

L.I.
LINGUA IMPERII

so violent was the force that struck it dumb

anagoor

Original project conceived for the
60th Trento Film Festival
2012

Prize-winning show for best direction of the *Jurislav Korenić* award
at the 53th GRAND PRIX of MESS Festival 2013, Sarajevo

Prize-winning show at Music Theatre NOW 2015 award

Premises

A bomb in our heart and the memory we are interested in: archiving, memorializing and things immemorable.

The philologist and anthropologist Maurizio Bettini has recently put forward an interpretation of the memory seats in the social imaginary of the ancients, more precisely in the Latin culture. Accordingly, one of the body parts where memory was thought to reside was the ear: to Pliny memory was to be found exactly in the earlobe. In fact, to help somebody recall events, pictures, names or things to memory the Romans used to physically pull their earlobes. It is rather straightforward, then, that a civilization that relied so much on oral tradition and oral lore came to conceive of the pinna (i.e. the visible part of the ear) as the entrance to an archive. The ear was a passage through which information-rich auditory stimuli could be let in and converted to memory, that function specific to the human, a sentient being susceptible to sound.

A second seat of memory was the heart. Evidence thereof lies in the word *record* (i.e. to remember by storing things somewhere) and its Latin cognate *recordari*, where the root *cord-* harks back to the Latin for heart (*cor, cordis*) and the particle *re-* indicates a mutual relationship between parts, a sort of turning one's look towards somebody/something, here specifically towards the intimacy of one's heart. Thus, the act of (remembering through) recording was seen as healing a rift in the heart.

The two seats already point at two separate ways of conceiving memorization. This distinction is further enhanced by the fact that in numerous European languages, including English, the semantic field of memory makes use of words linked either to *memini* (*I remember* in Latin) and *mnemosyne* (*memory* in Greek) – which are cognates– or to the Latin word *memoria*. The latter is often thought to share a common root with the former two, while in fact it has a different origin and meaning: the root **MEN-* of the former (*memini, mnemosyne* as well as the very English word *mind*) places the seat of the archive and of the storing process in the mind, whereas *memoria* harks back to the root **(S)MER-* which, in words like for instance *mesmerize*, indicates bewilderment, restlessness, an enchantment, a vortex of emotions. A vortex that, like a bomb, is likely to burst all of a sudden in the recaller's mind, to attract and disturb him/her at the same time. A vortex that is capable of sucking him/her into a chasm, almost knocking him/her down physically.

Thus we are confronted with two different ideas of memory: on one hand memory is conceived of as an archive, an inert heap, and on the other as a reminiscing process that shakes and upsets.

At the time of the inauguration of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, about seven years ago, Giorgio Agamben wrote on *Die Zeit* that the monument has a dual nature to it. In fact, according to the philosopher, there would exist two types of human events (and consequently two types of memorials): memorable and immemorable. While the former can be archived and preserved, the latter cannot, due to their sheer enormity that makes them impossible to grasp: their remembrance can only occur through personal

experiencing. Always according to Agamben, the Memorial to the Holocaust victims designed by American architect Peter Eisenman, has both features: while the underground chambers would stand for the archival records, the dismaying field of pillars would be capable of eliciting the immemorial.

Piero Terracina, one of the last still alive to have witnessed the horrors of Auschwitz, has said that “memory is the thread tying the past to the present and determining the future.” As a matter of fact, in modern-day society we do celebrate memorial days and festivals of remembrance but how touching are they? They merely manage to struggle against oblivion. Take January 27th, International Holocaust Remembrance Day, for instance: we traditionally equate it with commitment against forgetting, but forgetfulness –odious as it is– is not the major problem. What are we to make of memory if the memory does not flood back in us, forcing us to re-direct our gaze to the heart? If real memory is the thread that ties the past to the present and determines the future, then it arises not from the remembrance, but from the discomfort that the memory itself procures. Memory is the tool that allows us to assess the gap between knowing what truth and righteousness are and the knowledge that our self has –at some point– done wrong.

