



il funambolo

A theatre company for Ticino and the rest of the world

**THE ART OF THE FUGUE
OR
HOW TO RUN AWAY**

Punctus contra punctum variations for an actor and a restless duck

Puppets, actor and ventriloquist: Ava Loiacono
Text and direction: Mauro Guindani
Puppets: Alejandro Corral and the company
Music: J.S. Bach, Bellini, Bizet, Verdi,
Tchaikovsky
Length: 60 minutes

Lilo is a restless duck, in search of her identity.

Ducks not only live in Duckburg; we find them everywhere, like the Chinese, Turks or Americans; ducks have also arrived here, with us.

As a matter of fact they have always existed and sometimes it is easy to confuse them with geese. But this mistake is part of another story.

Our country, in the long run, might seem narrow-minded and boring; ducks too have the right to escape from daily life, as do geese if they want to avoid becoming sheep.

Continuing in its commitment to researching new ideas, Funambolo's new direction uses illusion and its unmasking through the acting to ask itself and the audience questions about daily reality.

The basic theme is the fugue: that breathless movement in search of who knows what, that each of us experiences once in a lifetime, perhaps in losing and finding oneself.

As in previous plays, dummies and ventriloquism are used, but this time the music acts as an underlying theme. Through the "fugue"- a very rigorous musical form - all possibilities of variations on a theme are explored, through the twists of the 'ricercare', before the theme eventually returns.

Inspired by Bach's masterpiece, "The Art of the Fugue" is a game of hands playing and speaking, masking and unmasking themselves; a play between right and left, between rational and irrational, to find the centre, balanced on a tightrope.

The show can be performed in english, or french, or italian

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The Art of the Fugue. Birth and development of an idea

Our theatrical piece with its significant title "The art of the fugue" is part of a theatre language research which started with "Voices from Elsewhere".

Writing for theatre has never been a desk activity for me, but it has always been directly bound to the scene practice, its demands, its problems, and, not last, to the actors who will perform in it.

The word on the stage is a sound: writing is only a way to fix it on paper. Writing for theatre is also not so far away from the task of a composer who thinks in sounds, or from that of a choreographer who thinks in gestures. The term "ricercare" (to search), borrowed from the late renaissance's musical language, depicts this method of "work in progress" well - a work becoming form. And since a *corpus* - whether natural or artificial - exists by virtue of its substantial form, the form of a body may be described as its 'actuality', or as 'the principle by which its existence is actualised': *forma est actus corporis*.¹

The actor acts the word on stage, turning it into a gesture, which does not necessarily mean only mimicking, but always implies the presence of a human being. It is then always her/him, the actor, the leading character of every performance, who by multiple disguising and various illusions expresses her/himself.

Following the research on scenic illusion through ventriloquism and playing with puppets, which began with "Voices from Elsewhere", this new step has inevitably lead us to tackle the musical form, from the "ricercare" directly to the "fugue".

However, one needs to discern between "to escape from" and "to escape towards", and the fugue, once it has taken place, always implies the consciousness of something to which one has more or less renounced in order to attain something else, often yet undefined. The fugue is then a form of research, and it is certainly not by chance that it has taken such a place in the musical language.

Perfected by J. S. Bach with "The Well-tempered Clavier" first, then with his last unfinished work, "The Art of the Fugue", the fugue, by meandering through the "ricercare" implies a return to the basic tonality and to the theme of the beginning.

Following this form's example we developed a new way of researching.

Even more than in "Voices from Elsewhere", "The Art of the Fugue" uses the stage play to unmask its illusion and to make the imagination evident.

¹ Patrick Boyde - Perception and passion in Dante's Comedy - Cambridge 1993

I usually make immediate use of symbolism, situations and characters when developing a script. Regarding the duck (who does not want to accept its being a duck) the puns and the associations with the current language were almost a must (it is the same in Italian and German as well as in English, "to duck").The range of web-footed birds forcibly lead one to the goose and, thanks to Andersen and his ugly duckling, to the swan.

But what about the white rabbit?

“‘Oh dear, oh dear!’ said the Rabbit. ‘I shall be too late!’ And so, when the White Rabbit ran away, Alice wanted to see what would happen to it. So she ran after it: and she ran, and she ran, till she tumbled right down the rabbit-hole.”

I decided to give a deeper sense to that hidden disquiet character, who seemed a provocation with its unexpected jump out from the cylinder, and it was a pleasant surprise to understand its modern symbolic role.

