



Drawing - Federica Terracina

People of Altofest

Mimma Valentino / Researcher at Orientale University in Naples

Community vs People of Altofest. It is one of Altofest's watchwords, next to 'gift'. After all, the concept of community implies the gift, it contemplates it in its very etymological root, *cum munus*. To donate, or rather to give oneself, to "face existence outside of oneself", "to address the other" and almost "to expropriate yourself in his favour" (R. Esposito).

It is one of the founding principles of the fest, in the Neapolitan as well as the Maltese edition, and it is also the main theme of this second week of Altofest Malta. The relationship, reciprocity, hospitality – meant as an exchange or cultural barter between guest and host (E. Benveniste) -, the desire to be "infected" are at the base of that "experimental sociality" hypothesized by Anna Gesualdi and Giovanni Trono. These are indeed the ethical and aesthetic principles as well as the dramaturgical components that determine the writing of the Altofest work. In this perspective, the usual roles (actor-spectator) are subverted, the daily places are redrawn, the private being of the domestic space is demolished, and new possibilities for a dialogue between art and the polis are explored.

Based on such a political and creative tension, the artists involved in the Fest, during the days of this special edition conceived for "Valletta 2018", have invaded and continue to invade the human and urban geography of Malta, the houses and the city places, giving life to a live and collective theatre, a "laboratory city", intended as a place of experimentation with new forms of art capable of "infecting" the entire community. This way of conceiving artistic intervention clearly implies the idea of a 'political' commitment (in the etymological sense of the term): the performative event directly involves the polis, calling it and incorporating it into the processes of dramaturgical elaboration and construction; for their part, the inhabitants open themselves to the 'intruder', allowing them to cross the

limen of their domestic intimacy.

Taking up again the phenomenology of the encounter and clash between guest and host expounded by Klossowski, it seems that the donor/homeowner awaits "anxious on the threshold the alien liberator appeared on the horizon", thus considering hospitality not as "an accident [...]" but as the very essence of both guest and host". The Altofest "laboratory city" thus becomes an immense anthropological warehouse located at the

centre of the Maltese community. The citizens of the island are not just passive observers, as they are directly called into question as donors, as spectators, as scholars, as simple travellers who occasionally or accidentally cross the streets of Valletta, the archaeological sites of Rabat, the alleys of Zeitun, the Majjistral Park. Walking through the houses and buildings, they come across known or familiar places - from the Okella Agius building to the Saint Joseph Home - 'renaming' them through the language of artistic contamination.

At the same time, performers of different backgrounds dialogue with native groups, but also with ordinary people, sharing physical and mental places, daily moments and artistic reflections; private sphere and spectacular event are constantly confused, in a continuous trespassing between the two dimensions, which are intimately connected. The Aesthetic - the *pharmakon* of art - thus enters the daily routine, giving rise to a new social pattern, to an absolutely new type of relationship: artists and donors share not only the same inhabited space, but a vision and a

koinè. Starting from this "zone of promiscuity" the performers carry out their interventions throughout the island, in an acentric perspective which determines a sort of circularity between art and sociality. A constant con-division, an unavoidable con-tact, an authentic co-habitation in the most disparate places and spaces. A community, once again, that has the breath of the entire laboratory that is the city.

From the 13th April until the 13th May, 20 residents and communities of Rabat, Manikata, Qormi, Hamrun, S.ta Venera, Żejtun, Bormla, Birgu, Sliema, Gzira and Valletta will host international artists in their houses or workplaces, offering them hospitality. Therefore, the intimacy of domestic interiors and the unique landscape of Maltese territories becomes the scene of artistic residencies: during a two-week process each artist re-qualifies one of his/her works engaging a specific dialogue with the offered space. The same spaces will be then opened to the audience, to show (share?) the re-born (regenerated?) works. This proximity exposes both, the resident and artist, to a mutual dispossession: the first renounces to his exclusive rights on the places and objects of his daily life to welcome the artist and his practices, while the artist allows his artwork to be compromised by this encounter.

