

From 23rd to 26th April 2015
IETM Spring Plenary Meeting
Bergamo

Renaissance of creation

April 24th - 25th, 2015

Moderators: Caspar Nieuwenhuis (Netherlands)
Carlotta Garlanda (Italy)

Speakers:

Ingrid Vranken – Production Coordinator, SPIN (Belgium) www.spinspin.be/

SPIN is an artist-run support and research platform initiated by the Brussels-based artists - Hans Bryssinck, Diederik Peeters and Kate McIntosh. SPIN are artists huddling together to share overhead expenses and 'mutualise' practical needs for the creation of their work.

Marko Bratus – Artistic Director, Gledalisce Glej (Slovenia) www.glej.si/

Theatre Glej, founded in 1970, was the first experimental theatre within the Balkan region; nowadays it has lost the prefix Experimental, but its purpose is to search and fill the gaps in the Slovenian theatre environment. It is dedicated to emerging artists.

Filippo Andreatta – artist, Centrale Fies (Italy) www.centralefies.it/

Centrale Fies is a center for the creation and production of contemporary art including performing art, exhibitions, site specific art, video and any form of live performance , as well as events such as festivals, exposition and shows. It's situated in an isolated area in the Trentino Region.

Franco D'ippolito – Cultural Consultant, Regione Puglia (Italy)

In 2015 Italian residences have been recognised by MIBACT (Italian Ministry of Culture) and Regions. This is a great result in the Italian cultural panorama, involving Tuscany, Puglia, Emilia Romagna, Lombardia regions.

Paolo Giorgio – Responsible of International Projects, Scuola Civica Paolo Grassi (Italy) www.fondazionemilano.eu/

The school offers curricula for all the main professions in the field of drama. Over the years, the school has set up a number of important joint projects with leading European drama and pedagogical institutions.

Motus – artist - www.motusonline.com/

Motus Theatre Company was founded in 1991 by Enrico Casagrande and Daniela Nicolò. The company creates its own projects acting and reacting to the facts of everyday life, feeding on the contradictions of contemporaneity, translating and transforming them into powerful sources of reflection and provocation. Their work has acquired a relevant national and international reputation.

Eugenia Tzirtzilaki – independent artist - <http://libbysacer.blogspot.gr/>

As director and writer she develops her artistic work in US, in Europe and abroad without any support, just her work. She has presented her work in theaters, as well as in found and public spaces in a site-specific or site-adaptive manner. She's also created live art works, where actors and visual artists collaborate. She is a founding member of the art group Libby Sacer Foundation, which has created and curated so far 14 interdisciplinary events in collaboration with more than 70 artists of various disciplines and theorists, from Greece and abroad.

Wouter Goedheer – Stichting Nieuwe Helden producer and financial manager <http://stichtingnieuwehelden.nl/>

He produces many different projects (theater performances, concerts, festivals and tours) and he is very interested by art projects and urban actions in the public space; at Stichting Nieuwe Helden they are driven by the need to turn the public space into a place of encounter once again.

The Renaissance took artists out of the artisan guilds and opened the way for them to become creatives and even superstars, many of them supported by their private Maecenas. We now face a reality in which there's less and less room for publicly funded creation/ experiment/ failure and the status and income of the artist is in decay: should we have a look at what went wrong and what's to learn from the period before we entered the process of individualisation and emancipation? The aim of both sessions is to develop some reflections and thinking about this new era of transition. The output would be the identification of new perspectives and generating some food for a deeper reflection on future artistic creation.

Looking back in History, we recognise an important period of transition between the Middle Age and Renaissance. At that time, artists came out of the artisan guilds to become individual artists, often "superstars" supported by Maecenas.

Which are the peculiarities of that eras and what do we recognize nowadays?

