

## An outline of "Teatro degli Affetti" research-action method

*"We spent 14 years carrying out research to probe the out-of-theatre acting art potential, to invent new expressive paths, vehicles and spaces for playing with texts, direction, actors and audience, to conceive a model capable of respect both man and his creative process. In this way Teatro degli Affetti came into life, a real theoretical-methodological-technical construct where uncountable applicative possibilities of theatre originate and develop in social, therapeutic, formative, expressive and artistic fields. [\[1\]](#)".* Giulio Nava

**"Teatro degli Affetti"** is a research-action method based on Grotowski concept or Art as Vehicle. Thanks to the constant collaboration of Giulio Nava, the founder of Teatro degli Affetti (from now on called "TdA"), with a research/action repertory group, consisting of 11 professionals

and researchers, hundreds of projects have been carried out during the last ten years under the label TdA, especially in northern Italy. The intent of the group is to continuously investigate the theoretical/methodological/technical "Teatro degli Affetti" model.

The reference institution has been, from 1990 until 1999, the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore of Milan. It's three years that an autonomous centre exists in Bergamo, the Centro di Ricerca-Azione "Teatro degli Affetti" (Research -Action Centre "Teatro degli Affetti") that is an independent cultural NGO, which gathers, with the exclusive research, promotion and cultural diffusion aims, accredited professionals and experts in this area. It is also warrantor with other main cultural and social institutions.

## History

Giulio Nava, the group leader, is a researcher and educator in social theatre area, but mainly

works as analytic psychologist-psychotherapist specialised in treatment of border-line, character, psychotic, nutritional, depressive and phobic disorders. He's also the honorary judge for the Juvenile Court in Brescia.

His teathrical background includes several workshops and theatrical seminars, the most significant of which were those performed with J. Malina and the Living Theatre in 1989 and with the Teatro Tascabile of Bergamo in 1993. His first theatrical experience as group leader was in the former mental hospital of Bergamo, with the involvement of 25 patients and positive results, both social and clinical, attained for the most part of the participants.

He is working from 1986 as designer, researcher, educator in theory and technique of theatrical intervention in pedagogic, social, therapeutic and educational context; the first educational intervention took place in 1986 in favour of the (male/female) nurses of mental hospital in Bergamo; successively important initiatives took place in favour of institutionalised elderly people, medium-disabled people, seriously mental ill people, minors and young persons at deviancy risk, nursery and primary school pupils.

He has also been teaching "Psycho-social Dramaturgy" in Theatre and Performance History Course II at Post-Graduate School for Social Communications of Università Cattolica of Milano and "Group dynamic and expressive communication" at Civic School for pedagogic and social animation of Municipality of Milano. He's a senior researcher at IARD of Milano, National Institute for Social Research, for the analysis of pre-teenager conditions in Bergamo schools and from 2000 is the Director of triennial School-Workshop for specialisation in Drama/Theatretherapy of Milano.

Author of several essays concerning social, educational, therapeutic theatre, in 1998 published the book "Teatro degli Affetti", for the editor SugarCo (Milano) where theoretical, methodological, technical structures of the TdA model are best illustrated.

## The method

The methodological-theoretical framework of **Teatro degli Affetti** focuses on **three main levels** :

## ***1. Dynamic-relational level***

It concerns the affective and communicative tissue that creates during the workshop, with particular attention to the group leader-group, individuals-group, group leader-individuals, individuals-individuals relationships that establish during the "here and now" moment of the activity.

## ***2. Structural/evolutionary level***

It concerns the development stages of work group that evolves and proceeds towards a more and more complex balance between personal and collective construction, dictated by progressive independence from group leader; the essential stages of this path can be defined as follows:

### *Interactive contact stage*

The group forms and the individuals begin to concretely experience the work inner codes and the conduction method; the foundations of the expressive activity in body and verbal action integration are laid; experiences for making pre-existing group and individual relationships less rigorous start-up; the group continuously organises in sub-groups, that are variable and consist of few units;

### *Dran-Theatron stage*

Individuals start, at the beginning in sub-group then one by one, emerging both under representative and compositional profile; the group and the individual experiment the construction of representative events resulting from simultaneous and integrated interaction of the various representations processed; the possibility to stay close to one's own construction though modifying it in the contact with the other is experienced. The integration and social, relational comparison process starts up.

### *Collective construction stage*

This is the most complex and important stage of the method as a whole. Owing to specific work indications, the group is guided towards the experience of Collective Construction, which is the result of a weighed, dynamic, expressive relational balance. The latter combines the safeguard and the progressive strengthening of the representative individual modes and the intent of reaching a common, collective dramatic structure, which will be the reference point in the subsequent work stage;

### *Representation stage*

Beginning from the collective dramatic structure, a work develops guiding the groups towards a real theatrical play to be presented to an audience that would see all the participants involved even if strongly independent of the group leader;

### *Repetition stage*

It concerns the possibility that the play could be presented several times in different contexts, with absolute independence of the group leader and in total group self-management. At this point the group reaches the highest level of social and relational competence.