Convinced though we are that disseminating historical documents is of utmost importance, and that every activity aiming at disseminating information in general is the main path to educating the mind and spirit, we plan with this work of ours to stir memories on a different plane from that of sheer information and narration through documents. We have set up a theatrical journey that in our intention should be capable of eliciting the “immemorial”, that dismaying past deeply buried in our soul, which either because of its being buried deep within us or because of the very nature of all human action is easily forgotten.

Deeply inspired by the first pages of *The Drowned and the Saved* by Primo Levi and by his reflections on the elusive human memory, specifically on the memory of the Holocaust, we have chosen to draw on literary works of authors of the subsequent generations, men who did not directly experience that horror, but whose consciousness has felt the need to recall it, no matter how painful that may have been.

Presentation

A tragedy, or the sung lament of the hunting pack: meaning and dramaturgy, setting and performers, overtone singing and a video-clip

What we have set ourselves to achieve is to bring back to life –through a kind of (en)chant(ment)– the memory of those hideous old habits of men’s according to which in the past some of them have turned into predators of other men and, even as late as the twentieth century, soaked the soil of Europe with the blood of millions of people: so much its civil heart as its vast and beautiful forests, reaching as far as its mountainous borders. On stage there has been unleashed a chorus of Erinyes of memory who –before the rekindled memory of their victims– reject their being hunters and lament the burden of guilt for all that cruel hunting.

The Caucasus —easternmost limit of Europe, natural boundary, Mountain of Languages (as it is sometimes known), inextricable tangle of ethnic groups, maze marking and confounding the boundaries at one and the same time— rises as the epicentre of memory and turns into a mythical place of this judgment, much like in Aeschylus’ poetry.

The theatrical form chosen for this creation of ours is the tragic chorus where singing and music, gesture and totemic vision are closely intertwined.

A small community of women and men of various ages shoot their voice-darts in between a jolt to the heart a lament and a dream. The chorus includes a singer of Armenian origin. She is a traditional custodian of an ancient and vast musical heritage, and living memory of a people who was wounded by an unforgotten —yet often shamefully ignored— genocide.

As on the wide central screen the victim’s manifold face gradually emerges, on the two LCD side screens, a struggle unfolds between two Nazi officers, each championing opposing views of life.

L.I., *Lingua Imperii*, is the language of the empire meant as coercive domination. It is the poor, brutish, deceitful language of the Nazi propaganda. It is the alphabets and the languages taught by force. But it is also a gag imposed as a violent gift by the rulers. Ultimately, it is the very language of violence.

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With

Anna Bragagnolo, Moreno Callegari, Viviana Callegari, Marco Crosato, Paola Dallan, Marco Menegoni, Gayanéé Movsisyan, Alessandro Nardo, Monica Tonietto

And with

Hannes Perkmann, *Hauptsturmbannführer Aue*
Benno Steinegger, *Leutnant Voss*

Voice-over

Silvija Stipanov, Marta Cerovecki, Gayanéé Movsisian, Yasha Young, Laurence Heintz

Translation & Language Consulting

Filippo Tassetto

Costume Design

Serena Bussolaro, Silvia Bragagnolo, Simone Derai

Original Score

Paola Dallan, Simone Derai, Mauro Martinuz, Marco Menegoni, Gayanéé Movsisyan, Monica Tonietto

Non Original Score

Komitas Vardapet, musiche della tradizione medievale armena

Cameramen/Video

Moreno Callegari, Simone Derai, Marco Menegoni

Dramaturgy

Simone Derai, Patrizia Vercesi

Directed by

Simone Derai

Produced by

Anagoor 2012

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The hunt comes to a halt in the Caucasus, mountain of languages

Safe haven since the last glacial period in Eurasia, the Caucasus region has also been a well-known passage for many travellers, traders and conquerors. Yet, although local powers and the adjoining empires have disputed its domination for centuries, the Caucasus has remained a secure shelter for peoples whose identity lies in the about fifty languages spoken in the area. The persistence of such strong ethnic identities is due both to the geographic features of the region, whose mountainous character has been able to isolate and protect the various groups, and to a type of society whose ties and cultural codes of loyalty to the clan have always been as strong as –if not stronger than– those towards the nation and the region itself. The attempts that have been made so far, especially by the Soviet Union, to assimilate and dominate the Caucasians have all been in vain.