Abandoning the institutional space it was conceived for, the artwork is indeed displaced: it loses his ordinary frame and all technical supports, while the relationship with the inhabited space, his memories and geometries, forces the artist to let it evolve in his essential meanings and forms.

The "space donors" are the crucial elements of the project. Accepting the challenge of integrating their everyday life with the revelation of the artistic creation, they become the first "actors", "initiators" of Altofest's process.

Thus the festival aims to call into question the boundaries between public and private, creating a no-ownership area and to activate an experimental social dynamic between residents and artists, with the intent to change the art's understanding of both parts and to affect the geographical urban and social texture of the city.

Altofest and Valletta 2018

Graziella Vella / Research Coordinator, Valletta 2018 Foundation

As a Valletta resident, born and raised in Valletta, and working with Valletta 2018 since the very beginning of this exceptional adventure, I have experienced the city of Valletta embarking on a radical change. The city has become a more accessible space, with open and accessible spaces, and abandoned buildings being given a new lease of life. This, combined with the Valletta 2018 Foundation's extensive Cultural Programme, has ensured the city is once again a cultural hub. Albeit some issues still needing to be tackled after 2018, the city has overcome a strong period of decline and is now at a peak.

The city is now a space for interaction, where the community interacts with its respective members and meets other communities. The concept of human geography is developed further within the city space. The residents themselves experience a

sense of intimacy with the city, an extension of their home. All these changes, have created a sense of displacement, which create new synergies, and sometimes tensions between different groups.

The work of the Valletta 2018 Foundation has focussed on making culture more accessible, providing a varied programme of events for active participation by different groups. The Valletta 2018 Cultural Programme extends beyond the walls of Valletta to all the Maltese Islands, and this is also reflected in the programme of Altofest. The Foundation has also embarked on extensive evaluation process which looks at understanding the impact generated by Valletta 2018.

As part of this process, we ask questions such as, how is Valletta 2018 changing or re-shaping our identity? How can we evaluate the success of artistic interventions? How can we say artistic

projects have met their objectives? How do we actually measure successful participation rates?

On a more personal level, I ask questions like, how has my city really changed? What was the real impact on my city, on my surroundings and for myself, of this Capital of Culture? Will I still be able to live in Valletta after 2018? Is it possible to obtain a balance for residents, businesses and the artistic community? Can we all 'reside' in 'our' city? Can it be our home and playground at the same time?

Taking the case of Altofest, one of the objectives is to create the so-called unforeseen. In this case, can we really define success? Should we do so? And if not, how can we evaluate similar projects? Shouldn't we look more at understanding the discoveries, the experiences generated in such contexts, by the artists, donors, communities and participants, rather than understanding whether

similar projects have been 'successful'? Especially for projects where the main objective is to actually 'lose control' over what we have planned on....

In conclusion, the Foundation has focussed the work on its Cultural Programme to ensure that Valletta 2018 is not just about 2018. Once 2018 is over, the real success will be measured by quantitative and qualitative data. But, the real success of Valletta 2018 will be measured by how many people have experienced new cultural events and the new skills gained. Possibly more importantly, the real success of Valletta 2018 will be 'measured' by the experiences and interactions generated. That will be the real success of the European Capital of Culture, and it is with this in mind that Altofest is proudly part of the Valletta 2018 Cultural Programme.

The link between community and culture

JosAnn Cutajar / Lecturer and researcher at the Gender Studies Department, University of Malta

The word 'art' is often used to refer to artistic phenomenon which societies consider unique. What is deemed as high culture, is reserved for the few, those who have high economic or educational backgrounds to create it or consume it (Williams, 1974). Altofest is trying to do away with this, by taking what is perceived as unique, to the local.

'Ordinary' people have their own 'art', one that helps to celebrate the notion of 'communitas' (Victor Turner). Cultural artefacts or events which celebrate the community, tend to be regarded as 'low' culture. Boissevan's anthropological study of Maltese festas and Good Friday celebrations demonstrate how important these pageants are to help bring people together.

