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IN PRAISE OF DIVERGENCE

We have tried to build up this new Icaro issue around the theme of "divergence", with the idea that the divergent nature of childhood and adolescence should be preserved. A virtuous society cannot leave respect for rules beyond consideration but, at the same time, it cannot give up on divergent people that may be able to change them or, at least, inspire us, to improve these rules. It seems right to denounce the use of charisma to shape silent and tamed audiences, but while facing the daily struggle trying to keep our roles, it can sometimes happen that in one and the same way we condemn this. In applauding divergence, without first taking responsibility of our accordance and of our conformism, would taste like preaching without practicing.

We welcome divergence because we like it, because divergent people move us, they literally win over us, but also because this kind of attitude that the gloomy charm of misunderstood heroes brings, is also "a given" on our being their antagonists from time to time.

Without absolving ourselves too much, we tried to outline some divergence models in order to keep an open reflection on the destination that our path would like to have, on our favorite divergent subjects, children, especially those ones whose mind-set is systematically planed by grown-ups' grammar. With this issue we want to say "thank you" to all the Masters who have been able to listen to children's and young people's divergence and to all the ones that, silently and without resonance, keep doing it.

translation by Sara Branchini

Editorial staff

Icaro editorial staff is made by a group of supporting members (both employees and not) of La Baracca - Testoni Ragazzi: some of them, like **Roberto Frabetti**, author, actor, director and administrator, are "old ones" and some of them are younger but just as passionate, like **Antonella Dalla Rosa**, actress and international-projects coordinator, **Enrico Montalbani**, actor, author and cartoonist, and **Francesca Nerattini**, graphic designer, in charge of promotion activities and editorial projects; three others are brand new contributors, loyal playgoers of the theatre like **Dario Canè**, hairdresser and dramatist, **Gianluca D'Errico**, teacher, and **Beatrice Vitali**, pedagogist of the Gualandi Foundation. Different experiences and perspectives that cross each others to give birth to visions and thoughts that go around childhood and adolescence.

For the english version: translations by Sara Branchini, Letizia Olivieri, Anna Sacchetti, with thanks to Jo Belloli for editorial support



OPEN LETTER TO “DIVERGENT” PARENTS

Or rather “school is not a cream puff”

by Gianluca D’Errico

Dear parents,

these are very peculiar weeks for those who have a daughter or a son: in a few days time we reach the deadline for admission to schools for the next year (this letter was written in February, editor’s note). For those who are joining a new school in September, nursery/kindergarten, primary school or junior high, it’s time for big decisions: which school should I apply for? I am going to reveal my intentions right away: this letter is an advertisement. Because I would like to persuade you or at least influence you.

Having been a teacher for a while, every year, just before the deadline of this fateful application form, many friends and acquaintances would contact me. “My son is going to attend primary school in September but I really do not like the school that’s close to my house...” or “Public-funded school is in such a bad state! Is it true that they do not even have toilet paper?” and again, the well-informed ones claim: “Schools in my neighbourhood do not even have a shadow of a pedagogical plan”! And, the less hypocritical ones: “Too many foreign people” (by the way, and just for a laugh): the last person who complained about too many foreigners in public schools did not have an Italian passport). And finally, the frank ones: “Cut the talk and tell me the truth: would you send *your* daughter in there”? In the end, everybody makes his choice. For the best: who does not want the best for his daughter or son? And then there is a smaller but increasingly more consistent contingent (according to my partial information) that just “flees”. They run away from public schools, for example: home-schooling experiences, parent-managed schools, Steinerian schools or just public institutes that “have a computer for every child”! Some parents, even choosing public school, decide to run in another neighborhood in town: “There is this school that has good teachers, is a little bit far from my house but you know, our neighborhood is somehow... neglected, and we will make a little sacrifice to take him there”. And yet, who does not make sacrifices for his son?

Given that I do not dare tell any of these acquaintances, with a phone call, that I do not share their “evasive choices”, I publicly do it now with this letter.

A WORKSHOP’S DIARY, 30 years of theatre in the schools of Medicina

The photos illustrating this issue belong to the exhibition “A WORKSHOP’S DIARY, 30 years of theatre in the schools of Medicina”, set up by La Baracca - Testoni Ragazzi, the Department of Culture of Medicina, and the Istituto Scolastico Comprensivo of Medicina in November 2014. A photo exhibition for celebrating thirty years of theatrical workshops led by La Baracca - Testoni Ragazzi in the schools of Medicina. A long-lasting experience that has involved thousands of young people and that is a testimony of a strong bond with the territory. In fact, since school year 1983/1984, the Municipality and the Istituto Scolastico Comprensivo of Medicina have been promoting theatre education, allowing for the workshop project to keep going until today. A project that, through the years, involved 469 secondary school and 138 primary school classes.

The photos collected in the exhibition describe the experience of the theatrical workshop, year after year. A big collage of moments captured during the final performances of the various classes, a selection of images that can transmit the intensity of this unique experience.

For the years between 1986 and 2003, photos by Prof. Totti; from 2005 on, photos by Antonella Dalla Rosa (La Baracca - Testoni Ragazzi).

Let me try to argue this.

First of all, this exhausting search for the “in you own image and in your own likeness” school, the school that best fits the family education style, it’s the exact opposite of participation. It smells like supermarket, like a shopping trolley: in this case, the product to be “eaten” is the school. “Looking for what suits my taste best is the most obvious behaviour, right”? Right, if it was not that the school is neither a cream puff nor a sandwich. And also it is even not a book to read and a movie to watch. Parents and kids are not – or rather should not be – either customers or “users”, as many like to say in these plastic years. School is, first of all, a community, and parents do not go there to buy some knowledge for their kids: they are an integral part of it and learning is more or less effective depending on their behaviour.

Here comes my first piece of advice: parents please participate!

Go to class meetings, present a speech, try to talk with the other school stakeholders, get them to elect you as a representative. In other words: no blank mandates. Even the worst school (and this article shall not hide the thousands of problems and, from time to time, incapability of public schools) has substantial room for improvement. Everybody does his job but everyone cooperates as well.

Your children are looking at you: and they will see parents that, in a context that may turn out to be hard, choose to put themselves on the line and not to go somewhere else. This will influence their education, as much as the relationship with an enlightened teacher.

Second piece of advice: please do not leave us alone.

Public schools have teachers – few of them, many, it does not matter – who try to change, to resist this hideous drift that makes the meeting between adults, children and adolescents lose its sense. If sharper parents, the ones who “question themselves about it”, run away and build their rafts elsewhere to save themselves alone, then these teachers’ fight gets more and more isolated and is bound to be defeated.

Third piece of advice: after you brought your children to the world, please put them *into* it.