As the author Jonathan Littell describes with a wealth of historical documents in his disturbing novel *The Kindly Ones*, the very hunt for Jews by the Nazi meets a resounding setback before the tangle of ethnic groups, the religious syncretism, the stratification of beliefs and the crossings of languages of the Caucasus. In the novel the young German linguist Voss, who is serving as an SS officer, is asked by a military commission to provide scientific evidence of the alleged Jewish ancestry of some mountain people, the purpose of course being their complete annihilation. But the fancy theoretical castles in the air of the commission come crashing down when faced by brute fact. The young linguist, definitely unwilling to align with Nazi ideology, delivers –with scientific precision and consistency– a dizzying survey of languages and dialects and a comprehensive account of the centuries of separations and intersections between the peoples in the area. Much to the indignation of the SS officer in charge of the commission, the linguist dismisses the Nazi theory of race, Volk and the purported “nativeness” of the Germanic tribes as *veterinary* philosophy.

The backbone of the entire project is provided by three dialogues between the SS Hauptsturmführer Aue and Leutnant Voss, set between the spring of 1942 and the autumn of that year during the operations of penetration in the Caucasian region by the German Forces in the southern sector of the Eastern Front.

Man-hunting and the mountain of boundaries

To talk about manhunts is to talk about one fragment of a long history of violence on the part of the dominant. The manhunt must not be understood here as a metaphor. It refers to concrete historical phenomena in which human beings were tracked down, captured, or killed in accord with the forms of the hunt; these were regular and sometimes large-scale practices whose forms were first theorized in ancient Greece, long before their enormous expansion in the modern period in conjunction with the development of transatlantic capitalism.

The Italian word *caccia*, whose closest English cognate (via the French language) is *chase*, means two things: on the one hand it designates the action of hunting, particularly with regard to game animals, on the other it refers to the action of chasing out by means of violence or coercion, forcing to leave a certain place. There is a hunt of pursuit and a hunt of expulsion; hunting that captures and hunting that excludes. These two operations are distinct but may enter into a relationship of complementarity: hunting human beings often presupposes that they have been previously chased out, expelled, or excluded from society, from a common order. Every hunt is accompanied by a theory of its prey that explains why, by virtue of what difference, of what distinction, some men can be hunted and others not. And it also explains who has the power to determine and establish such distinctions and lines of demarcation.

The history of man-hunting is thus a history not only of the techniques of tracking and capture but also of procedures of exclusion, of lines of demarcation drawn within the human community in order to define the humans who can be hunted.

In this sense the Caucasus, being itself a geographical boundary, with its secluded valleys and gorges that potentially assure protection and separation to the different language families, while at the same time sharing a history of hybridization of peoples, perfectly embodies the symbol both of “boundary and separation” and the dissolution of boundaries, of their senselessness,

It might be no coincidence that it was to a rock in the Caucasus that Aeschylus chose to bind his Prometheus, the Titan of boundaries who broke Zeus’ order giving Man not only fire but also the insurmountable boundary of mortality.

The arrogance that makes some men stand high above heaps of corpses against the sky springs from a blind pride, from considering themselves holders of that power of distinction that is Order, from the triumphant drunkenness of wielding the power of life and death. Hermann Göring, who called himself *Reichsjägermeister*, that is “the Reich’s hunt-master”, evidently pledging allegiance to the myth of Nimrod the Mighty Hunter, said “I decide who is a Jew and who is an Aryan.”

The Mighty Hunter, cynegetic power and the mountain of corpses

Originally the project L.I. was to be called *Nimrod*.

Who was Nimrod?

We learn his story in the Book of Genesis. He was the founder of Babel and the first king that the earth has ever known. “He was the first to be a despot on the earth”, “a mighty hunter before God”, the Bible reads.

In what sense is Nimrod called a hunter?

With that word the Scriptures do not designate a hunter of animals, but a hunter of men. It is in this sense that he is “a mighty hunter”, whereas David is “a shepherd of peoples”.

His name means “rebellion”. As a matter of fact, he disobeyed the order that God had directed to men to leave and populate the Earth after the Flood. He gathered men by force: in order to become king he subdued them with violence.

