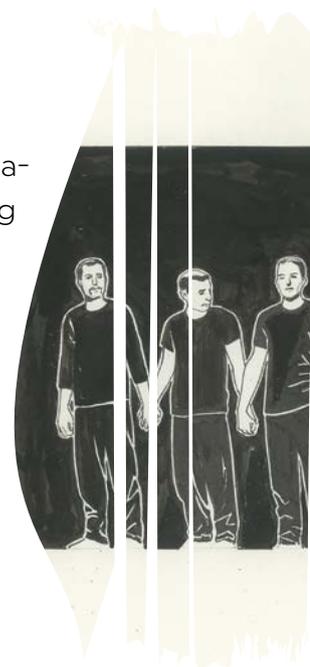
WE WOULD LIKE TO GET THROUGH BÜCHNER'S SKETCHES TOGETHER WITH THE PUBLIC, TO GET TO THAT UNIVERSAL THOUGHT THAT SAYS THAT THE PURE EXISTENCE OF MAN IS A FUNDAMENTAL VALUE.



9 Üres Tér website (urester.hu), introduction to the performance.

They had the rich material of Büchner: their pedagogical point of view and the relationship with the drama are both involved and strengthened in this milieu, making it extremely challenging for them.

Apart from the prison where we could invite outsiders to watch the performance as well, Vojcek had only one public performance, in a prestigious cultural institution, the National Theatre of Pécs. Theatre director Miklos Rázga was open-minded about the performance. The transport and surveillance of the inmates, the public conversation with them after the performance were all difficulties to deal with.



## REACTIONS BY THE SPECTATORS AND CREATORS

Based on the written feedback of the spectators – here we quote three of them - we are proud to say that this unique, unrepeatable public performance in the National Theatre of Pécs was a great success.

**ÉVA FÜSTI MOLNÁR** (actress): I wouldn't have thought how hard it was going to be to explain what I felt about the performance. I was so shocked emotionally; I find it difficult to express. I experienced a double catharsis. It was an excellent, professional job of dramatization and stage direction, with the mission of saving three souls from their predestined rat race. I could see with my own eyes the vulnerability of the three inmates and my own as well. I only remember that I applauded amazed, shuddering, with a huge lump in my throat. This was more than (just) theatre!

**KATALIN STYRNA** (teacher): I had already seen some performances of the company Üres Tér, but this very play surprised me in a way that I experienced a different effect. I think that the power of that effect was given by the masks. Throughout the performance I felt that by them, some ancestral, until then more or less controlled, frightening instincts were let loose, and that we all should be terrified of this. Some more, some less. At the same time the „actors“ who wore the masks had seen the hell that prison is because they had given themselves up to these instincts. I was genuinely afraid of them. They played so well: since their facial expressions were covered, their body could play the whole part. And so, the body, as an independent creature, away from the control



of the mind, with a primitive uninhibitedness went for the satisfaction of its needs. Every gesture sent us the message that „the weak must be destroyed“. The emptiness of the space and the game of the shadows and lights also boosted this message.

In the end, when they took off their masks, surprisingly they were similar to the „shadow faces“. As if they had taken off their real faces. I mean, Márk detected the sense of their personalities quite accurately, probably he managed to rip off this criminal part of them. It must have been a cathartic feeling to leave this role, taking it off together with the mask. They said during the conversation with the audience – while sitting like kings on their „thrones“- that in prison it does matter what the message of your body posture is. I think that they meant the raw representation of dominance, that is why a major part of their life is to play „the strong man“. The protagonist, as a perfect complementary partner, symbolized the human soul for me that can weaken

you in this fight of life and death. I cannot even remember the storyline, because I was deeply affected by the non-verbal messages and effects. Since then it has been a strong memory, one of the greatest performances that I have ever seen.

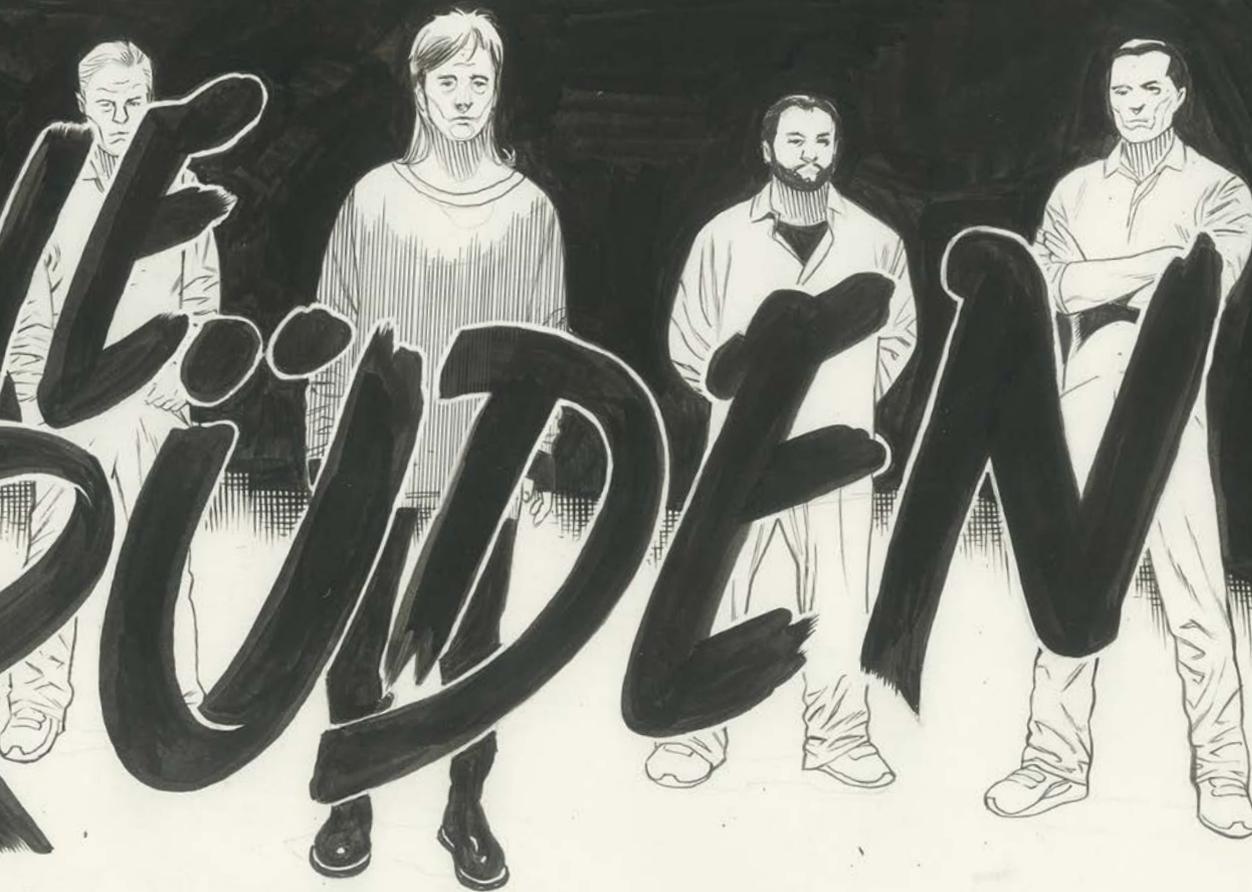
**MELINDA REIBLINÉ HORVÁTH** (healthcare worker): I had never been touched by a performance like I was by Vojcek. I was just standing there waiting, now what? How is it possible to quit this situation? I even forgot to clap first, because I was thinking that what just had happened was my fault.