The scheme summaries the peculiarities of both periods:¹

Guilds	Renaissance
Cooperation – artists work collaboratively	Individualism – artists are independent and self-reliant in their work
Concentration on depth - increasing craftsmanship and specialism	Concentration on growth / development – focus on increasing competences
Local / community – artists work in their area	Global / super-urban – artists travel in different cities
Artisan skills – developed through a long apprenticeship	Artistic signature – they create their brand

We are assisting at the emerging of a New Renaissance, mixing and combining features from the two eras, focusing at the same time on collaboration and on preserving individualism in the artistic work individual artists.

How do contemporary production houses operate? What are their good practices? How do they work with artists?

The speakers of the session provided practical examples from different countries and situations that show a multifaceted situation in Europe:

¹ See also: Ernst Gombrich. *The Story of Art* (1950). London: Phaidon, 1995¹⁶; Oscar Brockett and Franklin Hildy. *History of the Theatre*. Boston: Pearson, c2008¹⁰

- Production houses are places of experimentation, their role is to push young emerging artists to be more visible, to do what they want, to express their freedom, to experiment. In most of the cases this experience tells us that this experimentation will be then institutionalised.

In the example of **Gledalisce Glej**, individualism and artistic signature are two peculiarities, while there is less focus on artisan skills: young artists are too “pro”, while missing some artisan competences.

Production houses use open calls to pick the best projects from young artists: budget is tight, but it's used to give the possibility to artists to do what they want. “*We lose money wisely*” says Marko Bratus.

- Residences offer artists a precious resource - time, as well as the possibility to work without commitment. Residences are places to focus on creation, without aiming at a concrete output, for instance, a première. Isolation and concentration in a residence place like **Centrale Fies** are best conditions for artists to work.
- **SPIN** in Belgium is an example of cooperative autonomy: each artist protects its individuality, but the business part (administration and management) is run in cooperation. Instead of the hierarchy system of guilds, horizontal structures are in place and the individual artistic signatures are preserved. The mutualisation and cooperation at the business level are considered a political choice: it's a way to be drivers and not just passive users, to be *resilient*.
- **Italian residences** have just been recognised at a national level. Institution doesn't reflect artists' reality, which is always on the move, in progress. This is a great change, residences will be supported by the Italian Ministry of Culture in cooperation with Regions (at the moment Lombardia, Puglia, Toscana, Emilia Romagna). There are two types of residences: ones whose focus is on the activity of the artist; ones whose focus is on the community, where artists live and work.

What will this special agreement at a national level produce in the future? According to Franco D'Ippolito, Italy is getting a cultural sector where where big institutions and a widespread system of best practices linked to local communities work together.

At some point, both parts will be strong enough to support each other and to co-exist. Artist is a key figure, is at the centre. The artist, in its development process, is supported from the very beginning till the moment when he is ready to jump in the institutionalised world.

The work to do is to create and build relationships between artists and Institutions: there is a big lack of trust, there is a suspicious attitude to each other.

- What happens in arts schools? A new era is arising, young artists – such as the ones of Scuola civica “Paolo Grassi” – cooperate and share organizational elements and collect energies to invent a job to be later developed beyond academies.

Schools and academies have to follow the changes; students are changing, they have new

needs and they have to be supported and guided in a more efficient way².

During the session the gap between the field of big, institutionalized companies, theaters and festivals on the one hand, and the saturated field of independent artists arose. What is happening with the middle field? For example: in The Netherlands it will be an issue in the upcoming policies for the next four years: the mid-career artist and mid-sized companies. Are we thus creating new institutions? This is a big risk, in some countries there is a saturated market, there are too many independent artists and the focus is on big institutions and young artists. What's in between? This is a gap that has to be solved.

Artists point of view as well as a reflection on big institution and festivals has been at the centre of the second session.

The first presentation came from Enrico Casagrande and Daniela Nicolò, known as Motus, an independent theatre company, based in Italy. They work in residences, in squats, in "teatri occupati" (occupied theatres), and they work abroad in more institutionalized places.

They struggle to introduce themselves with the name Motus and not with their individuality.