Nimrod revels in abducting people: that is the way in which he obtains his subjects. He reigns over Babel but he periodically plunges into the space outside to hunt down his prey, which he then shuts up inside his walls. In contrast to David’s pastoral power, his is a cynegetic power, a movement for annexation that constantly appropriates outside in order to accumulate inside: he hunts and builds at the same time, or – rather– he hunts in order to build. Cynegetic power gathers together what is scattered, centralizes it, heaps it up in a limitless logic of accumulation. That is the image of Babel, where the pile of game humans is replaced by a vertical piling-up that will ultimately “reach unto heaven”.

The biblical account of the masses enslaved by Nimrod and the large tower-pile soaring up into the heavens as an overt symbol of the king-hunter’s hubris bear a grim resemblance to the heaps of corpses produced by the meaningless genocides that the history of the twentieth century has sadly witnessed.

Sources and inspiration

L.I. LINGUA IMPERII feeds on the words, thoughts and works of W.G. Sebald, Jonathan Littel, Primo Levi, Eschilo, Martha C. Naussbaum, Grégoire Chamayou, William T. Vollmann, Komitas Vardapet, Markus Schinwald, Jay Roemblatt, Grossman Vasilij, Susan Silas, Robert S. C. Gordon, Collier Schorr, Mario Casella, René Girard, Tzvetan Todorov, Bruno Bettlheim, The Caretaker, Claude Lanzmann, August Sander, last but not least, Victor Klemperer.

ANAGOOR – BIO

The Anagoor company was founded by Simone Derai and Paola Dallan in Castelfranco Veneto in 2000, established from the very beginning as an experiment in collective work. Today, directors Simone Derai and Marco Menegoni work regularly with Patrizia Vercesi, Mauro Martinuz and Giulio Favotto, while other artists and professionals join them continually, enriching their growth and underscoring their nature as a collective. An ongoing workshop, open to professionals and amateurs, Anagoor is the hub of a creative process open to the city and its diverse generations where, in a strenuous attempt to generate a theatrical art of the polis, there is an ideal continuity between educational activities in schools, work within the territory, the call for community involvement, the company's productions. Anagoor's theatre responds to an iconic aesthetic that precipitates into various final formats in which the performing arts, philosophy, literature and hyper-media theatre engage in a dialogue, demanding however, strongly and by virtue of the nature of this art, to remain theatre.

Their productions include: *jeug- (2008); Tempesta (2009), winner of a special mention at the Premio Scenario; Fortuny (2011); L.I. Lingua Imperii (2012), one of the winning productions at Music Theatre NOW 2015; Virgilio Brucia (2014); Socrate il sopravvissuto / come le foglie (2016) nominated for the Premio Ubu as Production of the year, *Orestea / Agamennone Schiavi Conversio* (2018) selected by Fondation d'entreprise Hermès within the framework of the New Settings Program.

In 2012 the company approached musical theatre in the film-concert *Et manchi pietà*, followed by the direction of two operas: in 2013 *Il Palazzo di Atlante* by Luigi Rossi (1642), presented at the Sagra Musicale Malatestiana in Rimini, in 2017 *Faust* by Charles Gounod, a production of the Teatro Comunale di Modena, Teatro Valli di Reggio Emilia and Teatro Municipale di Piacenza and in 2019 *Das Paradies und die Peri* by Robert Schumann, a production of the Teatro Massimo di Palermo.

Anagoor has won many awards, including the "Jurislav Korenić " prize to Simone Derai as Best young director at the 53rd Festival MESS (2012), the Premio Hystrio – Castel dei Mondi (2013), the Premio ANCT for innovative experimentation in theatre, the HYSTRIO prize for direction (2016) and the Premio ReteCritica.

Anagoor, which in just a few years has moved to the centre of attention of Italian and European theatre, has been attributed the Silver Lion for Theatre in 2018 at the Venice Biennale.

Since 2008 Anagoor has based its headquarters in the countryside around Treviso, at La Conigliera, a rabbit farm converted into an atelier and since 2010 it is part of the Fies Factory project at Centrale Fies – art work space.

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