# ZONE 3

THEATRE WORKSHOP  
IN BERLIN PRISONS

URESTER.HU



# INTRODUCTION TO ZONE3 E.V. CULTURE - INTEGRATION - EDUCATION

by Sabine Winterfeldt

We have been carrying out theater projects in prisons since 2003 for different organizations. Five years ago we founded our own association: **Zone3 e.V. Culture – Integration – Education**

The goal of our work is to give our participants who may be scholars, detainees or ex-prisoners a new and different perspective and a new attitude towards themselves, their fellow human beings and society we are living in together, by creating an artistic space, that is free and protected. We carry out prevention projects in educational institutions, projects in prisons and for former inmates who have been released from prison into open execution.

Our belief is that through theater work, the participants get the chance to make different experiences in artistic work, and by this, gain a new perspective on life in society. We assume that this is essential, as our participants, no matter if they are inmates, former inmates or scholars often come from deprived social backgrounds. Often a milieu where crime is the normal, and their usual circle of life is living in their society is being in prison, being freed and back into prison. Our aim with our contribution is to breach this vicious circle, in the best case right before the circle even starts.

Not only people, who have committed a crime and been in prison for it, are stigmatized by society. Also, people from social deprived backgrounds live often with this stigma. An essential part of our work to talk to EVERYONE, despite social background, gender, political opinion. In order to create a long-term "resocialization effect" it is of mayor importance to first build a communication platform and by this a relationship. A good and stable relationship is the base of a possible positive evolution throughout out work.

The basis of good relationship work is mutual acceptance of the other person within the rules set by the system (the system of theater work). The human being is always in the foreground in our work. The person stands in front of the system in which he or she moves, from which he or she comes and into which he or she is to be integrated. This is why conflicts arise again and again, as people do not fit easily into a system that often does not contain any justice or perspective for their own subjective reality of life and in most of the cases shows no interest in the individual needs of the person – **THEY ARE "OFFLINE"**.

**THE GOAL OF OUR WORK IS TO GIVE OUR PARTICIPANTS WHO MAY BE SCHOLARS, DETAINEES OR EX-PRISONERS A NEW AND DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE AND A NEW ATTITUDE TOWARDS THEMSELVES, THEIR FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS AND SOCIETY WE ARE LIVING IN TOGETHER, BY CREATING AN ARTISTIC SPACE, THAT IS FREE AND PROTECTED.**

## WHAT KIND OF THEATRE

The ultimate and most important rule is mutual respect. This is actually the only exclusion criterion. Participants who treat the other players with disrespect are not welcome.

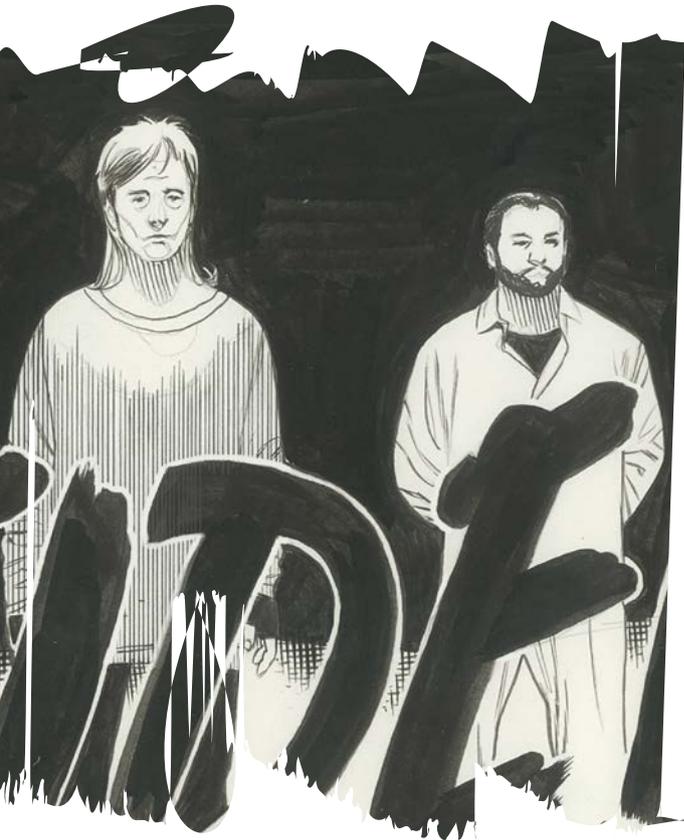
We are very flexible and work with different approaches. We are very responsive to the respective group. With us, anyone can join in for the time being, as long as they follow the existing mutually agreed rules.

Our work is always completely process-oriented. We attach great importance to all participants listening to each other. Not only to be focused on one's own process and procedures,

but to concentrate on what is happening in the group and on stage is an important part of our work.

We often work with existing pieces and together with the participants, we develop a version that is directly related to the life backgrounds of our players and their attitude towards themselves and society. We invite the participants to integrate biographical information as well as their own skills, singing, martial arts or even their own poems and stories to our work. The integrated input connects their reality to the fiction of the play and by this, they learn the change of perspective.

The process-based approach includes a high degree of openness of results. The demand for artistic quality is defined, but its achievement is not evaluated. The performative may change and be changed again and again.



The goal is to create a new experience that is determined by a sense of community, to bring about a condensation of life through the inter-dependencies of the stage events. Everyone should feel as a (valuable) part of the whole.

So one could describe our Theater work as **PROCESS** driven open performance approach.

## METHODOLOGY

### PROTECTED SPACE

The participants must be sure that the space they train, act, discuss is evaluation free, grants free speech – as long as it doesn't discriminate or offends anybody – and action. It is essential to build a partnering relationship, that all what happens in the protected space stays in this area and is not transported to the "system of repression" as which the prison system and even sometimes school is felt.

### THE TALKING STICK

A central element in this protected space and the key tool of our work is the TALKING STICK.

↙ The idea of the stick is, that the carrier of the stick is entitled to say whatever is on his mind, without being interrupted, always in accord to the agreed rules which have been discussed at the beginning of the workshops.

---

At the beginning and at the end of every workshop as an always returning routine, each participant (trainer and participant) has the opportunity to **SPEAK FREELY** to the group. It is about an ego-message, the goal is **CONSTRUCTIVENESS**. Complaints are allowed, but no talking about the others, it is about expressing one's own sensitivities. The only criterion is that there is no evaluation of what has been said. This is an important aspect in creating the **PROTECTED SPACE**.

---

## THEATER AND ACTING TECHNIQUES

As we are not working with trained actors – with different talents – we introduce in the first-place acting techniques, that they can feel free and comfortable on stage.