Community cultural events such as feasts of patron saints, or cultural events organized by local council help to reiterate the idiosyncratic identity of a locality (Muscat 2008). They promote social cohesion, instances where "people's sense of community, their sense of belonging to a neighbourhood, caring about the people who live there, and believing that people who live there care about them (Portney & Berry 2001, p. 71).

Maloney et al. (2008) maintain that communities are located in specific cultural, economic and political contexts which shape, and structure how they operate. With Altofest, there are two communities involved – the artists and the organisers of the artistic events and the communities in which the space donors are embedded. Both play a crucial role.

Van Schaik (2002, p. 7) maintains that socially involved people build reciprocal relationships that help generate interpersonal trust.

These reciprocal relationships, in turn, helps build social capital, and social capital enables actors to secure benefits on an individual or collective basis. Association in voluntary organisations helps generate both internal effects on the member who participate, such as habits of cooperation, solidarity and public spiritedness (Maloney et al. 2008, p. 285) as well as external effects on society, because they help bring about change in that micro or macrosocm.

The objective of Altofest is twofold – it is to showcase the idiosyncrasy of the locality, and generating habits of cooperation, solidarity and public spiritedness beyond the community. The formation of links with communities and individuals beyond the community help in effecting effective socio-economic regeneration that benefits those within the community (Cutajar, 2008).

Letki (2008) maintains that people residing in areas with low neighbourhood status tend to have lower levels of interpersonal trust levels. This leads to a negative sense of belonging which has a detrimental effect on the organisational involvement of community. Letki (2008, p. 105) adds that residents in low status neighbourhoods also tend to distrust 'outsiders'. Social inequality and deprivation leads to what Putnam (as cited by Fieldhouse 2008, p. 27) refers to as a 'hunkering down'.

The Altofest experiment might help to undermine all this. Cattle (2008, p. 13) maintains that when different social groups share spaces, this might facilitate the propagation of mutual knowledge, understanding and trust. This does not happen on its own, but a project like Altofest might help catalyse this.

Community

Marcia Grima / Regional Coordinator - Valletta 2018

Altofest plays with the ordinary, bringing together artists and non-artists; in houses, workshops, schools... Slowly, subtly, something occurs between artists and hosts which interrupts the familiar rhythms of normality, allowing for the birth of something new and unexpected. The alchemy of Altofest lies in its humanity and its trust in artists and space donors to open up to one another and to follow a path together, culminating in a public performance.

I'd like to adopt three concepts here to help understand better the dynamics at work in Altofest: **liminality**; the **gift** and **communitas**.

The **liminal** has been used to describe rituals within traditional societies that free participants from normative behavior. The liminal incorporates processes of separation, followed by transition, and finally re-aggregation into social structures. These can be transformative such as rites of passage into adulthood (Van Gennep). They can invert normality such as carnival. Victor Turner says that liminality is lies within social structures but also offers space for creative and critical re-imaginings of dominant discourses and can sow the seeds for social change.

Wibstutz distinguishes liminality in theatre from rites of passage. Unlike rituals (eg. baptism) spectators return to normal everyday life unaccompanied by a new identity. However, what happens when the line that separates performance and normality becomes blurred? Last weekend in Rabat and Manikata, I would suggest that liminality was not contained within the performance but was present throughout the residency.

Last year, the creators of Altofest asked me and my colleagues at Valletta 2018 to find 'space donors'. Residents in several Maltese towns and villages were sought out to host artists and offer their homes as venues for

their artistic performances. There would be no payment. The space-donors would offer their hospitality as **gifts** to the artists who in turn would gift their performances back. In the spirit of Mauss, the gifts would create bonds of reciprocity and solidarity between giver and recipient.