Some alternative schools have enviable educational approaches and pedagogical projects that teachers who work in public schools really wish to have, but this does not save those schools to be a space for just the happy few. Few and equals. I am not talking only about rich ones (for private schools). I am also talking about cultural backgrounds, lifestyles, sometimes religions. Running away from your neighborhood’s public school has a double effect: you put your son under a bell jar (and he or she will see, listen to, play and fight only with people “like himself”) and at the same time you take a part in conforming the neighborhood’s school where only some kinds of child and families are left. Actually endorsing the idea that there are premiere league- and bush league-neighborhoods, “good” schools and schools “for all”, where “for all” gets a derogatory meaning.

I am done with the advertising, let’s get started.

translation by Sara Branchini



NOTES IN FRONT OF A DISH OF BROCCOLI

by *Beatrice Vitali*

I was in Berlin and I was sitting at a table in a restaurant. I guessed I was going to eat a peculiar meal, if for no other reason than it was a vegan restaurant, but I would have never believed that in a short while, following a tiny cherry that was actually red cabbage jelly, they were going to serve me the perfect culinary synthesis of the educational thinking that thrills me.

I was arguing about the urgency to rethink education practices on early years (I deal with 0-6 years old range) and to look for new work patterns, not because of some extravagant habits but in order to answer a matter of social urgency, which, according to me, we have to face. What kind of answers do we have towards today's social complexity? And more specifically, how should we consider the differences that involve any of us? Towards what kind of future, heading which society? Huge issues that need to find real and simple answers, that may be applicable in different contexts,

starting from the commitment of the ones who daily live them.

I spent that day in a kindergarten, among children who played in the different school's areas with great simplicity. Those kids had the freedom to move from space to space, to stay inside or outdoor, following their own times, in complete autonomy, free to choose their own games and to allow time for their curiosity. A complex project, that was borne from deep and constant thinking, one of whose long-term aims is to make children self aware, capable to carry on their own ideas; to raise "troublesome" kids who, once they get to primary school, are not only ready to stay still and listen but who are also capable of asking questions. A brave way to rethink the future.

And then, on a nice white dish, here they serve me broccoli.

It was a whole broccoli, with stem and leaves. Every part of the same vegetable was cooked in a different way. The big leaves were crunchy thin veils; the whole baked stem was solid and compact; the flower, that I guess was pan-fried, just kept its softness. All of it in a single dish.

Can we embrace different answers to the same questions? Do we offer variety? Are we able to look at the same context from different points of view?

In our schools we often demand one only answer. We demand that tasks are completed in a given time or that things happen because we have planned it. As a result, we have some management issues, more "troublesome" kids that we define so because they do not show interest in anything. Don't they? Did we observe them in their spontaneous playing and did we play with them? Is it really possible that children from 2 to 6 years old show no interest in anything?

I think we have to reverse this question: why should all the kids show interest in what we have thought for them in that specific time? Taking no part is also licit. It's the adult, then, the one who has to ask himself what is not working in his proposal and what are children really asking for.

In other words: how were broccoli served to them? Did they recognise the leaf or had they just seen it as an inadequate answer? Why? In this path there's no waiter nor client, but a more fluid logic, that is for sure more demanding and that feeds itself with divergent thinking, in other words this ability to see different answers to the same question and keep them all together in a single bowl.

translation by Sara Branchini



PROMETHEUS

Objector, deserter, stubbornly divergent

by *Roberto Frabetti*

This article is dedicated to “divergent” children and kids: it is true that every child is divergent in the eyes of the adult world, but amongst kids and teenagers, there are the divergent among the divergent. These are the ones who resist the adults’ indolence and the impositions of their mates, and are able to look beyond any invasive act, either explicitly or implicitly meant or done with carelessness, lack of attention, superficiality. Those who are able to face widespread bullying and the absence of adults. They are strong, self-confident and they are just there.

The story of Prometheus is for them.

Some time ago, Aeschylus left us the following words:

Tell us the whole story of what happened. How did Zeus have you seized and on what charge? Why does he so shamefully abuse you in this painful way?

You asked why Zeus is torturing me like this. I will explain. I have been compelled to bear the yoke of punishment because I gave a gift to mortal beings. I searched out and stole the source of fire concealed in fennel stalks, and that taught men the use of all the arts and gave them ways to make amazing things. Now chained and nailed beneath the open sky, I am paying the price for what I did.

The myth of Prometheus is so fascinating. Prometheus is the titan who “deserts” the war between his brothers and Zeus. But he is the only one who is not afraid to disobey the God to be loyal to his moral principles and defend his choices, even when he is asked to give in, accept, mediate.

To us it seems that what Hermes has said is not unreasonable. His orders tell you to set aside your stubbornness and seek out wise advice. But Prometheus does not hesitate and replies to Hermes: so let him hurl his twin-forked lightning bolts down

on my head, convulse the air with thunder and frantic gusts of howling wind, and shake the earth with hurricanes until they shift the very roots of its foundations. Let him do all that - he cannot make me die.

He is stubbornly and deeply “divergent”, like all objectors, meaning the real ones, not those who hide behind a loophole and leave others to face suffering and pain. Is it really possible that the whole 63.9% of doctors who refuse to apply Law 194 of 1978¹ do it because they believe in what they are doing?

I don’t want to give myself an answer, I prefer to think about Antigone’s words, carved deep in the history of divergent thinking, which carries in itself the conscience of objecting. *When Creon asks her: “Had you heard my proclamation touching this matter?”, she replies: Could I help hearing it? It was public and when Creon says: “And yet you dared defy the law”. Antigone does not yield and replies: “I dared. It was not God’s proclamation. That final Justice that rules the world below makes no such laws. Your edict, King, was strong, but all your strength is weakness itself against the immortal unrecorded laws of God. I knew I must die, even without your decree: I am only mortal. And if I must die now, before it is my time to die, surely this is no hardship: can anyone living, as I live, with evil all about me, think Death less than a friend? This death of mine is of no importance; but if I had left my brother lying in death unburied, I should have suffered”.*

Conscientious objection to weapons, war or violence, has often been associated with desertion. And this word has had a negative and denigrating meaning for much too long. Then, Boris Vian wrote these words:

Mr. President, I’m writing you a letter that perhaps you will read if you have the time. I’ve just received my call-up papers to leave for the front before Wednesday night. Mr. President, I do not want to go. I am not on this earth to kill wretched people. It’s not to make you mad, I must tell you My decision is made, I am going to desert.

Aeschylus’ and Sophocles’ theatre connect to Vian’s words

¹ Law 194/1978 is the law that regulates abortion in Italy.



through the centuries, across that net of divergent views that has marked the often untold history of conscientious objection to military conscription. In Italy, this history has united the experiences of people like Capitini, Pinna, Gozzini, Don Milani, Father Balducci, and many others, until December 1972, the date of the great social achievement represented by Law 772 on conscientious objection for religious, ethical and philosophical motives.

