

A Diverse Beauty: *Amore*, by Pippo Delbono

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Abstract: To consider something or someone different is to discriminate. Objectively, this term has no moral connotation. You take a category and relate to it by choosing different references. Pippo Delbono manages to synthesize the beauty inside the difference; an intense, painful, even tough beauty. For him, contrast is not a method, but an acceptance of identity: marginalization as an existential condition. He places himself in both seats: in the audience – and *inside the show*. Spectator and actor, director, he changes the perspectives because he embraces them all, thus indicating that each of our roles is interchangeable. We can always be *the other* or *different* for someone, a group, a context, and the list could go on. One of the central images of *Amore* performance this year, at the International Theatre Festival in Sibiu, is a heartbreaking *Pietà* illustration.

Keywords: Pippo Delbono; beauty; the Other.

“Belief and the power to worship – that is what we lack”¹

To find something or someone different involves a certain discrimination. Objectively regarded, this term does not have a moral connotation. You take a category and you relate to it, choosing something else. Pippo Delbono manages to integrate the beauty of difference: an intense, painful and even harsh beauty. For him, the contrast is not a procedure, but an assumption of identity: marginality and diversity as an existential condition.

He adopts both positions: close to the public – and *in* the performance. A spectator and an actor, a director, he changes perspectives because he assumes all of them, thus showing us that the roles played by each and every one of us are interchangeable. We can always be the *other* or *different* to someone, to a group, a context, and the list goes on. His only request and

¹ Edward Gordon Craig, *Croyances et faux-semblants*, in *Le théâtre en marche*, “Pratique du théâtre”, Paris, Gallimard, 1964, p. 111, in Monique Borie, *Corp de piatră, corp de carne. Sculptură și teatru* [Body of stone, body of flesh. Sculpture and theatre], București, Editura Nemira, 2019, p. 17 (translated after Craig, E. G., *Belief and Make-Believe*, “The Theatre – Advancing”, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1919, p. 55).

expectation from the other (the public, meaning each person from the public) – is to be listened to. He addresses the public, by saying: Good evening. Silence. Once again, a bit more emphatic: Good evening! Good evening, a few voices answer more clearly. I am here, I am talking to you, I am watching you, this isn't theatre, it isn't a performance, this is about us. Us who?

One of the central images of the *Amore* performance, staged this year on the occasion of the Sibiu International Theatre Festival, is a poignant Pietà. An Angolan singer, Aline Frazão, embraces Gianluca Ballarè, an actor from Pippo Delbono's troupe suffering from Down syndrome, as if he were her own child. A human-child. Another man, the other. She accepted him as he was. He is us, each of us with our immense need: the need of every one of us and of the whole pained humanity, to be "accepted", caressed, touched, embraced in the suffering of existence. The bare fingers of the singer and the lace of the traditional bride's dress touch the naked skin of the human, in an act of utmost vulnerability. It is like a cry, hard to endure, which Pippo Delbono transmits to the spectators, to the whole world.

The artist chose a common topic: love and a universal language – the love song – to chant and ease his own different and unique suffering. Fado is a music of the other, not his, not ours – and yet it contains a universal cry of sensuality, melancholy, dolour and wistfulness.

The same as some physical deficiencies – love, suffering stigmatize. Thus, each one of us becomes the other at a certain point. Us who? The public answered in the end, when they all acclaimed as one. Different people with different experiences reacted, touched by the inspiration of music and the archetypal situations, and also by the apparently naïve honesty with which the director told the story.

Pippo Delbono confesses, in a performance which is a sort of a human poem-installation: AMORE. In exchange, he asks for empathy as a natural, essential, human aspect. The performance seeks to remake, in a desperate attempt, the profile of the perished Other – out of love and life. The Other is the *different* one, because of deficiency, gender or illness; it is also *the other* from a couple, who suddenly stands out, without "asking for permission", forgetting to have been part of a whole. The director amplifies the image of suffering by exposing the suffering of other individualities.

The aching beauty is what Pippo Delbono shares with us through this performance. Embrace and crucifixion – or the other way around. The wound is beautiful, for it is human. The innocent wound, I would say. Hurt by his journey throughout this world, the artist exposes his wounds so as to heal them. The performance of the innocence of bodies.

Recent research in the field of psychobiology has begun to question the immateriality of the soul, without denying its existence (surpassing, thus,

materialism or, on the contrary, spiritualism). Biology, closely regarded, proves to have features which we commonly attribute to the immaterial soul: desire of freedom, volatility, unpredictability². I had this strong feeling of the soul manifesting through the body during Pippo Belbono's performance, *Amore*, in which the body is material and the voice is also material. The voice affluent in an assumed pathos, with a timber like a thick felt: "Il tuo corpo, amato e perduto..." / "Your body, loved and lost..." holds the stage and the auditorium together all throughout the performance.

Beauty is not always, but *every time*. Beauty regarded neither like an object, nor like a moral category, but from the perspective of the personal response to existence. The place where difference is the most manifest is the body: the agile body as a spiritual glyph of the actress Dolly Albertin, the continued, tireless motion of Grazia Spinella, dancing in a corner with her own solitude, fixed in a cone of light, as if her arms did not have joints.