The first residencies have just come to a close. What has surprised me is that where my initial concerns were for the hosts, once the residency began I worried more for the artists. Moreover, the hosts worried for the artists. As the artists struggled in different ways with a foreign culture; their new home, their relationship with their hosts and most of all the performance that they were expected to deliver; the hosts became friends, stage-hands, performers and an inspiration for the artists to explore new ways to perform. A dancer gave form to the brittleness of pottery, to the malleability of clay and transformed her body into the fire of the kiln - inspired by watching her host, a potter, at work. In other instances, the space-donors greeted audiences and even performed themselves. The more the hosts 'let-go' and were pulled into the performance, the more one could sense that the performers and hosts were sharing something unique, an experienced that may be defined as **Communitas**.

Communitas describes a shared experience that breaks down social differences and structures and connects people. It is not something that can be imposed; but we recognize the feeling when it happens.

As the experience of Communitas gives way to memory, we may ask what traces of the liminal will remain within the 'ordinary'. What initially may have seemed like 'giving up' one's space, has become something else. One's private spaces have been opened to what Edith Turner described as a 'spring of pure possibility' and this is the gift of Altofest.

indicates only the gift that one gives, not what one receives. All of the munus is projected onto the transitive act of giving. It doesn't by any means imply the stability of a possession and even less the acquisitive dynamic of something earned, but loss, subtraction, transfer. It is a "pledge" or a "tribute" that one pays in an obligatory form. The munus is the obligation that is contracted with respect to the other and that invites a suitable release from the obligation. [...] What predominates in the munus is, in other words, reciprocity or "mutuality" (munus-mutuus) of giving that assigns the one to the other in an obligation [impegno]. But let's also add in a common oath [...].

R. Esposito

Communitas. The origin and the destiny of community (1998).

Translated by Timothy Campbell (2010)



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M² - Intervento Okella Agius Flat

Dynamis / Theatre Company

Theatre and community. The research of connections between art and life is an essential premise of the creative gesture, the one and only way that could truly bring us back to a theatre meant to be "contemporary", thus a theatre of the year 2018, talking about the year 2018, to the people of the year 2018.

We often wonder why audience should come to see our performances or why they should go to theatre. Nowadays, when we are invaded by entertainment. Theatre is a ritual and should refer to a social community; but what is indeed that thing that concerns, involves and detains us without risking to merely fall into distraction?

In our dispositives we are seeking the possibility of a theatrical act as an experience and a collective ritual; thus, when the spectator feels the responsibility of an active involvement into the research process, we are overwhelmed and welcome every aspect of the audience participation.

In this perspective, the audience is an essential element of our performances – particularly in M² -, where the matrix of the action is built thanks to a collaborative game among strangers, in a crescendo of simple actions that the spectator is invited to develop.

Throughout the hypotheses, verifying the given possibilities into the space, the dramaturgical action engages the audience in a dynamic of research, into the exploration of different opportunities. The spectator becomes though part of the process, rather a research, continuously developing on stage.

In our proposal, the audience becomes another acting part, creating a small, extemporaneous community.

In the context of Okella our vision focuses on the relation with the space, with the inhabitants of the place and with the potential spectators; the occasional tourists who, like us, go through that territory with aiming to be observers, the only given possibility. Since we provoke the participants into becoming actors, engaged in the action on stage, we allow the inhabitants of Okella to be mere observers of the action.

In a crescendo, from the ground until the top floor, in the block of flats the sun and the air rise, thus the performance calls into question the external spectators as participants, and the inhabitants of Okella as audience.

We know that human beings lack of fantasy: when we are young, we cannot imagine our elderly age; when we are healthy we cannot imagine how it is to be sick.

The power of theatre allows us to play, provoking and enlarging our empathy, creating the conditions, occasions, dynamics, could overturn the roles and break the rules.

Although, just for an instant.

Milano-Malta: logbook

Phoebe Zeitgeist / Theatre Company

Malta, 2018. On Monday we arrived in La Valletta and we are hosted by the Hamrun Scout Community.