### BREATHING TECHNIQUE

Breathing is absolutely essential for theater work. When babies are born, they have everything they need to use their voice to its fullest. Unfortunately, we unlearn this again in the course of our lives, through socialization and “education”. Basically, the breathing technique for the theater is about relearning to breathe the whole body and also to use all breathing organs optimally. It has been proven, that a good breathing technique contributes to a happier, healthier, more conscious life. Many people use only parts of their body and are unaware, for example, that their diaphragm is located to a large extent in their back.

---

The **EXERCISES** are all about gaining knowledge about your own **BREATHING** and a feeling for it, and making the best use of your breath for good **VOCAL TECHNIQUE**.

---

### BODY SENSITIVITY

This is similar to breathing. Many children lose the ability to be sensitive to their body and to feel what it needs, where it feels good or is injured. We take our body for granted and, if we do not explicitly train sensitivity, we become blunted over time. As a performing artist, be it in music or theater or as a painter, you need a permeable body that has direct access to your feelings and thoughts.

---

We promote the sensitivity of our body through various **MINDFULNESS EXERCISES** and through this a greater awareness of our own individual body is created. We teach an awareness of the different emotional states that appear in the body, such as anger, fear or joy and learn how to react to the body language of the other players.

---

## IMPROVISATION

In improvisational theater the participants learn to act to their own impulses and to react to those of their fellow players and not to go into resistance, but into anticipation, process and joy of playing. In improvisational theater, different cornerstones such as relationship, status, emotion or profession are given and within the given cornerstones the players should develop a scene. The players are trained to be really "in the moment", to concentrate, to rely on their own impulses and to be open for their playing partners.

Through the **EXERCISES**, the participants learn to **FEEL** their own **BODY**, to express different emotions and to realize what happens with body, **VOICE** and **BREATHING** during the different emotions. The participants learn that they have different ways of expressing themselves and possibilities to expand their spectrum of acting.

By working in a group, they also learn to listen to each other. People who have nothing to do with each other in normal life (and also in everyday prison life) get to know and accept each other in a new, artistic way. Sharing their emotions and speech, they get awareness and respect of each other's feelings and thoughts and their body, but also of their criminal and the legal surrounding. We try to emplace a system of values to our fellow players that is not based on competition but on mutual support and collaboration with the other community members. Teamwork is in the foreground.

**WE TRY TO EMPLACE A SYSTEM OF VALUES TO OUR FELLOW PLAYERS THAT IS NOT BASED ON COMPETITION BUT ON MUTUAL SUPPORT AND COLLABORATION WITH THE OTHER COMMUNITY MEMBERS. TEAMWORK IS IN THE FOREGROUND.**

## PLACE OF TRUST

This shifts and changes beliefs. Whenever possible, we try to make our groups very heterogeneous. In the first workshop phase, the most important thing is joy and fun. The participants should play and laugh with each other and forget the prison and their worries for the time of the workshop. This way they relax and make new and important experiences. Only when we created a relaxed atmosphere and trust in the group and the secured place, we start developing the material.

We are not interested in hierarchical theater work and present the theme of the workshop, work ourselves through it, regarding the impacts and emotions and thoughts created by this theme. We then ask the participants to contribute with their emotions and ideas and reflections. This is only possible, if we have created a place of trust beforehand, which is not an easy task in a prison.

## DEVELOPMENT

In the next step we work on the different themes of the play and work out the personal relationship of the participants. Then we develop a play together and then we rehearse it. The last weeks of this process should always be intensive rehearsals, i.e. rehearsing with the group every day at least one week before a performance.

In terms of content, it is important for us to engage with the world that surrounds us and especially the participants as they have in general their own perspective which must not be coherent with the general perspective. We try to work in a socio-critical and gender-conscious way.

NO NOS INTERESA EL TRABAJO DE TEATRO JERÁRQUICO, PRESENTAMOS EL TEMA DEL TALLER Y TRABAJAMOS NOSOTROS MISMOS A TRAVÉS DE ÉL, EN FUNCIÓN DE LOS IMPACTOS, EMOCIONES Y PENSAMIENTOS QUE GENERA ESTE TEMA.

## PRACTICE EXAMPLES IN DIFFERENT INSTITUTIONS

Germany is organized as a federation of states – and so are some laws, their enforcement and its institutions. Different states and their way to implicate the law-enforcement and the different regulations have impacts regarding safety precautions during performances or during rehearsals are accordingly very different. So one can have performances in prison with various visitors while in others states only the closest family may attend. In other prisons, there are no visitors from the outside allowed and the only guests for the performance are the people, that work in prison.

Every institution acts completely different. This always has to do with the local management of the respective prison, the political situation in the local state and of course the way the institution sees itself and its behavior towards the system. How these prisons are open to your practices, the legal references -how the law permit this practiced.

The regulations regarding film and photo guidelines also vary greatly. The decision-makers in the institutions have a relatively large margin of discretion and decision.

This as a preface we are working in schools, prisons for male and female inmates and NGO like Gangway which are all organized depending on local law. Of course every institution is always a mirror of its management and strongly depending on its personal attitude and goals



## SCHOOL: WESTSIDE STORY (THEATER PLAY AND FILM)

This was a project with a duration of two years. It was financed by the American government from the funds of Homeland Security. The model was a project in Seattle, which was carried out together with the local police and artists from the Bernstein Foundation's surroundings. There were areas where poverty and a lack of education had made people leave the system to such an extent that neither the school nor the local police were able to gain access to the population and children there. It was possible to build a bridge there through theater and music. Artists and police officers worked together there.

We translated this to Berlin and, together with students and teachers from a so-called "hot spot school", developed the West Side story to Berlin with a play and a film.

## MALE PRISON: DIE RÄUBER OF WRIEZEN (ALT. VERSION OF SCHILLERS FAMOUS PLAY)

Together with a group of young prisoners from Wriezen in Brandenburg we developed the play "Die Räuber von Wriezen" (The Robbers of Wriezen) over a period of 3 years. We mixed the original texts with translations of the dramaturgy into their own language. Interestingly enough, the young men did not want to know anything about the original play by Schiller at first, but in the course of the project they literally tore themselves apart to play the original texts. Over the years, they developed a deep understanding of the story. This play was often performed with great success outside of the prison and also had guest performances in other prisons.



## EASTWESTSIDESTORY IN PRISON

Together with a prison for young male inmates and two girls and women's prisons, we developed our own version of Romeo and Juliet as a hip-hop opera. The rehearsals took place separately but also partly together. With an extremely heterogeneous group of people from different milieus and cultures, we created a piece and performed it with great success in different prisons. Some of the actors came from the right-wing extremist scene and from the Islamist milieu, and former refugees were also part of the project, as were drug addicts and drug dealers. We worked together with a group of actors, musicians, costume designers, directors and film makers.



### FEMALE & MALE PRISON:

Over a period of four years we developed pieces at four locations with prisoners from the male and female penitentiary system, the open prison and with former prisoners over a period of 9 months each on the topics **DIGNITY, HOME, IDENTITY**. We played in different locations. We integrated individual prisoners who had permission to go out for a day into the overall piece, so that some of the players only had a single day to play together.

