

# Wandering through the Mediterranean among Labyrinths of Contradictions

**Ornella D'Agostino.** Dancer

*My career as a dancer consists of wandering from one place to another, while the perception goes on dancing even though the body seems static.*

For me, practising intercultural dialogue is an irreplaceable cognitive experience, which has allowed me to convert an aesthetic search into transcultural survival strategies. My utopia consists of perforating, albeit only for a few moments, reactionary communicative modalities, which continually induce discrimination, separation, hierarchy and the creation of conflicts, with the aim of opening a breach towards the suspension of judgement, in which the perception of the moment expands to such a point for the body investigating its context that it becomes revolutionary without this necessarily implying that it is militant.

My Northern European artistic training has substantially meant for me the suppression of conventional perceptive frontiers, initiating me in the interaction between languages and cultures, and introducing me into the space of decontextualisation. I come, in contrast, from places in which cultural memory is imprinted in forms deposited for a long time, where freedom of expression can be provocation in terms of contexts that resist transformations, especially if the stimuli come from sources not

legitimised by common sense. I frequently act pushing the limits!

I am the incarnation of the breach between the North and South, and of the breach that also exists between the globalising economic-social forces and the local cultures. A breach that provokes a continuous oscillation of one's own image, and in which I have not found solutions of survival other than those of continuing to search incessantly, moving along the imbalance. In the practice of the imbalance, provoked by a mobility unleashed in different places, I have discovered that it is possible to be injured and also die because of intercultural dialogue, both in the EuroMed space and in other places on the Earth.

If the European Commission fosters an ethical campaign on the comparison of differences with a view to stimulating its practice, it is welcome! But it is difficult to evaluate which and how many energies it will be necessary to mobilise, in terms of individuals, artists or groups, in order to safeguard the bordering cultural zones, given that in many countries of the Mediterranean the public policies and institutions are still maintained as systems of legitimised corruption, denying the right to citizenship and democracy. We have few hopes of surviving with our cultural, artistic and international cooperation projects when from



Beirut Box performing. Installation by Ornella D'Agostino and Carlo A. Borghi.  
Collage by Carlo A. Borghi. Photo by Alessandro Melis.

North to South in the EuroMed area the conditions of peoples and individuals who emigrate are getting worse, when the multinationals of globalisation, small and large scale, are ending instability, vulnerability and the task of searching, which form part of the risk base involved in the creative processes. And intercultural dialogue – if it is not understood as a creative process – runs the risk of being exhibited as an identity parade which is confronted based on the pride of belonging, at the most making the effort of reciprocal gratification in the mutual recognition of similar features.

No thanks! Stimulating pride in identity is easy because it is a feeling rooted in the

established cultures, in the explicit ones and also in the masked. If it does not stimulate the deconstruction of both collective and individual identity, the dialogue between the differences is no more than a publicity and propagandistic ruse to promote ideas without specifying the practices and strategies to carry them out, and without understanding that the promotion of ethical and political values must provoke processes of transformation. The processes of transformation, at least in some their phases, are painful and slow itineraries. The time given to them is always too fleeting; time is expensive and frequently the investments made in culture in many regions



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Collage by Carlo A. Borghi. Photo by Mario Garbati.

of the EuroMed area are casual, disperse and scarce.

And what about the artists? Nomads full of contradictions, between the search for success, on the one hand, and the revolutionary legacies that feed a critical thought, on the other. How can they participate in the demolition of the geographical, cultural and perceptive frontiers? If, on the one hand, art can be the medium par excellence to go on freeing oneself of certainties and to renew our view of ourselves and our interlocutors, on the other, the artistic contexts are strengthened on the basis of protectionist dynamics. Even the contemporary art circles do so, perhaps more ostensibly than other circles,

to defend themselves from the risk of official approval, in a continuous and spasmodic attitude which has the object of producing originality and differentiation. And if we agree that intercultural dialogue also means establishing a comparison between the big and the small, the consolidated and the unstable, the famous and the emergent, how can this be fitted into a EuroMed world of art in which the distances between North and South, tradition and contemporaneity, are immense seas of distortions and the untranslatable. Therefore, there is reason to fear that the policies that promote intercultural dialogue are now making strides to create paths which induce artists to meet

each other, to collaborate and move towards other worlds even though they may not have chosen this, and even though they are not aware of the distances and possibilities of distortion involved in these practices. Because, whatever the desire, the force of impact of the artistic product is still a priority in terms of the quality of the meeting, of a meeting that, in the end, can also legitimise ignorance and the fragility of the codes and styles that try to redeem themselves of inhibitory systems and incorporated immobilisations.

*Fostering mobility towards other worlds to relate to is healthy because it can help to evade the perceptive prisons that the places of custom can represent*

Because legitimising the emersion of the expressive contradictions and fragilities in those places where the definition of contemporary art is still being sought and giving oneself the time to transform the shapeless or saturated material of inhibitory legacies means that *the best* can be *the worst* if it is uprooted without respect for the differences and in the vain discourse of the urgency that demands it. The insistence with which the “North-Euro” promotes “innovative” artistic practices and visions towards the “South-Med”, without assuming that such innovations are perhaps undesired and out of place, moves us to think that the need for mobility is similar to the need for exporting which is innate in the markets, regardless of the category they belong to.

But artists, people, thanks to specific induced cultural policies, are meeting each other and uprooting experiences from one place to

another, and this mobility, which was in crisis before being defended and conquered, because in the EuroMed area not everyone moves with the same ease, is producing dynamics that must be recognised and observed, because we can also die of intercultural dialogue through abstinence, once it has been tried.

Fostering mobility towards other worlds to relate to is healthy because it can help to evade the perceptive prisons that the places of custom can represent. The exoticism of the different languages is strong, and can become a drug of evasion, of a flight from a routine of oppressive localisms for artists and for people. But if the geographic and cultural journeys do not also help to transform the conditions of autism and isolation produced by proximity and familiarity, developing instruments to travel with the mentality of change to those places where it is easy to adapt to the custom, in other words, making localisms mobile, intercultural dialogue will be no more than cultural tourism, artistic tourism or war tourism; in other words, an evasive diversion of the *feeling of impossibility* produced by the places of renunciation. But no artist or movement of implantation of the differences will be able to put these transformations into practice if the official policies are not transformed into the opposite of what they are at present: aberrant distortions and perverse mechanisms of concentration of power and resources.

However, while we wait and make the effort to bring about a tangible utopia, we can do no more than endorse those policies designed to invite us to go on confronting each other because, otherwise, perhaps we would be running the risk of remaining too far on the sidelines!