In 1965, the military chaplains being discharged from service in Tuscany wrote an open letter to the Nation against Don Milani, stating that “the so-called *conscientious objection* was to be considered an insult to the homeland and the fallen, as it was against the Christian commandment of love and was rather an expression of cowardice”.

Don Milani replied:

...Over the past 150 years, we haven't been fully aware of objection. We have instead known obedience too well, for our disgrace and that of the world. We live our history together. And then you will tell me where the Homeland was, where we had to shoot, when we had to obey and when we had to object.

Dalmazio Bertulesi, Bachisio Masia and Ezio Rossato were amongst the last Italian people to be sentenced for conscientious objection by a Military Court. Because at the beginning of 1974, although the law had been in force for over a year, the alternative social service was not yet a right; so, young boys at 20 could be sentenced to two years in jail for conscientious objection.

“I am a conscientious objector, I don't want to use weapons, I just ask to be granted the alternative social service...”

It was not an easy choice.

Ezio Rossato has been a dear friend and has left important traces in the history of La Baracca, which he followed in its early days.

When he makes his “social decision”, he is 21 and works as a truck driver in Turin. He is arrested for draft evasion. And the military court sentences him and his two companions to 16 months of jail. The trial lasted just a few hours.

The sentence had already been written. So, two very old military judges could sit there and sleep throughout it.

I remember it very well.

But it was an important trial, because it somehow touched many consciences and the right to objection took another step forward.

For his choice, for having committed the “grave crime” of conscientious objection, Ezio spent a year in jail, and another 18 months of alternative social service, in the mountains around Cuneo.

For him, the consequences of that experience have been devastating. He had to find a new job because of his wrecked knees, and he had a constant *ennui*, but he never regretted the choice he had made. Ezio committed suicide when he was 35.

In his letter to the military judges, Don Milani used these words:

I hope with all my heart that you will clear me of all charges. I don't like the idea of going to jail to play the hero, but I can't help stating clearly that I will continue to teach to my boys what I have taught so far. That is to say that if an official gives them crazy orders, their duty is to tie him up and bring him to a sanitarium.

I just hope that my fellow priests and teachers around the world of any religion will teach as I do. Then, maybe, there will be a general who will find someone miserable who will obey, and we will not be able to save mankind. But this is not a good reason not to perform our duty as teachers.

These are heavy words. A deserter's words. And they remain there, elusive, divergent, like free leaves or light and happy flowers flying and floating in the wind, because flying is not something only fighter-bombers do.²

² From “Canto disarmato” – Cantamaggio 2012. Cantamaggio is a residential workshop that every year involves over 100 boys and girls over three days, usually on the occasion of May 1st. It is held in Medicina (Bologna).

translation by Letizia Olivieri



A SHORT REFLECTION ON DIVERGENCE

by Yutaka Takei

Dancer, choreographer and performer: supporting member and great friend of La Baracca, he lives in Paris

On the 7th January 2015 I was at home, in the suburbs of Paris. I was writing down some ideas on future creations in my office as usual. By chance, I took a look at the Japanese news on the internet to relax, but then I found the headline “Terrorist attack in Paris”. I immediately checked the website of a French newspaper. “Terrorist attack against Charlie Hebdo, at least 12 deaths”: this big headline struck my eyes. It was an inconceivable shock and I felt this sense of hanging in the air for a long time.

“Why? Who? What for?” A thousand thoughts started to circle in my mind... On the 11th January I went to Place de la Republique to join the demonstration for the freedom of speech and expression, as a tribute to the victims. And there, I could feel through the pores of my own skin this mood that does not accept any opinion other than from “I am Charlie”. I thought that it was a contradiction, since we were debating freedom of expression.

In France there is this quote from Voltaire (actually it seems like Voltaire did not write it at all): “I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it”.

I think it’s obvious that there are cases where we do not agree with others’ ideas and opinions. Then, like in this sentence, we have to listen to other opinions to discuss them together. But it’s going to be like a false promise if this sense that does not accept other opinions and states “Of course that we to listen them!” spreads.

I think that one of the most important steps is creating a proper environment. I guess that the creation of an environment where you can express without hesitation can be the first step towards an attempt to find a real solution. This year I received many requests from schools to “lead some workshops in order to create a show”. As a matter of fact, there generally is some mismatch between my ideas and the school’s intent. I realize every time that there is a great difference between imagination and reality, between being in the office and being there, with children and teachers.

Everyone is different and you never find the same things. Every person is unique and yesterday does not exist anymore, tomorrow is not to be foreseen and only the present time belongs to us. Preparation is important, but I think that we should not freeze ideas from the beginning and that it is necessary to make cooperation grow by designing things once they have taken flight from meeting with the participants.

Imposing one’s personal idea won’t be the true solution in times of divergence.

In Japan, we say that we have to become water-wise, body and mind together. If we are as solid as an iceberg, it is not possible to adapt to the imaginable situations. On the other hand, if we are as flexible as water we can take the measures in every single case. I believe that this flexibility is the key to proceed in the right direction.

translation by Sara Branchini



PEACE IN THE WOODS

The true story of Sauro's non-war

by *Dario Cané*

*"I know this is something strange to say,
but my father's happiest years
have been the war ones"*

Loredana Cusato

Vitiana, Garfagnana, April 25th 2004.

The sun shines over the woods in the valley, a car drives up the road and stops right below the small village. An elderly man gets out of the car and starts walking towards the village, bringing three more people with him: his wife Anna, the life-long companion who could not stand to watch him wither, now pleased by the success of her idea; his daughter Loredana and her husband Roberto, who ask themselves if the lively man climbing the streets with great confidence is actually the very man that a few hours ago hardly got into the car. Indeed, the man proceeds easily through the empty village, as if it was all he ever did in his life, until he sets his sights on a house. He stops in front of the door, reads the name on the doorbell and, while holding his breath, he rings it. A woman opens the door, not sure who she is looking at, but before she can ask he starts talking.

- Hi, Mary lived here. Are you relatives? I'm Sauro.

- ...

- I lived here for a while during the evacuation of Lucca...

I'm Sauro... Sauro Cusato, Mary used to live here...

- Y-yes... Sauro! I'm Mary's sister...

Vitiana. Autumn 1943.

Sauro gets away quickly from the village. In his legs he still feels the steps of his last dance with Mary, on his skin the scent of her hair twirling around him, and in his stomach

the desire of that kiss he did not have time to give her.