### MALE PRISON & GANGWAY (NGO): GERMAN LANGUAGE COURSE VIA THEATER

The key to a country and its population is communication. Without the ability to communicate one is deprived of any access to education, work, culture and social relationship. Understanding this leads to the understanding as many of the male and female inmates are not speaking German, that the labour market is closed for those people. German courses itself are nothing spectacular, but in reality the success quote of the inmates learning German the usual way is less than 20%. The participants often deny learning the classic way – sometimes because of

lack of alphabetization – but are highly motivated to learn German the “play-way”. The Quota here is somewhere around 80% success depending on the time they can take part in the workshops.

### MALE PRISON & GANGWAY (NGO): DIE RÜDEN (THEATER PLAY, FILM)

Main theme of this contribution which will be treated intensively in the next chapter.

## IN AND OUT, AUDIENCE INSIDE, INMATES OUT. HOW THE LAW PERMIT THIS

This varies greatly from prison to prison and from state to state. Some prisons believe in their inmates and the work they have passed during the workshops and with that knowledge of the lively relationship between the inmates and their workshop coaches take a greater risk, under the motto: the prisoners have to learn to deal with freedom and trust, and permit exterior presentations. Other prisons are strictly against this form of liberty and prefer to stick to the more conformist rules – detainees stay in prison for their time!

The same procedure is to observe with the audience coming in – families in general are allowed but non family related visitors are permitted depending on the prison the play will take place. A very interesting performance is always the performance for the other inmates. Experience shows that this is the performance where the players are most excited, but it is also often one of the most interesting. The players are usually afraid of being embarrassed, but they usually get great recognition from their colleagues and from the staff. These spectators are especially interesting, because they are usually very honest, if a play is boring, they tell you immediately, but when they like the play, they are a great, exited audience.

Conform to all of the prisons is the prohibition of fotos and films inside – which is understandable to protect the inmates.





## OUR SENSATIONS AND MOTIVATION

*In the first beginning it was pure necessity. I had to nourish a child and myself and needed a regular income. I had to think of a way to place my abilities and to let them meet with my ideas of social life. This is how I started to work in Prison...*

With the time the perspective changed, as we learned to know more and more all kind of different inmates, with all their background stories and started to understand the system of prison and punishment.

Apparent absence of creativity and freedom in the system permits to place the flower of phantasy and creativity and to let it grow. This place so enclosed by walls, borders and rules can offer on the other side a great pile of emotion and creativity, which is our task to dig to the surface.

Artists have a great longing to capture and experience "authentic, real" life and find an expression for it.

In addition, theater and acting work can lead to people experiencing a greater awareness of themselves and the world and thus leading a happier life. Through the rehearsals and the performances, one goes through a very intensive process together. So, it is both: As an artist you have an intensive, meaningful experience and you have the feeling of having given something positive to the world and you have the possibility to understand yourself better in your work and your own expression.

Negative feelings are also part of the work. For example, when the solidarity and the sense of respon-

**THIS PLACE SO  
ENCLOSED BY WALLS,  
BORDERS AND RULES  
CAN OFFER ON THE  
OTHER SIDE A GREAT  
PILE OF EMOTION AND  
CREATIVITY, WHICH IS  
OUR TASK TO DIG TO THE  
SURFACE.**

sibility towards the group leaves much to be desired, when a rehearsal cannot take place or has to be changed because someone is missing (again). As an artist, this is a very valuable experience, because you hardly ever experience it outside of the prison environment, because actors always want to play, and we expect great enthusiasm from the creative people.

---

**MOTIVATION:** if one assumes that a successfully experienced crime is an unprecedented kick, then our work is about producing a substitute kick, something that comes close to the feeling of condensing into life. Acting and theater are excellent ways to reorient a person - anything is possible, the limitation is the own giving into the situation. The motivation as an artist is that art is not developed in the middle of society, but almost always on its fringes. Prison is one such edge.

---

## BEING A WOMAN IN THIS SYSTEM

As a woman, you are naturally confronted with the classic role clichés. Many prison employees, but also many inmates are rather used to the conservative role models, although this is of course also a cliché. So it is always a matter of breaking through these, of demanding respect.

On the other hand, in many cultures the "feminine" is either idealized (the perfect kind mother, the holy wife, the pure sister) or stigmatized (the whore, the false snake, the cunning). One is often extremely idealized as a woman in prison. On one hand, you can use this for relationship work, but on the other you have to be careful not to let yourself be manipulated.

The relationship work in prison is a very delicate plant. It happens very quickly that you try to fulfill the expectations of the other person and then you are caught in the manipulation trap. The work in prison is a constant change between closeness and distance.

**The absolute borderline between being female and male is more evident in prison:**

- ^ because there are no mixed prisons
- ^ because it is often about violence, which is decided by physical force.

Since the inmates here are a significant experience ahead of us, a feeling of superiority or inferiority arises, which can lead to tension. Here it is an advantage to be a woman, because as a woman it is "natural" to know the physical limits. As a woman, you are immune to competition with the inmates.

## **SUCCESS OR FAILURE - WHAT DOES THAT MEAN IN OUR WORK WITH INMATES**

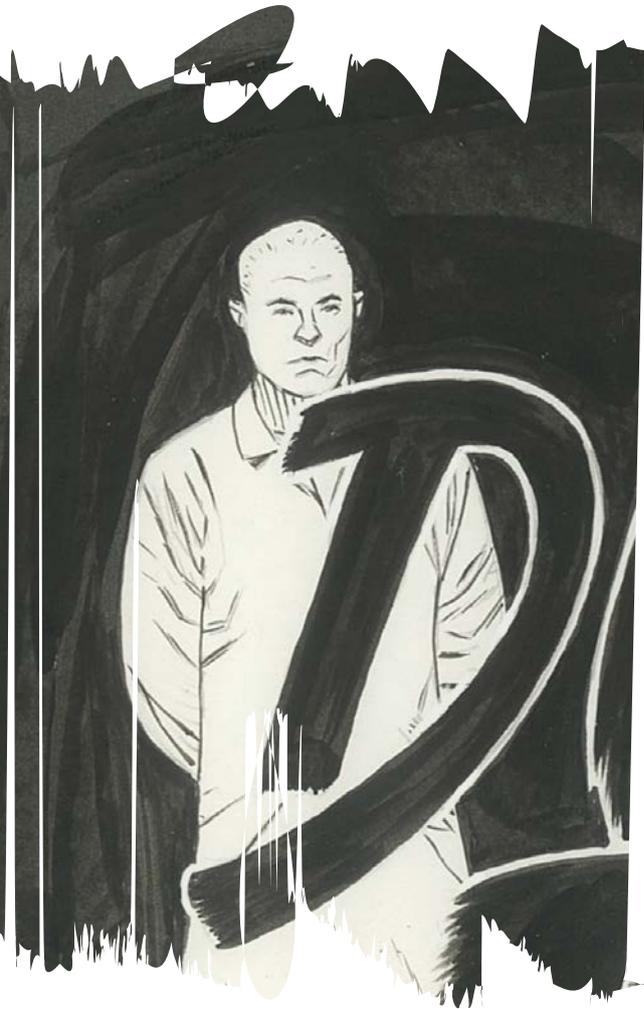
The process with all its different stages is important. A project is successful for us when we have understood and got to know each other better on the way to a performance and have rattled against the walls of our own beliefs. Failure is definitely always a possibility of the process and can have many reasons.

