



O KYKLISMOS TOU TETRAGONOU

INTERVIEW WITH DIMITRIS KARANTZAS

Your work as a young director is marked by an interest for classic authors such as Chekov and Ibsen. Why did *The Circle of the Square*, a play written by a living Greek author, attract you?

Dimitris Karantzas: After I was invited by the Onassis Foundation, I discovered the work of Dimitris Dimitriadis, including *O kyklismos tou tetragonou* (*The Circle of the Square*). I was at first terrified by the scope, the forms, and the content of that play. But I kept coming back to it, and became more and more interested not so much in its parallel stories or in the types of characters it uses, but in its deeply musical nature. I think this play is first and foremost a score. In a play, the rhythm of the language, the way it condenses to then break down, always fascinate me because they are a source of great beauty. In *The Circle of the Square*, which is based on a principle first of repetition, then of combination—of which there could be an infinite number—of four initial scenes, the language is, at first, almost epic. Progressively, its sweeping rhythm turns into a series of scattered words, and it ends up sounding much like the music of John Cage. What is the function of this repetition? By presenting situations that seem at first commonplace—a series of failing love stories—it seems to me that Dimitriadis explores the effects of the weakening of the narrative thread, and the progressive transformation of eleven distinct voices, belonging to eleven distinct characters, into a unique scream. It is by diving deep into what characterises those voices, by seeing those characters from up close, that we end up with this scream, an expression of absolute despair. Every single situation we encounter is a dead end, the characters unable to avoid the same pitfalls, and this context eventually leads to the rise of a single voice, which struggles to find an answer to its own existence. Once all the possibilities this repetition opens up have been explored—because as it is the case with every human being, those voices cannot shut up on their own—they end up switching places, their only goal being to be able to keep talking, to continue to express themselves.

What is it exactly those voices say, when they become a single voice?

The score of the play is very structured, very carefully composed—I therefore assumed that the author wants his text to be followed very closely. But beyond the design of the writer, I see the existential anxiety that exists in each and every one of us. The play is like an attempt, for each of us, to listen to the rhythm of our own breathing.

Do you see a relationship between the content or the form of *The Square of the Circle* and the current situation in Greece, like the directors of other Greek plays that will be performed at the Festival suggest they do in theirs? In other words, can *The Square of the Circle* be read as a metaphor for the troubles your country is going through today?

The situation in our country is, I believe, a prism through which we have no choice but to see things. Once we've been through it and assimilated it, that situation influences us. How could it not? But it doesn't mean that every single Greek work has to talk about those issues. We are all influenced by external factors; creation, in Greece like everywhere else, happens in a specific environment.

The basic events of the play are, you said it, commonplace: they feature characters incapable of facing romantic situations that question who they really are. But the repetition of those situations leads inevitably to violence and death. Do you think this is the only way we can face those existential issues?

I don't think the play offers any solution to violence, death, and suicide. Quite the opposite, in fact: the repetition and endless return of the characters to those solutions almost negates them. The very structure of the play, with all its darkness, contains a sliver of optimism. The fact that those characters, who struggle and come to the extreme solutions that are murder or suicide, then come back, return to life, and start over from the beginning, to try to find a solution, to deny the void, the nothingness of non-existence, hints at a hidden hope. The characters touch death, but they overcome it to find an answer to the question of life, of existence. This negates all the banality, all the clichés of love stories the play uses. It's nothing but a pretext to show us the limits of the human, this moment where we brush with our fingertips the questions at the heart of existence.

How would you define the performance of your actors, their relationship to the text?

It's an aspect of my work I'm particularly interested in. I believe one can find freedom in performance only if one is working within a very strict framework. When directing a play, I first spend a lot of time with the actors, working on blocking. The goal is to determine together the objectives of the play, scene by scene, in a very detailed way. Actually, those objectives are divided into two parts: those of the role, and those of the actor who plays that role. It's important to me to know what each actor hopes to bring to the play through his role. A role is carried by an actor. He should watch himself as he performs. In a way, he is his own director, in regards to his performance. My work as a director



is to make sure we all understand the play the same way. This first stage, to sum it up, is dramaturgy. Then we work, without the text, on improvisations based on the themes of the play, in order to explore the language of the stage, of the body, of space; the language and the geometry of the body in a given space, and how those can change at any given moment based even on a tiny shift in one of its components. It's the combination of those two stages that then makes the show.

During rehearsal and those moments of improvisation with the actors, how did their own experience with love, possession, or frustration influence the way they understood their characters?

Did that create interferences?

Personal experiences are always the source we come back to in order to create. To me, a role is the meeting point between an actor, a specific actor, and the information given by the play. That being said, during rehearsal, I never stop to discuss my or the actors' personal experiences. That sounds very risky to me; diving into someone's personal history can stop the work dead in its tracks, can sometimes turn to psychodrama. When we're rehearsing, I prefer to force the actor, within a specific direction, to use his personal experience within a process of improvisation; this leads to actors proposing intonations in which I try to detect the largest possible range of sensibilities.

Interview conducted by Laurent Muhleisen.

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