

## Cristina Castrillo

# Stray Dogs

If we were to set ourselves the task of considering all the questions that arise from the practice of theatre pedagogy, we would come across overwhelming uncertainties and few answers. Starting from the banal question of whether one is born an actor or one becomes one, and moving on to the incredible and diversified quantity of exercises, opportunities, techniques, methods and approaches that current and future theatre practitioners have at their disposal - all this can be used as a means to conform to a way of making theatre, emphasising or enriching it, or simply experimenting.

In recent years we have seen the possibilities offered within this field multiply. It is as easy to access a classical training - which allows the performer to move in between theatre and television - as it is to have access to the numerous other proposals in vogue for their exoticism and idiosyncrasy, whether or not this training is supported by tested practice. Within this "globalisation" that seems to offer an increased level of participation and knowledge, it is not easy to ascertain for oneself that which is decisive and important for one's own evolution. The market for theatre schooling and pedagogical approaches is confirmed by the professional curriculum of actors of all ages and origin. The references include a variety of techniques: from the Actors' Studio to Kathakali, from contemporary dance to Gestalt, from transcendental meditation applied to improvisation to shaman ritual as a means of expression. It seems to be a general belief that the greater is the experienced quantity and extent of information, the greater will be the richness of creative possibilities.

I do not intend to question this common mechanism or argue whether this belief is right or wrong in order to reach the goal of exercising the craft. Undoubtedly I come from a different path, working my way forward both with intuition and disappointments, recognising my personal needs alone and then sharing this recognition with others. So, I can only talk about aspects of my own perplexities and preoccupations.

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origins. Many of them had gone through contrasting experiences like the ones previously mentioned. With all of these actors I felt their longing to go beyond the acquisition of specific techniques towards a sense of belonging and a feeling of being welcomed into something. As a pedagogue, I affectionately define this as the syndrome of "stray dogs" - going from one place to another, from one direction to another, from one pack leader to another. It is like moving along in an eternal journey knowing that sooner or later we will feel that we have arrived.

Although I come from a different schooling, this "stray" life allows me to find several points of contact with the people who come to me to learn. My impression is that beneath this continual and disciplined search for new and different skills lies not only the quest for tools belonging to a craft, but also the belief that through this particular craft it is possible to gain a greater understanding of who we are. Probably these statements - difficult to demonstrate - are central in a quest to locate the biggest uncertainties and my most tenacious needs.

Even if we consider it possible that this need is the final truth of all learning processes, the premise and intention of an approach to apprenticeship has to make use of other parameters and points of view. An efficient technique and the development of certain skills and talents are important for this different approach, but most of all it is the wish for a parallel or underground force which should lead to a way of discovering and knowing oneself.

Besides the selected characteristics particular to group theatre, theatre in general has in itself a gregarious nature and a tendency towards sharing. This is true for productions as well as apprenticeship. So in both cases, often the care and focus on the single individual is lost. Generally in this field the acquisition and the presentation of a technique appears in the

form of different photocopies of a method. So we come across more or less effective standard codes, which seem to have a vague and approximate memory of the matrix from which they originated.

Although particularly identifying with different past and present approaches to theatre research and so with new structures of transmission, it is surprising to register how certain forms, terminology and results, are as stereotyped as many of the products of that "traditional" theatre from which we wanted to disconnect. I would like to believe that there can be a way in which the content of what is passed on does not become the tight fitting clothes of a form that - perhaps unwittingly - always imitates the original.

I do not think that these considerations should change the way of looking at the subject that one is trying to transmit, but they should open up a different perspective concerning the need for "results". It may be that the "true results" are not found just through the ability to accomplish an exercise or the embodiment of whatever technique, but rather by the capacity - by means of a particular pedagogy - to search for clarity in terms of "who we are". This is an essential step in the direction of later finding the itinerary in which one recognises oneself, the above-mentioned sense of belonging.

Probably it is these observations that have slowly induced me to modify, if not the content of my pedagogical proposals, at least my general point of view and also the primordial intentions in the act of "teaching" or transmitting. In fact this position prompts me to "not teach", but rather to build a path where apprenticeship and the eventual aim is not only the conveying of one's own theatrical point of view, but the creation of an environment where questions concerning ourselves and our craft can be asked.

In the same way as the word "theatre" can no longer alone define its meaning, and the

word "actor" does not stand for a typology or clearly decipherable profession, the word "pedagogy" vacillates in this general confusion. Also we should not forget that it is possible that the first impulse to "pass on" an experience is given by the need to confirm and test personal beliefs.

Of course I know that these approximations cannot give an answer to the problems laid out. But I also know that a process of apprenticeship would be limited if it did not envisage the individualisation of creativity and the discovery of a language that is not a systematic repetition of rules, but only a frame for one's own personal universe.

Finally I believe that theatre pedagogy can only "escort" an individual in the discovery of what s/he has and of what s/he is.

It is a way in which to meet up with the possible revelation of that tangle of limbs, joints, heart and mystery that we are.

Translated from Italian by Aurora Taminelli

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