**A project is successful if it meets the following factors:**

- ^ The process-oriented work
- ^ The acquisition of skills
- ^ Rethinking the own beliefs of all participants
- ^ A performance with high artistic standards

**A PROJECT IS SUCCESSFUL FOR US WHEN WE HAVE UNDERSTOOD AND GOT TO KNOW EACH OTHER BETTER ON THE WAY TO A PERFORMANCE AND HAVE RATTLED AGAINST THE WALLS OF OUR OWN BELIEFS.**

- ↘ Gaining public attention to make people aware of the importance of such projects and the situation of this parallel society.
- ↘ One factor in a successful performance is also whether the audience rethinks its own beliefs and clichés. The change of perspective takes place in all directions.



The experience of doubt, uncertainty, stage fright... the experience of play, which is seriously pursued, but always remains play. Becoming loose, becoming playful. There is no "right" and no "wrong" - there are only effects and visions of different kinds. The experience of surprises and letting oneself in for them: = improvisation work.

Improvisation is an essential part of the work, because it eludes predictability, expectability and demands affirmation from the other person.

#### There are two **OBSTACLES** in this context:

- ↘ The first is located outside and is called **PER-SPECTIVE**. Even if one teaches prisoners in theater projects or other social trainings to decide for a legal life, the reality outside the prison walls unfortunately often offers only one path - that people return to their old structures and nobody there takes care of them anymore - and so they have the backlash. The relationships or the living conditions have led people into a criminal life and these circumstances have mostly not improved or changed for the better during the imprisonment. On the contrary. After the im-

prisonment many people expect stigmatization, unemployment and homelessness. And these factors often lead to new crimes, which may then lead back to prison. In this way the system feeds itself.

- ✎ A second factor is that, in addition to the "success stories", there are sometime people, who are reached by acting, but not in the way one would like to be reached, i.e. that not really empathy and sensitivity is promoted, but rather hubris, ego. These people also feel better then, but sometimes you get the impression that you have given them a tool for a more successful career as a criminal and violent offender.

## INMATES EXPERIENCES AND COMMENTARIES TO OUR WORK

In the course of 17 years of prison theater, one experiences the most diverse things: That participants, by the impulses they receive through theater or through personal encounters with artists or fellow inmates, make new decisions and choose to live a less violent life. During the theater workshops membership in inhuman groups, like Hells Angels or Family Clans are often questioned it sometimes happens that the inmates abandon their past life-Style to a new one without their "family". The confrontation with oneself as an artistic personality often leads to a different perception of one's own abilities and gives encouragement to an access to literature and education. A positive group experience helps to counteract the existing mistrust.

It often happens that participants in our projects have been inspired by the impulse of the theater work to take a different path in life. This work can't be more than an impulse, but of course it can't be less, it's not about passing the time of the prisoners, but about opening new perspectives and by that offering new possibilities and different paths of decision and activity.

A young man from Poland, for example, who was in our theater project for 2 years and has been involved in organized crime since the age of 13, started reading during the theater project. Years later he wrote us a letter and told us that after his imprisonment he had finished high school and studied social work and was now working as a social worker in Switzerland.

Other ones were so deeply touched by the theatre workshops that he decided to start living a career as Actors. One started with his acting studies, while the other is playing in small theatre in Berlin.

There were always cases of young men from the right-wing extremist environment who left their inhuman group during the course of the theater work because they could no longer defend this Nazi attitude with the experience, they had obtained in the theater work.

While the work with male prisoners is often about lowering the aggression potential and leveraging the acceptance and tolerance, with female prisoners it is more about " self-esteem, self-empowerment, and self -consciousness. Through the theater work they get a feeling for themselves, a consciousness, a self-awareness and often manage to get out of abusive relationships.

## **A VISION OF "THEATRE-IN-PRISON" STATE OF THE ART IN GERMANY**

Federalism makes a big difference. Unfortunately, such projects are also always dependent on the political and personal mood. Therefore, this cannot be generalized at all. Everyone follows what is being published in the media, both population and politics.

Personally, we believe that prison theatre projects are extremely important. They contribute greatly in giving prisoners social skills that can support them in their individual life decisions. They give them the opportunity to gain experience with themselves, with fellow inmates but also with the prison staff. These experiences allow them to evaluate their own situation differently.

But also, the spectators and the staff get a new impression. We have experienced time and time again that people approach the project with an expectation. "They will not stick to it anyway; they are all criminals without feelings, they just want to be admired...they never change...etc..." and then, after the project and the performances, they have to question their own beliefs or, for the duration of the play, have forgotten that they are in a prison.

Important impulses are always manifested in so-called "family performances". The family, which lives with the stigma of a "prisoner in the family", which is often associated with great shame and usually has a long history before imprisonment, suddenly has the opportunity to be proud of their son/brother/daughter. This has a very positive influence on a family system.

If we could wish for something...then I would like to develop a prison theater that is a mixture of professional actors and prisoners - where everyone has equal rights, which also means: equal obligations. Whoever takes part commits himself to stay, and whoever is absent without excuse or jumps off, has to pay a "penalty" (= make the consequences of his own actions immediately noticeable). This prison theater should be accessible for spectators and it should be well subsidized.



## INFLUENCE OF EUROPEAN EXCHANGES IN YOUR WORK

We are all living in boxes. In general, we cope quite well in our box and could be satisfied with this status. But we all need new impressions, new impulses and new approaches. This is why we think that intranational- and cultural cooperation's are extremely fruitful, necessary and important to our personal evolution and with the new impulses we gain to our daily work.

We experience to which different points work in prison is supported in the different countries, how far the acceptance of a lifeworthy existence is permitted to the inmates in prison. We believe, that projects like this, can be a key to make a change to their actual situation in prison, but also like water on a shore erode the shores of the actual's society beliefs to a better way of acquaintance with people on the borders of society.



**IDEAS COULD BE** developing **EUROPEAN STANDARDS** by European collaboration between prisons, having international theater projects not only for the coaches, but also for the detainees.

Creating the **INTERNATIONAL PRISON SPACE** through exchange. To develop a European standard.

# EXAMPLE IN PRACTICE

## "DIE RÜDEN"

### PLAY IN PRISON - THEATRE WORK IN A PROTECTED SURROUNDING USING THE EXAMPLE OF DIE RÜDEN

I'M IN MY BODY  
LIKE IN A SHRINKED QUILT  
PULLING IT UP, FREEZING FEET  
PULLING IT DOWN, FREEZING BRAIN  
I HAVE BECOME TOO SMALL FOR ME  
AND PLEATS I WRINKLE ANYWAY.