"They're coming down, boys. You'd better go hiding...". That voice was all it took to bring everyone back to reality. Better said, back to the outer reality, for the inner one is very different. There may be hunger, but in Vitiana they are partying. There may be killing out of there, but in the village people meet, play music, dance, make love. Like an island that is outside of time and history. There are many women in Vitiana, the families help each other and life goes on as if there is no war; and yet there is a war, as it is proved by the empty pantries. You can't ignore misery, not even in Vitiana. But still, you can dance around it. The party had just started, and people were already dancing, when the news that partisans were arriving had reached them. If you are not with them, it means you had been a fascist: even if you are just a boy, best they don't find you. In comparison, escaping Nazis and Blackshirts was a joke. Like that time in the church, when Sauro and his cousin stayed hidden in a confessional for two days. The priest did not bring them anything to eat, and they could not even empty the urinal pot, or the soldiers might have found them.

Or that other time, hidden for one whole day hidden in a chestnut tree, between the branches with the squirrels, waiting for *them* to leave.

But this time it's different, Sauro knows that. This time everyone has to go as far as he can, every man by himself,



find a good place to hide, and - maybe - never come back. When Sauro turns back, at dawn, to look at the village, he sees something he does not expect: Mary. The girl had followed him. Without thinking twice, the young deserter walks back to take something that was missing, and that for sure he would have missed a lot, but that he needed more than a blanket, more than the walnuts. Of course, when in hiding he would have suffered the hunger and cold, but *that kiss* was what he needed to remain alive, just like the whisper that followed it: *"I'll be waiting for you"*.

From Mary's point of view, Sauro was swallowed up by the bushes quickly. The woods gulped him down in a sudden, without changing the rhythm of its breath.

Drinking from the creeks, covering himself with leaves when the cold hits harder, and waking up surrounded by roe deer. Feeling like he was part of the forest, an animal among animals, was a peculiar perception he'd better not surrender to. However, except for some sporadic moments - figments of his imagination, weird visions that had vanished as rapidly as they had occurred - Sauro never forgot his human nature. And then, his heart filled with tangible fears, such as those of the wild boars rooting about that every now and then made him jump up into the closest tree; during those silvery nights he was tempted to come back - but where? Someone out there was looking for him, someone wanted to give him a rifle, and this thought was enough to scare away all his fears. He had always refused to accept a rifle. Sauro, with his almost illogical love for animals - he had not been able to kill a chicken even though he had not eaten for days-, with his love for women and freedom, stayed away from rifles.

Vitiana, again on April 25th 2004.

Sauro, almost eighty years old now, leans out of the guard rail looking for an undetermined point on the edge of the forest. Mary's sister had just invited them in, but they thanfully and graciously declined - they really couldn't, they had to go! The truth, however, was different. The news that Mary had just passed away, in December, four months

before, had hit Sauro hard. And yet, if not for his wife Anna's insistence, he would have never known. But Sauro doesn't think of this. He doesn't think of Anna, walking silently a few steps behind him, quietly putting aside the bitterness of feeling the one left in second place, and truly sharing his pain. Today Anna gives ground to Mary, refusing senseless competition. She is the living proof of elegance, but she doesn't know it.

Now Mary is something strong and alive for Sauro, a vivid, clear memory lying beneath those trees.

1943. Sauro has been living in hiding for quite a while; he is worn-out, he has to come back. But he can't come back to the village right away, he has to pay attention. He has to sniff the air to sense his predators, the smell of their gunpowder. It will be difficult for him to be so close to home, and yet not to be able to go in easily.

And then, just when he is coming out of the forest, he has a start. Mary is there, standing still right where she was the last time he saw her - as if she had never moved. *All clear.*

It doesn't matter whether Mary and Sauro's paths separated, if they had more important love stories, if they never saw each other again: for him, the memory of that moment, of the days into the woods waiting for love, remains as a proof that a paradise on earth, after all, can exist.

End credits

This story is based on the testimony of the relatives of Eugenio Cusato, known as Sauro (Lucca, May 14th 1925 - Bologna, February 22nd 2012).

To them goes our heartfelt thanks, in particular to Loredana, his daughter, and Roberto, his son-in-law.

His wife Anna Fedele, to whom goes the credit of bringing Sauro back to Vitiana in 2004, passed away before him, and exactly three years after that journey: on 26th April 2007.

translation by Anna Sacchetti



CONSUMERVILLE

by Francesca Nerattini

Recently, while surfing on the internet, I ended up on a blog where a mum tells about her journey to India. Amongst many different spiritual experiences, she suggests to any traveller passing by Mumbai with children *“to escape the shock induced by the city and take shelter into a miniature world: KidZania”*.

This draws my attention.

“A downright child-friendly city where you can be a firefighter, a journalist, a doctor, a waiter... and where each and every activity is ruled and managed by the children themselves”.

“This must be interesting”, I think.

A special place built and studied for symbolic play experiences.

I visualize a sort of giant crèche, with corners and spaces structured for the different age groups.

Well, look at what happens in Gandhi’s land...

And then I read that this is a franchise, and that there are many of these miniature worlds in many different cities.

I can’t stop reading. But the more I read on, the more I feel that there is something wrong going on...

“There is a special currency, the Kidzo: the children use it for the different activities they do, and some of these activities allow you to earn more Kidzos. This way, KidZania offers children the possibility to deal with money. Work in return for money, work in return for activities and products”.

Now I start to turn up my nose.

“A city with squares, trees (everything is fake, of course), banks, restaurants, hotels, hospitals, jewellers, beauty salons, construction sites, you name it, and everything has to be managed by the children. At the entrance, after paying the ticket, you receive a cheque that you will need to change in coins and notes in order to do the different activities”.

Alright, who has never dreamt with Monopoly money? But here, my feeling is that the play takes a turn for the weird. Children from 4 to 12 that walk through a make-believe city while earning and spending money. And yes, I might be the mum who is still not sure why you should receive money for losing a milk-tooth, but this is too much.

I close the blog and decide to go for more information about this strange, industrious universe.

KidZania was founded in 1996 starting from an idea by a Mexican businessman. After building the first “city” in Santa Fe, the format met such a success that almost twenty “copies” have been built around the world, especially in Middle- and Far-East.

I find some reviews online. Before checking the official website, I choose to let someone else’s first hand experience condition my opinion.

The focus on economical issues seems to be the main feature of this “concept world”: children can move freely around the underground city (no natural light or ventila-

tion), earn money by experiencing different jobs and then spend this money in the many shops that can be found around this city.

Even the University promotes its classes, while underlining how it is possible to earn good money in the firms linked to its courses.

Everything works according to market and production logic. Moreover - and now it gets interesting - everything has a brand: cars, banks, fast food restaurants, groceries, airlines, clinics (and not hospitals)... Everything can be ascribable to existing firms.