Immediately the place, the space and the community offered us several suggestions. Immediately we asked ourselves a question: how can art emerge from the community as its distinctive expression, becoming in the meantime an instrument of social growth, fostering the formation of a future cultural legacy?

Focused on this main question, the project Nick of The Abyss starts from the narration of a local myth, an island's myth, collected by the folklorist Giuseppe Pitrè from the sicilian oral tradition, but also present in other versions around the mediterranean cultures. This myth has met Hamrun Scout Community. Hamrun is a particular district, one of the most marginal of Malta; Scout Community is a historical association, of military mold for educational purposes with a precise hierarchical order. Out of the Scout Centre's gates disorder dominates; within the gates order dominates. But also the music. Here the children grow surrounded by music, by sound, in disguise (the experience of kilt, livery, impersonation), in the band.

Through a workshop, we involved children as well as adults of Hamrun Scout Community. In this part of the residency, we asked to the children to paint 'light' drawings, starting from the idea of a favorite fish (at the beginning the scoutmaster authorized only this activity). After they worked on the texture of the skin of these fish. We try to involve adults and other scouts too. We asked them to participate only one evening. They should learn a pop song and propose something of their repertoire. We don't know if they'll do it. We are still waiting for an answer. But, even if it were to be a monotone symphony of a single tiny instrument, it will be greatly significant.

Nothing in Common

[...] as dictionaries show, the first meaning of the noun *communitas* and of its corresponding adjective, *communis*, is what becomes meaningful from the opposition to what is proper. In all neo-Latin languages (though not only), "common" (*commun*, *comun*, *kommuni*) is what is not proper [proprio], that begins where what is proper ends [...]. It is what belongs to more than one, to many or to everyone, and therefore is that which is "public" in opposition to "private" or "general" (though also "collective") in contrast to "individual" [particolare]. In addition to this first canonical meaning, which is already traceable to the Greek *koinos* (and also translated in the Gothic *gemein* and its derivatives *Gemeinde*, *Gemeinschaft*, *Vergemeinschaftung*), there is still another meaning to be added, one, however, less obvious because it transfers properly within itself the larger semantic complexity of the term from which it originates: *munus*. [...] the *munus*

In the space of theatre

At the Doria Pamphilj Gallery in Rome, there is a painting by Joseph Heintz the Young (named Piazza S.Marco, being part of a serie of landscape paintings, realised in the city of Venice around 1648), extremely interesting to us due to what it suggests about *Commedia dell'arte* and theatre in relation with the life of the city.

The subject is San Marco square (where the painter has imagined a bright red pavement), full of people, masks and animals, seen from the point of view where nowadays the Napoleonic wing is. [...] The masks are on the stage but also all around, in the meanwhile watching other shows where the same identical masks play, thus participating to the comedy they play themselves, inventing elsewhere fragments of a show.[...]

In such meeting place theatre has invaded

all: and beside the "focus point" being unique (the stage, made of planks of wood), the masks and the audience bring the show all over the place. More than ever, it is a synthesis and an intuition of what mainly had been or could had been *Commedia dell'arte*: an example of its contemporaneity/coexistence in the relationship with the society and the mask, of its presence in the fundamental meeting point of the city, of its possibility of going beyond the scene, in a continuous pendulum of the masks between the square and the theatre.

The representation in Heinz's painting seems to me the most stimulating one not only for what it says about the theatre all'improvviso and about the relationship carried out between community and theatre by that time, moreover it inspires me and

offers several starting points to develop topics that I particularly care about : theater as a happening and theatre as a meeting place. Those topics imply the fundamental question associated to theatre, which is the concept of *SPACE* in relation with the cultural environment surrounding it. A non speculative theatre holds the writer and the spectator together in a new straight relationship directed against the prejudice that is in each of us, the prejudice of a perspective theatre.

It is a matter of making theatre a space ideally similar to the contemporary city, a matrix of a mesh of equal size, a place of apparently equal right entitled individuals. A space organically a-centric.

Giuliano Scabia
"Teatro", Il, 1968.