ISCH STECK IN MEINEM KÖRPERWIE  
IN NER EINGELAUFNEN DECKZIEHSTE  
OWWE, GUCKSTE LINNE RAUSZIEHSTE LINNE,  
FRIERSTE AM KOPPICH BIN ZU KLOA FÜR  
MICH GEWORRNUNN FALDE SCHLAG ISCH  
TROTZDEM

This Hessian poem describes in a humorous way what happens when we develop ourselves. We do this constantly, even under the most adverse circumstances. We can't help it, and usually it happens unconsciously. How valuable would it be to always have a method at hand that allows us to consciously reinvent ourselves, to playfully gain distance from ourselves in order to become familiar with ourselves again in a new way? This is the enchanting opportunity that acting offers. For everyone.

## THE PLACE

Prison, correctional facility, detention centre, reform school, penitentiary, dungeon, jail - many names for a place that only a few know, but of which everyone believes to have a fairly precise idea. Seldom is a place so burdened by prejudices and moral evaluations as this one.

The serving of a prison sentence is the atonement of the deed, which is paid off after the sentence has been served and the person, once again in freedom, has a renewed chance to participate in society.

---

So far, the theory! But what is it really like? How do the prisoners spend their time? How does change happen, and how consciously can a change to the positive happen?

---

As there obviously can be no guarantee for positive change there is a dilemma that, as such, always becomes the focus of public attention when a perpetrator becomes a repeat offender after serving his or her sentence. The recidivism rate is too high for the almost reflexively recurring public questioning of sentences to be marginalized. Whenever the recidivism of an offender is spectacularly experienced, the entire system is faced with an immense need for explanation and justification.

No act can be forgotten. For the victims, this makes sense immediately. But a deed does not fall into oblivion for the perpetrators either. After the crime can never be before the crime. Actions create traumas beyond guilt. A deed represents a lifelong stigmatization for everyone. The duration of a prison sentence has a moral meaning, but it does not affect the stigma.

---

**THE QUESTION** arises what can, should, or even must happen during a prison term in order to learn to live with the stigmas, or even to encourage a change in the behaviour of those imprisoned?

---

Therapeutic measures are voluntary and open-ended. Therapeutic care of prisoners by therapists who are civil servants, who have the power of the keys and whose assessments are the basis for facilitating imprisonment, release or just the opposite, is never free. Therapy within the prisons is flagellated therapy because it cannot provide one hundred percent protection for the person being cared for. Therapy can only ever be provided on a voluntary basis within a secure relationship of trust.

The project-related theatre-pedagogical acting work in prisons, which is carried out by independent project leaders, is of great importance here.

## THE PLAY

To act is to show a game, the "to-do-as-if" with the intention of entertainment, of diversion, for pleasure, without seriousness. The exception, the fantastic, the unheard-of is the norm, that which gives an audience the greatest pleasure: the sanction-free suspension of common rules and norms of behaviour - everything is possible in the game, and when it becomes possible, amazement, surprise, discovery begins.

And this experience takes place both on stage and in the auditorium - so auditioning as a communal experience becomes double joy. A performance in a hermetic system such as a prison, where an audience that would normally have no access and no points of contact is admitted from the outside, is an extraordinary event that can be of immense impact and radiance. The result is a community that can have a lasting effect beyond the duration of the performance - on both sides here as well. A successful performance is rewarded with applause and recognition - an ensemble is celebrated - these are experiences that are sometimes completely new for prisoners.

The way to get there, the work of acting, rehearsing for a play, means an intensive new experience for most. By slipping into a different role, the actor can become a different person for the moment of the performance. She/he can reinvent herself/himself and feel new. How great the inner distance to the character being portrayed is, can be a guided agreement, but also a very personal decision, which is powerful and opens up a space for the actors that they have rarely or never experienced in this form. The completely sanction less decision to enter creates a special protective space. In the intense moment of playing, prison walls no longer have any meaning. Acting generates an intensity, a condensation of life that many of the prisoners only know from outside or from the experience of violence.

This is a trait of acting that makes theatre work in prisons so extraordinarily valuable.

**IN THE INTENSE MOMENT OF PLAYING, PRISON WALLS NO LONGER HAVE ANY MEANING. THIS IS A TRAIT OF ACTING THAT MAKES THEATRE WORK IN PRISONS SO EXTRAORDINARILY VALUABLE.**

Beyond that, acting only works in cooperation. Alone there is only the one-person play, the monologue. And that too needs at least one person to watch it. The willingness to cooperate is the basic requirement for every play. Only when at least two people act together does a situation arise. The recognition of interdependence holds a great surprise for people who discover playing for the first time as adults. Status assignments can be solved and changed in a playful way, who takes which status can be changed in a flash when it comes to creating an entertaining situation. It is precisely this - the breaking of the usual rules of behaviour - that very often creates tension or entertainment value. Flexibility, freedom and dependence beyond all known patterns can be tested and practiced playfully. If my opponent does not play along, my game does not take place. It requires the cooperation of all actors, it is not only the main character who leads the scene or the play, who decides, everyone is responsible for the success of a performance. Even the smallest part can ruin a scene as well as give it the greatest brilliance.

Classical patterns of behaviour and experience are thus circumvented and counteracted. This too is usually a completely new experience for those involved.

---

**TOLERANCE, RECOGNITION** and **RESPECT** are enabled and acquired in new contexts. The same applies to conflicts, which are usually handled differently on stage than in the usual way. Everything is new territory.

---

In order that this newly experienced experience and freedom can become a lasting experience, the precise guidance and careful execution of the workshops is of utmost importance. It is quite possible that accustomed hierarchical structures can be shaken, the new experience of power/powerlessness (dependence) can be a very irritating experience. Acting is a confrontation with oneself, one's psyche, one's body, one's attitudes.

THERAPY is essentially process-oriented (following the needs of the participants) - acting and plays are essentially result-oriented (following the dramaturgy, the vision).

Acting means opening up, entrusting, letting go. In the end, every intensive acting is a deep examination of one's own personality and there are quite a few who compare acting with

therapy because acting often has a therapeutic effect. Nevertheless, this should never be the orientation when doing theatre work, not even in prisons. Because such an intention distorts the experience, prevents authenticity. Because playing can be extremely authentic if it succeeds in establishing a real shelter, a safe space of the "as-if" that generates a new reality for the moment of the play and sometimes even beyond.

## THE PROJECT

With the film project DIE RÜDEN we would like to give a concrete insight into our work.

**DIE RÜDEN** tells in feature film form about a therapeutic encounter between aggressive dogs and violent offenders under the guidance of a dog expert in a fictitious prison in an indefinite period of time.

All participants play against the background of their real horizon of experience: The dog trainer is a dog trainer instructor in real life, the therapists are or were prison therapists and theatre pedagogues, the prisoners all have real prison experience and are former violent offenders, the dogs are highly aggressive dogs - the events in front of the camera are situational documentary actions.