Now it is time to enter the official website and see how the company presents this huge make-believe

game. The first thing that strikes me is that “Industry Partners” is one of the main items, right on the homepage. I have to click on that.

“A key component of the KidZania experience is the integration of real-world brands to sponsor the city’s business and activities. This form of integrated marketing partnership enriches each activity by creating a more authentic experience. An airline knows best how to train pilots or run an airport. A bank knows best how to teach children about saving and investing. This is an immersive and interactive brand experience.”

There’s no denying it: a pretty manifest marketing strategy. I’ve had enough.

I think back to the blogger-mum and her suggestion. Are we sure that the shock one should escape is the city of Mumbai?

“Children have the right to have a relationship with arts and culture as sensitive and competent ‘subjects’ not as ‘consumers’ „

from
Charter of Children’s Rights to Art and Culture

translation by Anna Sacchetti

BEING IN LIFE

open dialogue with **Daniela Micioni** and **Valeria Frabetti** of *La Baracca - Testoni Ragazzi* and the theatre company of *Arte Salute Ragazzi*

We started to work with the actors of Arte e Salute 5 years ago, and thanks to our training programme we produced 5 shows for children of different ages.

Arte e Salute Ragazzi is now an innovative presence in the scenario of TYA; it is a theatre company that offers a special kind of communication without barriers and with a "special sensibility" in its relationship with children.

As happens in all theatre companies, some members have always been there, some of them have arrived earlier, some later; some stay and some go.

Today, the company is a harmonious group. Silvana, Stefano, Cristina, and the two Lucas: and here we are with them, Daniela, Valeria, Chiara and Andrea, who have always been with us throughout this journey.

We are sitting in a circle, collecting words.

How would you define your theatre practice?
And what does Arte e Salute Ragazzi mean to you?

Stefano - It is an original working method. We feel we have responsibilities because each of us creates their own character, then the directors write the story. It is a working method that expresses the actors' point of view. And it becomes a "co-production" between actors and directors.

Silvana - It's been difficult because I am a lazy person, but now everything has changed: I feel I am more enthusiastic about it, as it gives me the opportunity to express what I

feel inside. Before, I was a little too emotional and I just couldn't express myself. Now I feel I have improved as an actress.

Luca A. - I had done something similar before. Then I joined this group and it was like starting from the beginning all over again, because the technique is the same, we work a lot on improvisation, but the project is different.

Luca M. - I joined the group because I'm very interested in theatre and I think it's a very important form of expression for human beings. At the beginning, I found it difficult to share, be together as a group, improvise, but still I could see the final objective. I benefited from it on a psychological as well as physical level, because theatre is powerful, far more powerful than other means of communication. It's a parallel dimension. Reality takes on other shapes, but you keep your feet on the ground while being fully immersed in an imaginary world where ordinary things, the simplest things, become magic.

Cristina - I was a member of the theatre company Arte e Salute. I now feel at home in the group and I really appreciate the training we are given: it is more complete, as it involves the body as well.

What do children mean to you?

Cristina - They are small, delicate persons...

Luca A. - Yes, but if they kick you, you can't just kick them back because they are going to fall...

Cristina - They need to be taken care of, because they have to grow up in a happy environment. I think theatre and art can take care of them.

Silvana - They are innocent people who have to be protected and safeguarded; they need to keep their innocence as long as they can.

Stefano - They are an attentive and smart kind of audience, and when you are on stage you can feel the silence. At the end of the show, they pose difficult and complex questions and you just don't know what to respond. And you say to yourself: "Now what? What I am going to say?" Once, at the



end of the show “Metamorphoses”, a kid asked whether we worked on the Greek metamorphoses or on Ovid’s.

Cristina - They are an attentive and involved audience, and they never criticise.

What do you mean?

Cristina - They don’t come to the theatre saying: let’s see how they do this or that; they don’t come to criticise and are just interested in being involved as an audience.

Luca A. - Yes, they need to be protected, because they are our present and our future.

Luca M. - They are important because they remind us that we have once been kids, and the kid within never grows up. They need to have the right values and to be offered expressive work, because they have to grow up in a world able to stimulate their imagination.

How do you see Arte e Salute Ragazzi’s future?

Cristina - We will continue to perform and create shows. You develop as a human being and as a person, and quality develops, too.

Silvana - I don’t know if I can do it... I’m growing old...

Stefano - I would like this to become my job, from both a human and economic point of view.

Luca A. - I don’t know about the far future... But as far as the near future is concerned, new members will join our group soon, there are always new people. And I sign my contract on a yearly basis. So, I will continue to do it but if my dreams change... who knows...

Luca M. - To me, the future of theatre is expanding the activity. We all need theatre. It’s such an important type of art, so rooted in the present, that I want to study all of its forms. This year, I will focus on Pinocchio and on getting my driver’s licence. Then there’s the school, and the classes of theatre techniques. I would also like to attend a dubbing course or the Bologna theatre school. I think constant training is crucial.

If you had to tell other people about the way you do theatre in this group, what would you say?

Luca M. - I’d say our theatre work is physical and based on improvisation. It’s the actors’ improvisation that gives life to the final result.

Luca A. - Although we have a script, it does not mirror at 100% what we do. We have always worked very hard.

Stefano - I’d say it with a metaphor: our work is a tree and the roots are the direction, whereas the trunk and branches represent the actors. The fruit is the work between the roots and the trunk. And the more we nourish the tree, the more fruit it gives.

Luca M. - But I say that the presence of Valeria and Daniela also conveys a way of directing... They kind of teach us a method of self-direction that can be useful in our lives as well. In Pinocchio, I would like to present my proposal for the direction.

Silvana - I have improved both in theatre and in my life. Theatre taught me that I have to accept myself, to listen and be patient, which I really wasn’t. I have improved my willingness to learn and listen.

Cristina - It is drama work that each of us carries out on themselves.

What’s the difference between an audience of adults and an audience of children?

Cristina - As I said, children do not have a critical attitude. They make me think of something Nietzsche wrote in “Thus Spoke Zarathustra”, he said that men should be like children because children know how to say yes, and that’s something sacred. It means that they are open to development.

Luca M. - Children are a smart, “difficult” audience; sometimes it is harder to involve them, and they pay attention to the small things that happen during a show... adults pay more attention to the mistakes one can make, whereas children pose more relevant questions... you cannot underestimate them.



What do you expect or what would you like to receive from the audience?

Stefano - I would like to have an exchange of energy. I give something to them, and they give something back to me. An exchange. An applause.

Cristina - I always hope that the audience is welcoming and warm.

Luca M. - That they do not pretend, that they are true.

When you interpret a character, what does it mean to you? Do you feel they are near you?