There are times in our lives when we must make choices based more on instinct than intellect. Often, the soul recognizes its choices before the rational mind has time to process the information.

I realized that in modern rhetoric the white rabbit's image indicates an unexpected event leading to an understanding of a superior reality which suddenly upsets life's convictions. To follow the white rabbit means to pay attention to small, apparently insignificant events. Like Alice, newly asleep, noticed a white rabbit in a waistcoat running with a watch in its hand and was not surprised but she followed it, in the same way anyone fascinated by strangeness can enter a "Wonderland". There are many examples of this image and they often quote the white rabbit outside the fairytale context.

Upon this assertion it did not take long before the white rabbit's character took the role of a sort of ‘demiurge’ who would allow the transfer to another level of consciousness: that of the little spirit in the box.

The character's change from Lilo to Lola and viceversa.

Shortly before the beginning of the rehearsals Alejandro Corral, who already had created both puppets for "Voices from Elsewhere", invented, upon Ava's request, the character of an opera singer he called "Lola". A nearly monstrous character which in its traits looked very much like some characters from Disney's Duckland (Glittering Goldie or also Magica De Spell). This was the spur which led to the development of the story into Lilo's voluntary change to Lola, with its ambitions to become a lyric singer.

It took many hours to make the two puppets of Lilo and Lola into one character who masks itself and then gets unmasked. This also gave me a break from the writing to engage myself directly with the technical needs of the play - with the puppets.

Our contemporary world makes an ever quicker and less conscious use of words and so reduces language to a simple tool of immediate transmission and not of searching for sense. Playing with the language, be it with assonances or associations, can lead to discovering its hidden, unconscious or forgotten significances.

In its desperate search of a personal image, the duck rightly or wrongly makes use of well-known literary quotations. This is only one of the many inferences coming from contemporary life, which, with the help, mainly of the media, turns culture into a varnish which masks the void.

The connection with the world of Messiaen.

The one composer nearest to the true spirit of Bach is Messiaen. It was unavoidable to stumble into his world of sounds. The first contact was naturally with bird song. To create a distance between the two spaces (the here and now and the elsewhere, the daily and the unusual) I had first thought of introducing bird song in the background which would overwhelm and dampen the sound of the piano, between the first and the second scene, upon the characters' arrival at the Canaries. There is only a small leap from here to Messiaen's "Catalogue des Oiseaux". But to mention Messiaen's world also means opening a door to meditation the spiritual world.

Right and left.

It was evident that Lola would sing a lyrical aria and my clear choice was "Habanera" from Bizet's Carmen, because of its affinity with the character but also for its 'chansonesque' style, which makes this aria expressive even when sung by an actor. To be able to accompany it on the piano I needed my left hand to be free: so Lola was put on the right hand.

This act gave me a new awareness, without really understanding. Since it clearly was a game between the right and left hands, it now had to be made even clearer.

Everything seemed to hold together: right and left, white and black, point and counterpoint. Everything seemed to inevitably lead to the eternal conflict between opposites.

We started with a white duck who stole the black jacket's sleeve from the actor to lead her into an imaginary world. But we were now getting to it from the wrong side: the rational one. There was an equilibrium to be found again, and that would be the white rabbit's task. Springing from the black top-hat, the rabbit would reappear, but this time on the left. He would then unmask Lola, leading her back to her true nature.

Introduction of romantic pathos and return to the beginning.

There are three additions of romantic music in strong contrast with the guiding thread of Bach's music. All three underline the illusion of an unattainable world of harmony. The first, from Bellini's "I Capuleti e i Montecchi" directly quotes an escape in

*Miglior patria avrem di questa, ciel migliore ovunque andremo. Ogni ben che il cor
desia per noi luogo amor terrà"*

The second, from the finale of Verdi's "Trovatore" ironically leads to an extreme network of passions. This needs an immediate solution: to turn back in one's tracks, which leads to the equally ironic third quotation, the extremely romantic "Swan Lake".

All three examples are taken from music specially written for the stage; they simply are the lapses of the leading character's journey (the actor's) towards a new consciousness. This can only lead back to Bach and to the contrast of harmonic balance, which is the fundamental theme of "The art of the fugue".

The very simple basic theme is rigorously developed in the "Contrapunctus I" which only appears for a moment at the beginning, when the little spirit springs out of the box only to reappear at the end after all the romantic outbursts. It is from this theme that everything develops. It was always there, shut in the box, but to be able to recognize it one had to experience the whole journey.

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