The fictional form was chosen in order to give the participants the opportunity to distance themselves through fictional role assignments and through the artistically abstract space. Furthermore, various surreal elements are an important part of the filmic narrative. All elements of the hybrid implementation also aim to ensure that the reception by the cinema audience is different from that of a classical entertainment format. Through its form, the film plays with common prejudices and thus undermines a simple scheme of interpretation. The aim is to bring the viewer into an individual reflection with the topic of aggression and violence.

The theatrical release of DIE RÜDEN took place on 20.08.2020. The entire project took eight years.



## THE PROCESS

SEPTEMBER 2012

Filmmaker Connie Walther meets dog trainer Nadin Matthews, whose field of work also includes dog-assisted therapy for young people with disabilities. The two women decide to develop a feature film on the male topic of aggression in humans and dogs. In her previous works, the feature film director has already realized material that had its origins in reality: in her two feature films "Wie Feuer und Flamme" and "Schattenwelt" the stories were based on the experiences of real people, the TV movie "12 heißt ich liebe Dich" was the filming of a real love relationship and in "Zappelphillip" a boy with an ADHD diagnosis played an ADHD child. Nadin Matthews, who has been working for many years in dog training with a focus on aggression, plays the main character in THE Males.

During the conception of a joint film project it becomes clear that the encounter of dangerous, human biting dogs with strangers, who are supposed to credibly embody aggressive behaviour, cannot be easily handled by actors. The dogs recognize their counterpart in fractions of seconds. By means of body language they recognize the experience and the ability to use violence - unplayable for an actor who is without these experiences.

### MARCH 2013: CONNIE WALTHER AND SABINE WINTERFELDT GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER.

Sabine Winterfeldt, actress and theatre pedagogue in the anti-whale field, has been performing theatre work for men and women in various prisons since 2003... years and has been part of numerous European projects.

During a performance of Winterfeldt's current play..." Dignity"... in the red salon of the Volksbühne Connie meets Walther Ibrahim Al Khalil. Ibrahim is 22 years old and was released only a few months ago after 6 ½ years of imprisonment. During his imprisonment he got to know acting through Sabine Winterfeldt and now wants to become an actor.

## APRIL 2014: SABINE WINTERFELDT ESTABLISHES CONTACT WITH WOLF-DIETRICH VOIGT, THE DIRECTOR OF THE WRIEZEN PRISON.

The RÜDEN team would like to conduct a workshop with aggressive dogs in the social therapy department in Wriezen. Mr. Voigt finds the experiment appealing and gives the green light for the 4-day workshop. 10 inmates will be presented there on 3 aggressive dogs and are supposed to work with them. The intention is a therapeutic one: it is about treating the aggressive dogs by "equal aggression experts" - violent offenders. The exercises that the young men do with the dogs will be instructed by Nadin Matthews and the graduate psychologist Robert Mehl, who will also play the therapist later in the film. From the experiences of these 4 seminar days, the concept for the later movie DIE RÜDEN is developed.

## 2013-2016

While the financing of the elaborate feature film is being pushed forward - a budget of around 2 million euros is needed to realize the film - Sabine Winterfeldt is looking for suitable leading actors. The cooperation with Gangway e.V., which apart from classical street social work also cares for people after their time in prison, begins. After an intensive casting phase, there are finally 10 possible actors who can be considered for the film. Four young men, all of whom have experience of violence and prison sentences behind them and who can embody different types of aggression depending on their psychological disposition, are to be selected for the film.

## OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2016

In a specially designed workshop, all ten possible actors are prepared for the shooting. Since the recidivism rate of young violent offenders is high and the timing of the shooting has not yet been finalized due to the

lengthy financing, an understudy, a backup in case the selected ones become delinquents again in the meantime, seems reasonable. In addition to learning how to act in front of a film camera, the three-month workshop, which Sabine Winterfeldt and Connie Walther are able to conduct thanks to the generous support of Gangway e.V., is about letting amateur actors meet professionally trained young actresses and actresses, with the intention that both sides can benefit from each other through an exchange of experiences and against the background of their very different biographies. Connie Walther had previously met the young actors and actresses personally in her acting workshop in Ludwigsburg.

This special encounter of young people of the same age, but with very different, sometimes diametrically opposed horizons, is a unique and very intense experience for all participants. Bringing people into play with each other who otherwise would have no points of contact in their lives is sociologically valuable against the background that vertical mobility has dramatically decreased in our society. Not only amateur and professional actors meet here, but also people with different ethnic roots and diverse religious affiliations.

In order to provide a stable and reliable framework for all participants, Winterfeldt and Walther are developing a binding canon of rules to which all participants must commit themselves, which includes not only punctuality and reliability but also equal rights and the renunciation of drugs during the rehearsal hours together.

The three-month workshop, which is, takes place once a week in the rooms of Gangway e.V. - five hours in which fifteen performers and at least two leaders talk and play together. A martial arts trainer is also part of the program - from him they learn how fine the body language expression is when the focus is clear and mindfulness is present. They meditate together. Who of the young men should play in the film and who will be backup, is openly communicated, as well as the reasons for this decision. In order to avoid tensions, those who are to be the understudy receive a small financial compensation. For the young men, who are all short of money, an incentive to stay on. For all of them, participation is completely voluntary.

The credo of complete transparency in all decision-making matters proves to be extremely valuable for the cooperation of all.

The overarching theme around which many of the workshop evenings revolve is emancipation.

## DECEMBER 2016

The shooting planned for spring 2017 is postponed because the production company cannot close the financing. Gangway e.V. proposes to develop a play out of the work and offers to co-finance it within the project "Zwischenwelten". The themes of the play are emancipation and identity.

Sabine Winterfeldt acquires further funding for the play through her association Zone 3. In the following months, Winterfeldt and Walther develop the play "Wir müssen draußen bleiben (*We have to stay apart*)" from improvisations in the workshop.

Shortly before the first performance, one of the four actors quits: he no longer wants to have anything to do with his past and does not want to participate in the play or the film.

## FEBRUARY 2017

Participation in the exhibition "Zwischenwelten" in the law faculty at Bebelplatz: there a part of the play is shown.

## APRIL 2017

The play "We have to stay outside" tells of a fictional country where young men, when they grow up, have to own a dog in order to become a full member of the community. The better the pedigree of the dogs, the more respected the man. When a stranger enters the community, he is challenged: His dog must fight against the dog of the leader of the community. The stranger's dog, an undocumented street dog, wins and kills the leader's dog.

The piece is embedded in a frame story that begins unnoticed in the auditorium. Representatives of the Identarian Movement try to blow up the play from within the audience. They are outraged that foreigners are offered a stage here, storm the stage and fight with the performers for their self-assertion, which is linked to the slogan of the Identarian Movement: "Identity is precious. The initially aggressive wrangling of the opponents turns into a choreography, so that the audience realizes that everything is part of the production. The actual piece begins. The dogs are embodied by the actors, who at first crawl around the stage on all fours, but as the play progresses, through the struggle, come into an upright position and finally emancipate themselves from their owners by becoming human.

APRIL 19-22, 2017

The play will be performed four times at the Theatre DIE PUMPE in Berlin. The auditorium holds 200 people, the play is sold out daily.