Silvana - The characters have always been created for me, like Little Thumbling's mother. I liked her because I am a mother and this has been the best thing of my life.

Luca M. - I see myself in Pinocchio, because his story is full of drawbacks. I am just like Pinocchio, drawbacks tend to happen to me. Little Thumbling, instead, is smart and always finds his way back.

Luca A. - I liked playing the Ogre in "Little Thumbling". The Ogre is always mad at everyone and everything.

Cristina - I liked playing the Worm's lover in "In the Kitchen" and the Ogre's wife in "Little Thumbling".

Stefano - I always start from the role I have to play, like Little Thumbling's father. As to Pinocchio's story, I am interested in the relationship between father and son.

Luca M. - Building a character is a very personal kind of research: the more you feel the character is close to you, the easier it is; if it is far away from you, it's more difficult. You have to picture it in your mind, how it moves, what it wears, like in front of a mirror. It's hard work.

What have you discovered thanks to theatre?

Stefano - That I had resources that I didn't think I had.

Cristina - I live in my dimension. I think it's natural.

Luca M. - At the beginning, I played the Worm, a character that didn't speak. And when I heard the others speak I thought: "I will never make it!" Then I realised I had a good memory and that my voice worked, as well.

What is divergence to you?

Luca M. - To me, theatre is being in life. Because life is theatre, there's no divergence. You watch it, investigate it, and you realise that life and theatre are just so close.

Stefano - Sometimes theatre recalls life, but life is a very different matter... But it's true that both can surprise you.

A thought to leave to the children

Silvana - I hope that they always live happily and peacefully and that they can always be themselves.

Luca M. - I hope that they always nourish the children within, even when they grow up.

Stefano - They should never stop having fun.

Luca A. - And they should always be patient.

Cristina - I will do whatever I can to make them happy.

The Project "Teatro e Salute Mentale" (Theatre and Mental Health) is the result of the collaboration between the Department of Mental Health of the Bologna Local Health Authority and the Association "Arte e Salute Onlus". The main objective of the project is to improve the autonomy, quality of life and bargaining power of people suffering from mental disorders, through theatre and intellectual work.

The collaboration between Arte e Salute and La Baracca - Testoni Ragazzi started five years ago with a training course about the creation of shows for children. Over the years, the company "Arte e Salute Ragazzi" has created a number of productions.

translation by Letizia Olivieri



THIS IS THE LAST YEAR

by **Bruno Frabetti**

Bruno grew up in the theatre, and after years of shows and workshops seen from the outside, he now works at the La Baracca - Testoni Ragazzi.

To everything there is a season, and it is time for me now to take a year's break and start something new. I am in no hurry though, because the connection between the words Theatre and Workshops is invisible and clear at the same time.

Workshops are theatre because they involve a process of discovery, a new insight into a new world, nothing but frightened amazement. Theatre is a workshop of life, encounters, development and feelings.

It is a hidden place amongst many others, often a shelter for those who feel out of place or do not admit their curiosity. Usually, a theatre audience is composed of people who do not know how to pose the right questions, so they end up judging. Nonetheless, an actor is first of all a human being.

They can choose to go right until the end of the road alone, but first they need to make sure that their loneliness is a choice, and not a cage.

Workshops represent a first step forward towards ourselves.

“Are you here to become an actor?” and “When will your first show be?”

These are not wrong questions, but this is not the right time for me to wonder.

Not yet at least, as I am still in a *workshop* phase, where the objective is not succeeding, but *happening*.

Mistakes and changes of direction are admitted, but if you run too fast, you might even get there, but too soon.

“Trust” is the existential condition of any theatre process: trust in your leaders, in the people who share the experience with you, and in yourself. If you have no trust, the journey is over.

To me, theatre has always been something private, because I could rarely share what it meant to do theatre, both with those who never crossed the doors of a theatre in their lives, and with those who indeed have, or who have studied harder than I ever did.

On the other hand, the more you feel something is close to you, the more its picture hides in your thoughts and it is hard to talk about it, to give shape to something that is part of an aspect of your being.

Theatre is a *familiar* word, or, better said, a place where I have never felt I was a stranger.

“How did you get involved?”. I find it hard to answer this question without being misunderstood.

I grew up immersed in its stories, a child as any other in a place that adjusts the heights to your own.

A space without walls, open to those who know how to listen: *shush*, if you speak, you'll miss a story; if you get distracted, don't ask about it, because it will be different to the person sitting next to you.

It is not a big deal getting lost - it could even be interesting - but the story has started and it has to be respected.

It is always different; it flows and tells, according to its own rules.



The eyes? Attentive and open, like your nose. The ears? Open, to hear any whisper. And the mouth? Shut.

Always? Almost, because you, who are listening, are also part of the story.

I enjoy listening, but now I will try to tell a story, my story.

I think is important not to give our luck for granted: there are many children coming to the theatre every day to listen to a story, but I was lucky enough to listen to them at home.

I was a “Baracca-kid” who never got tired to listen to long tales and who always looked forward to sailing offshore with my dinghy just to turn on “Adventure Radio”. But this is another story and it is not the right time for me to tell it, because this happened long before my first workshop.

I actually started to take part in workshops very late in my life.

I had always been sceptical about entering theatre through that door, because it can take you to the other side, to the stage. I was shy or maybe too young to make plans, and I enjoyed being in the audience. Also, I had never thought that one day I could actually tell stories, and my idea of workshop came only from the final performances that Roberto, my father, created. When my father took me with him, I always slept in the car.

And I was always angry when I woke up, because there, in the workshop, Roberto could not be my father.

He could not be only my father, and I did not understand that.

So, if this is how it is going to be, “I will not do the workshops”, even though I was curious.

Then, in summer, there was the Park. And amongst Pirates and Musketeers, I was always there.

It was the summer of 2003, I had just turned 12 and a present came to me, an unexpected opportunity.

A surprise is a surprise, and it takes so little to change things and open new doors.

A director needed a child, because even Hercules had once been a kid and he had had a mentor to show him the way.

Hercules and the stars. Bruno - not me - was the director.

He often has one of those eureka moments that rarely do not leave traces, however the others may judge them. Otherwise, there would never have been a *Little Elephant* and *Cantamaggio* would be long forgotten.

I was that kid.

The same kid who met so many mentors on his way starting from the following year.

And each year, I started my workshops with new eyes, and I was looked at with different eyes, a child who needs to find his way and get ready to grow up. Not the Big Bruno, the one who has always been there and continues to be my mentor, I mean new ways.

Ambassador Project: workshops for children in Zambia during a month.

“Should I stay or should I go? I’m going and I’m going all alone.”

Someday all this will end, just like it started. And I am going back to the start.