## **3. Expressive-creative level**

The basic structures of theatre constitute the reference points beginning from which TdA works out its hypothesis and methods, with modalities apparently original and independent of any other model. The premises on which both techniques and elaboration points are founded are theatrical, even if the purposes can be translated in social, educational, formative, and where possible, therapeutic contents. The stages, the whole path consists of, are marked by continuous compositions and representations that part of the group or individuals play in front of the group as a whole. By means of the body, the action and the representative construction, stimulated by the emotional experiences with which the individual feeds inner desires, imagines,

project abilities to be invested in the group and played in the outside, the creative process becomes the core of the action.

Besides the THREE LEVELS mentioned above, it is important to emphasise some key elements of technical and applicative kind:

**The group leader's** essential intent is to make the group and the individual reach the highest relational, compositional, expressive and representative ability, stimulating independence processes. She/He is, by definition, an "anti-director". She/he does not give aesthetic and artistic assessment and indications. She/he creates the premises in order to make the group able to conduct and analyse on its own. She/he develops leadership hypotheses without strictly carrying out them, always putting at the core of his/her work the creative encounter with the group. The path declines based on the group and the process triggered off, that can produce different reactions, time and results.

**The techniques** usable and used sweep within the most diversified theatrical fields: narration, mime, body and choreography work, voice exploration, rhythm and musicality, use of theatrical masks, objects and equipment. Everything is newly viewed and exposed according to TdA methodological principles. Exercises, narration's or dramatic plays take shape of "action compositions" always variable and adjustable and not of rigorous and 'pre-packed' exercises.

**Leadership technique for "microindications"** is essential to respect the identity and the features of the group and make it develop the mechanism of group autonomy; work indications are measured by the group leader according to the integration level of the group and the workshop process, and are fragmented in small incitements that develop according to the participants' in-action responses. Individual incitements given by the group leader are subject to adjustments and variations according to the context and the group itself, without losing path purposes and the methods guiding it. In this way a continuous and creative dialog between the actions the group leader suggests and the group responses starts up, without continuity solution.

An **Assessment Staff**, consisting of the group leader, any other collaborator and other two figures specialised in process and result analysis, analyses the performance of any workshop intervention with particular attention to dynamic-relational, structural-evolutive and expressive-creative level. Such a staff includes, accordingly, the persons responsible of the institution where the intervention takes place. At a methodological level, and for research

reasons, each intervention is videotaped and analysed by the staff itself.

The **assessment and analysis framework**, which Teatro degli Affetti envisages, originates from the need of overcoming self-referential and assessment mechanisms. Through strict and innovative analysis and experience assessment devices, the development of a series of methodological processes and several operational instruments has been possible as years went by. The analysis and assessment framework has been expressly conceived in order to allow the continuous checking of the theoretical premises of the model and the operational modes of the group leader, on one hand, and to open new experimental fields still fully evolving today, on the other.

The **permanent research group on TdA**, co-ordinated by Mr. Nava and Bergamo-based, via Longo 12, at the moment is the place where all the developments of the research in progress continuously converge. The group deals with workshop experimentation and supervision of those several interventions its members started up, applying well-established hypothesis or only theoretically discussed aspects, and starting up specific researches stimulated by the encounter with all kinds of realities.

## Target

The work developed with students coming from all kind of schools - from nursery to high school - with particular attention to disabled individuals, with elderly people, with disabled teenagers and adults, with drug-addicted people and psychically unstable persons. Targets and results are closely connected to the type of project. As a consequence, they depend not only on the use but also on the scheduled duration of the intervention and on institution needs and specific problems onset during the work. In principle, the recurring target is to allow each user, autonomously and in close connection with the group he/she belongs to and according to his/her own resources, to reach the continuous creation, composition and staging of theatrical plays. The leadership methodology aims to the development, inside the users' group, of the highest relational equivalence and symmetry in the group decision-making power management. The theatrical principle, which gave inspiration for this methodology, is that one of "COLLECTIVE CONSTRUCTION". With our work we brought this principle to the highest elaboration and application developments. Results we report are monitored by an assessment staff and by continuous videotape recordings of our work. The result of our processes is that the systemic application of our methodology changes the group interactions, both micro and macro, creating new dynamic, relational and expressive balances.

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[1] From back cover of GIULIO NAVA, "*Teatro degli affetti. Azione, costruzione e progetto dell'arte teatrale*", Edizioni Sugarco, Milano, 1998.