The actors form sculptures of flesh³, in *ronde-bosse*, with the air moving around them. Lack, happiness, pain, wistfulness – manifest through the body. Thus, we feel more directly and more intensely the suffering of the other. And it is good that we feel the pain, for it is not different, it is ours. It seems as if it wants to read, with a sort of optimism, Pippo Delbono's performance. And not only because we project ourselves, through our passions, in what we see on the stage. It is also because we are truly hurt to see the woman, laid on a chair, motionless, like a pagan sphynx, with large, saggy breasts, while the men, grouped in a line, pass, hanging a string of evergrowing, oversized beads around her neck. And this moves you to tears. The burden of love. You cannot resist thinking about the biblical words: "her many sins have been forgiven; hence, she has shown great love." (Luke, 7, 47).

The second statuary group which remains in my memory, as an effigy, is the one about which I talked at the beginning of these lines. That poignant Pietà. And the bare fingers of the singer on the naked back of the vulnerable one, abandoned in the embracing; and his arm around her neck. It is not the perfect ones who need easing. But who belongs to this category?

And, in the end, another body, the one of the director-actor, who rises from his place amongst us and goes to unite himself (and us, together with him) – with his own story. His vertical body transforms into a horizontal body; the stage is united with the auditorium. The artist and the man lies at the root of the tree, a tribute to the hope that he who is gone shall return. He changes places with the one who has gone and is regretted, and is

² Pier Vincenzo Piazza, *Homo biologicus. Cum explică biologia natura umană* [*Homo biologicus. How biology explains human nature*], București, Editura Humanitas, 2022.

³ Monique Borie, *op. cit.*

accompanied by a singing body (that of Pedro Jòia, the composer and guitar player) – who now takes the place of the director.

Every ritual has its own music. The crying of love is accompanied by fado⁴ music, which means destiny or fate, from the Latin *fatum*. Indeed, when you listen to fado music and, in this performance, to the affecting voice of Miguel Ramos, the impression is that the soul has a body. And if it were to “break”, it would break at the same time, the soul and the body together. Pippo Delbono has chosen the most “material” of music.

The Nobel Prize winner, the Chinese writer Gao Xingjian, has spoken of a cultural revolution that only the independent ones, in a freedom of spirit, could accomplish. “The current artistic and literary renaissance can only hope for the awakening of independent writers and artists. Only those particular cases of authentic writers and artists, uncompromising in their autonomy, lacking taboos, can offer a profound understanding, through their refined and acute exposure, and the works that they leave behind become live testimonies of the human life and nature, much more real and durable than the history written by the political power.”⁵ It is also the case of Pippo Delbono, who carries out his own revolution (along with a group of followers), although he himself claims that he is not a revolutionist, even if he seems to be one in the context of a world which has fallen into commonplace and of an art which has grown old: “Theatre has become commonplace. The world has become commonplace. (...) I am not a revolutionist. But art has grown significantly old. (...) I simply look like a revolutionist in the context in which art appears to be old” said Delbono on the occasion of a conference within the Sibiu International Theatre Festival, cited by Monica Andronescu⁶.

In Pippo Delbono’s art, through the presence of *different* bodies, reality corrects theatre and becomes a vehicle through which the animate reaches us by the means of the truth. The truth, because difference is a natural state of living matter. Only we, because of our egocentrism, believe that difference makes us special. The truth is that, from the cells of our body to all species, everything is different. “A lung, a heart, a liver and a brain are more different from one another than a man from a mouse. (...) The only thing that draws a heart closer to a lung is the fact that we have both. Otherwise, we could think that they come from very distant galaxies. (...) And yet, all organs and cells

⁴ In 2011, the Portuguese music genre *Fado* entered the list of the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

⁵ Gao Xingjian, *Literatură și libertate* [Literature and freedom], Iași, Editura Muzeelor Literare, 2017, p. 37 [our translation].

⁶ Monica Andronescu, *O mare roșie. Iubire. Pippo Delbono* [A Red Sea. Love. Pippo Delbono], retrieved from <https://artitudini.ro/o-mare-rosie-iubire-pippo-delbono> [our translation].

in our body carry the exact same genes”⁷, as the neurobiologist and psychiatrist Pier Vincenzo Piazza asserts. Therefore, difference is the rule instead of the exception. To learn of this scientific truth is shocking and amazing. As it awakens the spirit, “certainty determines ageing, and the research spirit (...) keeps us alive, preserves us as artists, as public, as animate beings”⁸.

After all, the search for beauty is “the most difficult subject” for the artist and man who thinks, as the sociologist, writer and philosopher Henry-Pierre Jeudy mentions in his book about the body in art: “The most elevated subject in art for the contemplating man is man, or only his exterior, and the artist has as many difficulties in exploring the exterior of man as the sage has in exploring the interior. And the most difficult subject is beauty, as paradoxical as it may seem. But beauty, in fact, is not subjected to number and measurement.”⁹ To assert this fact on the stage requires courage. A courage which Pippo Delbono assumes: “I seek beauty. As Dante said, it takes courage to discover the beauty of the truth. When you talk about yourself, you talk about the whole world.”¹⁰

The encounter with what is different reawakens spirituality and, perhaps, a more animate life.

(Translated by Andi Sîsiac)

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⁷ Pier Vincenzo Piazza, *op. cit.*, p. 49 [our translation].

⁸ Pippo Delbono, retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gh8jn9odzX8&t=43s>, [our translation].

⁹ Joachim Winckelman, *Erinnerung uber die Betrachtung der alten Kunst*, in Henry-Pierre Jeudy, *Corpul ca obiect de artă*, București, Editura Eurosong & Book, 1998, p. 28 [our translation].

¹⁰ Silvia Năstase, *Căutătorul de frumusețe – Pippo Delbono*, retrieved from <https://yorick.ro/cautatorul-de-frumusete-pippo-delbono/>, “YORICK.ro”, nr. 220, 24.06.2014 [our translation].

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