The mouth? Not always shut; I may speak too much, but I have so many stories to tell.

The ears? Open, because suggestions always come in a whisper.

And - I almost forgot - the eyes? The eyes are the same.

translation by Letizia Olivieri



STANDING ON OUR TIPTOES

Remembering Janusz Korczak

by Grazia Honegger Fresco

Pedagogue, writer, member of the Board at the Montessori Centre in Rome, which she headed from 1981 to 2003. In 2008 she received the UNICEF Award.

"Janusz Korczak. Unpronounceable name. Born in Warsaw in 1878. Jew. This is an important detail for the last part of our story. Although not so important in his life, always inspired to secular values. Pediatrician, Educator... Stubbornly divergent."

In January 2015, on the occasion of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, La Baracca - Testoni Ragazzi presented a new production, *"When I am little again - Remembering Janusz Korczak"*, about the life, the thoughts and the idea of childhood of this extraordinary man who died in the Treblinka extermination camp in 1942, together with "his" orphans.

It is a great honour for our magazine to publish the article written by Grazia Honegger Fresco, who also wrote the preface to one of Korczak's most important works *"The Child's Right to Respect"*.

A huge thank you...

Korczak, born in August 1878 or 1879 (sources vary), was an educator, children's author and pediatrician, very famous in the Warsaw of his time. He discovered in his early teens what it meant to be a Jew. He refused to get married or have children because he feared they would inherit his father's madness.

He studied in Poland and Austria, in the famous pediatric centre of the University of Vienna.¹ There, he perfected his diagnostic and nursing skills, viewing human beings as a whole: complexity, originality, body and psyche united and connected to their emotional needs.

He soon started to swim against the current, becoming a very famous pediatrician and writer. He signed his articles under the pen name of Janusz Korczak and not with his family name - Henryck Goldszmit, which was instead useful for the certificates. As a doctor, he acted like Robin Hood: he was well paid but he gave most of his earnings to the poor.

He was always ready to make a joke, both for the rich and the poor. He used to heat up his hands before touching a

patient's forehead. He observed with involvement the victims of child abuse, and this led him to discover - after 1906 - a new vocation alongside his medical career: taking care of these children, especially those who were left with no parents, the orphans.

In 1907, he organised a summer camp for children, and he was more and more convinced that his future was with them. He shared his dreams with rich friends: a huge building was built for him and his children in Krochmalna Street, near the Warsaw Ghetto, which was later called the "Orphans' House". While the House was being built, he spent a few months in France to see what was being done there and in other Western countries in his field.

In 1909, he went back to Warsaw, where he met Stefa Wilczysynska, who was also interested in and committed to education. When the "House" opened, she became his closest associate. She was extremely involved in what happened in the orphanage and particularly close to the girls, and possibly in love with him - no one can say for sure, as she was very discreet. Certainly, she was aware that on this level the Doctor was unreachable, but she remained close to him and the kids until the end.

In the huge building, Korczak would have wanted to house

¹ The same where, between 1927 and 1929, Emmi Pikler specialised, a famous pediatrician now known for her care methods for abandoned children in the Loczy Institute in Budapest.

Jewish and Christian children, but the law wouldn't allow him to. So, starting from October 1912, he took Jewish boys and girls from 7 to 15 years old to live in the House, creating a sort of republic for children with great pedagogical value. When the Germans created the Warsaw Ghetto in 1940, his orphanage was forced to move from its building, but he continued to run the House until August 6, 1942.

These years were the hardest for the Polish Jews: forced to live in the ghetto, people either starved to death or were deported to some extermination camp. Amongst the few survivors of the ghetto, there were the Doctor, Stefa and their orphans, and a few other adults who struggled to protect their kids from the SS.

On August 6, they were forced to walk to the railway station and get on one of the closed wagons that would take them to die at Treblinka, an extermination camp almost as big and deadly as Auschwitz-Birkenau for the number of people who were sent there to die in the gas chambers.

Korczak knew what to expect. So, with as much composure as he could muster, he had indirectly prepared his "children" by telling them stories transformed into expressive tales (theatre). With great dignity, he guided them through their last march across the ghetto, holding the flag of their community and wearing their best clothes. During those years, the Nazis terrified most of Europe with antisemitism, but those events - as told by Andrej Wajda in his 1990 movie "Korczak" - witness the doctor's and his collaborators' great effort to perform their duty of educators until the end. It should also be noted that they were not the only ones who fought against the brutality of those years².

Today, Korczak is mainly remembered for the tragic end of his life - he was so famous in Poland that he could have saved himself. But this choice would have meant to give in to the Nazis, and he refused with no hesitation. Under many aspects, it is more important to know how he put his pedagogical ideas into practice over thirty years of dedication and commitment.

First of all, the organisation of the "House" and the constant crescendo of initiatives are effectively reported - together with his biography - in a volume that contains over 10 years of research: *The King of children* by Betty Joan Lifton, published in 1988.

Thanks to a number of details, incidents and examples, the reader gets a complete picture not only of him, but also of the atmosphere of the "House", the quality of the work, the choices made in favour of the children, always with a special focus on their feelings and losses.

In the huge building there were young boys and girls who helped each other out in a concrete exchange, as Maria Montessori was experiencing and experimenting with in

Italy in the same period, and as Pestalozzi at Yverdon already had tried after 1805. Rousseau had paved the way for this not so long before the French Revolution (his *Emile* is dated 1762). From Pestalozzi he took the idea of the mixed groups, where children can naturally establish richer relationships. Dividing the kids by age meant controlling the discipline and leading them to attain the same results at the same time. We know all too well that the use of this method leads to endless competition and useless - although not always conscious - sadistic acts.

In the "House", there were very few adults: Korczak, Stefa, the janitor, the cook, the laundress. The kids kept the place tidy and in order. Each of them had tasks that were proportionate to their age, and that were adapted to the individual skills and interests. They learned to make their bed, keep everything in order and tidy up, thus contributing to the harmony of the "House". Many students who entered the "House" thanks to an internship, helped out with the tasks.

The Doctor was always there, and beside him was Stefa, who took care of almost everything, from a loose button to a daily record of events. The real school was outside, in the big city that encouraged a sense of responsibility in everyone. Inside the "House", the atmosphere was peaceful, protective but responsible. Conflicts, inappropriate behaviours, damages and other problems were solved in a sort of children's court under the Doctor's attentive eyes. The children took turns in being the "judges" and were elected according to pre-established criteria.

On the basis of their daily experiences and with the Doctor's help, they had also devised a system that included penalties from 1 to 100. They were "sentenced" to carry out various tasks that never included food deprivation and were performed with understanding and forgiveness. At the same time, it was a way for kids and teenagers to have their sense of justice fulfilled.