MAY 2017

The financing of the feature film project has been completed.

AUGUST TO SEPTEMBER 2017  
- SHOOTING OF DIE RÜDEN IN  
COLOGNE

**The selection of the employees:** Since the project is a voluntary therapy project (the work of Nadin Matthews has a therapeutic purpose), special attention is paid to the selection of staff. Personal suitability interviews are conducted with each employee. Questions are asked about their attitude towards aggression, drug use and their relationship with dogs. Working with extremely aggressive animals required a special safety concept, which was developed especially for this shoot by the production company Action Concept, which is predestined for these special shooting conditions due to its many years of experience in the stunt business.



During the shoot, the young men are supervised by graduate psychologist Robert Mehl and a local street-worker. Mehl was head of the criminological service of Saxony-Anhalt and a systemic therapist in the juvenile penal system.

DIE RÜDEN are getting "green", i.e. they are sustainably produced with the support of the MfG Baden-Württemberg.

## SEPTEMBER 2019 - OCTOBER 2019

The film DIE RÜDEN celebrates its premiere at the international Hofer Filmtage.

All three screenings are quickly sold out, and two additional screenings are also almost sold out. The film is talk of the town; the press response is outstanding.

The social media campaign for DIE RÜDEN is launched. The website [www.dierueden-derfilm.de](http://www.dierueden-derfilm.de) contains information and interviews about this unusual project, the Facebook page DIE RÜDEN. Der Film. Now has over 15,000 subscribers.

## MARCH 2020

Due to Corona, the theatrical release scheduled for April 2020 will be postponed. At that time, 120 cinemas throughout Germany have already booked the film.

## JULY 2020

Together with Gangway e.V., a meeting with a journalist selected by Gangway is organized to prepare the young men for contact with the press public.

## AUGUST 2020

On 20. 08. 2020 DIE RÜDEN will be released in over 120 cinemas throughout Germany.

Previous premieres in Cologne, Stuttgart, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Berlin, Leipzig and Dresden. Accompanied special screenings with audience discussions.

NOVEMBER 2020

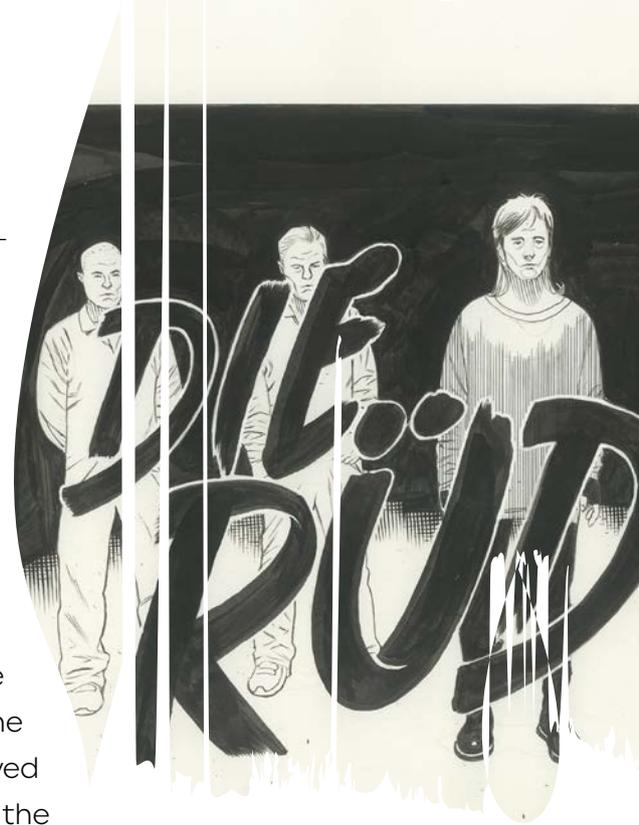
The second lockdown, which affects all cinemas, ends the theatrical exploitation of *DIE RÜDEN*.

## CONCLUSION

THE Males are, it is no exaggeration to say, a success story. The film has caused a sensation, brought the topic of aggression and violence into focus through positive reviews, and more than 13,000 viewers have seen the film in the cinema. None of the four former offenders has relapsed. One of them has now successfully completed his training at the acting school in Frankfurt/Main, another has finally received his work permit and has been able to gain a foothold in the alternative theatre sector since his release in 2013. The third has completed his training as a carpenter, worked as a stagehand in the Deutsches Theater and has meanwhile played in a crime scene. The fourth - Palestinian refugee from Lebanon - is still in toleration status, dedicates himself intensively to music and continues to be looked after by Gangway e. V.

For all those involved, *DIE RÜDEN* was an exceptional project that has had a significant influence on their lives and careers. The project gave them the opportunity to become visible, to point out grievances of their living conditions in front of interested spectators and brought them much recognition.

**BUT EVERY SUCCESS STORY** has its downsides, including *DIE RÜDEN*'s. The consistent insistence on adhering to the rules during the theatre project was a valuable approach, but it was ultimately of little use. Almost every rule was broken.





In spite of the success story, there were always difficulties, because in the work outside of prison with former criminals one is always confronted with the world from which they came and which brought them to prison. There have always been conflicts with the issues: Crossing borders, commitment, respect for women and drug use in a professional situation. Since we were under pressure to achieve results in the projects, it was very exhausting at times. Such a professional situation cannot be compared with an "educational measure". Although the young men always made a point of being taken seriously as colleagues, they found it very difficult to follow the rules of the theatre group and the film crew. This was very demanding and took up a lot of resources and time.

### OUTLOOK:

Based on their extensive experience in this eight-year project, Sabine Winterfeldt and Connie Walther developed a concept for a theatre-pedagogical workshop about the film DIE RÜDEN as an offer for inmates of German prisons. In addition to scenic work, learning improvisation techniques and a variety of body-centred exercises, the intensive seminar, which lasts several days, focuses on the exploration of action-determining beliefs (and their negation) with the goal of identifying new options for action. Unfortunately, the planned seminars in Tegel and Regis-Breitingen Prison were cancelled due to Corona.



## PERFORMING NEW LIVES

KA2 - Strategic Partnership for Adult Education 2019 -1-ES01-KA204-063966

### *Partner:*

Teatro del Norte (Spain) | Teatro Nucleo (Italy) | Üres Tér (Hungary) | Zone 3 (Germany)

### *Papers:*

Julio Rodriguez | Stefania Carnevale | Etelvino Vázquez | Horacio Czertok |  
Marco Luciano | Géza Pintér | Sabine Winterfeldt

### *Graphic design and layout:*

Caterina Martinelli • kchiocciola@gmail.com



### *Illustrations\* and cover:*

Antonio Amodio



### *Editing:*

Francesca Tisano



### *Curation:*

Veronica Ragusa e Francesca Tisano



\* The illustrations are processed from the photographic material of the workshops.









The project "PERFORMING NEW LIVES" is co-funded by the Erasmus+ program of the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of Teatro del Norte and neither the European Commission nor the Spanish Service for the Internationalization of Education (SEPIE) are responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.



Co-funded by  
the European Union