During the last years, festivals have become the best spaces for creating and performing, since many directors are dealing with the organization of hybrid cultural events.

In their last years experience, the most living places to create and perform are festivals, whose directors are creating more hybrid cultural events. Festivals are places for innovation, sharing, gathering. They are community based, there is a local and an international community living together. It's a reaction to blackbox theatre and they represent a way to get out of theaters.

Moreover, festival have easygoing structures compared to National theatres structures. Edimburg Festival is a great example, it became it's own creation.

Festivals have the possibility to push new productions and the creation of new independent festivals.

On the other side, festival cannot provide distribution in theatres for new productions: the situation is the same in Italy and in Europe, it's hard for new productions to tour.

During the session two main types of festivals have been defined: old fashion festivals and new festivals, where there is a frame and the director's idea arise from that.

The question that arises from Motus' hints and that is shared with the participants is if we are facing a distribution problem or an artistic problem; certainly there is a difference in production costs between a theatre and a festival. How can it be solved?

Eugenia Tzirtzilaki talks about the example of Greece: a new relationship between artists, audience, spaces and alternatives economies support the cultural life. There are

² See: Bernie Trilling and Charles Fadel. *21st century skills : learning for life in our times*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, c2009; Stephanie Bell. "Project-Based Learning for the 21st Century: Skills for the Future." *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas* LXXXIII.2 (2010): 39-43. Web. 28 May 2015. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/00098650903505415#.Vb33Jfm1fn8_>. ; James Bellanca, Ron Brandt (eds.) *21st century skills : rethinking how students learn*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press, c2010.

residencies projects, maybe in a geographically central position, where artists take care of the place, paying bills as electricity, gas, phones and other expenses. Some other spaces are occupied and shows take place there. Some non-traditional spaces, as people's apartments or public spaces are also used to present performances and shows. Shows take place also in traditional theaters but without paying a ticket entrance: the audience pays what they can in a box or there is a hat at the end of the show. Of course normality is still there - there are many theaters -Athens has more than 150, more than London actually - and most of them work traditionally with a normal ticket.

She also focuses on features of artists in the Middle Age that start to vanish after the Renaissance: the institution of apprenticeship and the relationship between artistic skill and the artist's signature. In our new era, as the arts and humanities get systematically downsized all over the western world, apprenticeships and art collectives become relevant again. Great artistic skills and a famous signature are not necessary related, but not opposed features either. The difference that now starts emerging - not only in Greece - has more to do with a new, yet familiar, value system of both artists and audience. The educational patterns and production methods of art are changing and so does the audience's perception of art.

Wouter Goedheer sees in the new era the figure of the super opportunistic artist, taking advantage of all possibilities to develop his art and his projects and focusing also on commercial elements in his work.

Two main differences emerge between the Renaissance and the New Renaissance:

- Renaissance was characterized by an ecosystem among artists, Maecenas and new opportunities: ideas were spreading around at the same time in different places, in different shapes.
- Renaissance arose when art and culture became important also from a political perspective, when it became useful to powerful people in order to reach various purposes.

Nowadays, the importance of art and culture is not a shared knowledge between different elements and we are facing a very fragmented period during which ideas are not spreading around at the same time.

To replace individuality, collaborations among artists and among institutions are not enough. Other structures could probably help to overcome this gap. For instance, festivals are more flexible, since they can be organized in different places at the same time.

National Theatres are also going in this direction, artistic directors exploit a concept with shows in different moments and places. On the other side, this could be a problem for the artists because their projects are not guaranteed with the usual degree of continuity.

At any rate, old and rigid structures do not seem to work properly anymore. Festivals represent a moment for talking, for debates and exchange. Festivals are fluids, they are a stimulating moment as they also connect to other sectors, not just performing arts sectors, they are more open.

In conclusion, during the session we talk about this new era of transition and the need to find a way to help the dialogue. The New Renaissance is about talking together and sharing experiences and knowledge.