Korczak was very careful in respecting each of them; he didn't want to hurt anybody in any way, especially children who had suffered losses. As a non-observant Jew, he had set up a room where the children could go and recite the *kaddish* or pray for their dead parents.

Together with Stefa, he paid special attention to the small things: for some of the children, losing a bird's feather or a cork could be very painful, so it was very important to always find the lost objects and keep them safe. Attention to detail was a must, even the broom closet deserved respect. After school and during the holidays, the kids were offered a wide range of activities: music, theatre, readings and games. The playful and peaceful atmosphere created by the Doctor made the "Orphans' House" a special place that was in plain contrast with the closed and punishment-oriented environment of other schools.

This was the case of Maryna Falska's school: Korczak met her in 1915 when he served in the army in Kiev, Ukraine, where part of the Polish army was also active. Mrs. Falska,

² Another example of dignity and silent awareness is Clara Grunwald, a Jew and a pacifist who shared Maria Montessori's pedagogic ideas. Before the war, she had been a teacher in Berlin, and in April 1943, she accompanied the children who were under her responsibility to Auschwitz.

also known as the “Sad Lady” for having lost her husband and baby girl in a dramatic accident, was appointed head of a house of the Red Cross that hosted 60 Polish boys. They were meant to become efficient Communist workers. Her methods could lead nowhere but to conflicts. Since they first met, and always with the good manners and authority that characterised him, Korczak changed the atmosphere of the facility adapting it to his style, which was based on giving the children trust and freedom while building together a sense of responsibility. After about two years, he went back to Warsaw where Stefa, in the meantime, had continued to run the “Orphans’ House”. Maryna and the children never forgot what he had taught them. And it was to her that one of Korczak’s children left his *Diaries*, as he was lucky enough not to be there the day the orphans left the House for the last time. The *Diaries* were then walled up and retrieved at the end of the War. They were brought to USSR and remained unheeded for a long time, as Korczak was considered a bourgeois writer - but they were eventually published.

Until the very end, while his celebrity grew, he kept a modest demeanour: with the apron he always wore, he left the rich Polish bourgeoisie disconcerted.

At different times, he and Stefa went to Palestine to observe the newly established State of Israel, especially the *Kibbutzim*. They both kept a critical attitude and were able to look beyond the surface.

There would be much to say about Korczak’s literary and journalistic production, from his first book *Child of the Drawing Room*. Written in 1904 or 1905, it was welcomed with enthusiasm. His colleagues and closest friends asked him: “If you could write so well, why did you become a doctor?”, and he replied that Ceckhov was an excellent doctor as well as a great writer. He wrote *How to Love a Child* during World War I, for the most part when he was in Kiev. *The Child’s Right to Respect*, a pedagogical book for adults, was published in the ‘30s; then, the *King Matt* series for children began. It was the story of a child who had become a king and brought peace and good mood to everyone. Korczak signed over thirty works, plus the articles and the journals written with the children and the issues of the “Ghetto Newspaper” from May to August 1942.

There is still much to know about his life and educational practices.

“*There is no such thing as a child in general; there is a child*” Korczak wrote, in line with the great pedagogues who came before him and with those of his time. He taught, experimented, ran schools, proposed simple instruments to create the respect that everyone deserves.

“*You say: dealings with children are tiresome. You are right. You say: because we have to lower ourselves to their intellect. Lower, stoop, bend, crouch down. You are mistaken. It isn’t that which is so tiring. But because we have to reach up to their feelings. Reach up, stretch, stand on our tiptoes*”. These are fine words.

In the same period, Montessori suggested that the child could be viewed as a Messiah. And Tolstoy claimed that there was an urgent need to “*put the child at the centre, because we have much more to learn from him than we can teach him*”: the openness to life and knowledge. The stubborn question about the meaning of life. The thirst for sharing, solidarity, being *me* in front of *you* and everyone, as in Aldo Capitini’s view. “I belong to the others”, said Scotellaro, an Italian poet, farmer and “child”. Meaning that we should learn to “be together with”, to rebel against what is unreasonable, facing the limits of the human condition and enjoying life within its limits, because we only have one and we should live it to the fullest and for everyone’s sake (and this takes us back to Camus).

With Korczak, we need to stand by our kids and grow up with them, because they have just arrived into this world and have sharper eyes. We live in a world where there seem to be very few adults who deserve to be referred to as such, i.e. wise and responsible, because “maturity is everything” in challenging history and the limits of our condition.

In this unique world of ours, the people of good will ended up being *orphans*. And we, the adults, have so much to learn from children, as the real educators have always known. Our role - Korczak was well aware of it - is to be brothers and sisters of our children, rather than mothers and fathers. He added a number of things to this awareness, things that are a direct consequence of it: self-governance and self-organisation as a practice of democracy, solidarity and brotherhood; the need to add reasons to feelings, to judge on the basis of rules to be established together; the importance of our rights and duties; but also the right to go wrong, to be who we are and, as a consequence, the need to be in a group, sharing our mistakes, overcoming them together while always putting them into perspective within the dialectic of mistake-punishment, confession-judgement, understanding-redemption. The group, the community. Together. And our guides in the community should be wise elder brothers and sisters, as opposed to authoritative and distracted parents.

Korczak’s thought is so radical that he claimed that children had a right to die. The ‘30s were a break between two horrible and criminal wars. Korczak didn’t dream of a better world, he wasn’t an idealist unable to see the danger coming. It is not a coincidence that his writings mirror an increasing clarity of thought as he sees his worst fears come true. However, when he told the children about their “right to die”, he didn’t do it just because he wanted to prepare them for the end (which he did, with tragic awareness). He did it because it is being aware of limits that gives value to what we have, to this short life of ours. His humanism was *radical* also in this sense.

Contemporary pedagogy has much to learn from Korczak’s work, because the future can always be worse than the past: we should learn day after day from his message of hope and trust.



WITH GREAT POWER COMES GREAT RESPONSIBILITY



To our supporting members and Icaro readers

This magazine is written by La Baracca - Testoni Ragazzi supporting members and friends, and it is therefore open to those who have proposals and reflections to share. So we invite you to get in touch with us if you are willing to write an article for subsequent issues. The editorial staff will select the most interesting proposals, hoping that all of you may share our work. In the meantime please send us your suggestions, critiques, ideas and all that may help Icaro fly.

teatrochecresce@testoniragazzi.it

We chose write a magazine available for free to all of you who would like to read it. We do not lack enthusiasm or ideas: we would like to translate every single issue and we are also thinking of creating an online version.

Anyone who is willing or has the opportunity to help us make this dream come true can support the magazine with a donation. Even a small gesture can help make our project grow bigger.

(to get information on donations please visit our website or contact us)