Author: Andrea Moneta

Title: Discovering the *Altera Forma Urbis* of Rome through a site-specific project and performance at Garbatella district, Rome.

Project in collaboration with Triangolo Scaleno Teatro, Festival Teatri di Vetro 3, Municipality XI of Rome - Urban Centre, MA Digital Theatrical Urban Scenography of University of Rome La Sapienza, Archabout Association.

Abstract:

The aim of the research enquiry was to uncover old and recent past history of Rome through a urban scenography design project that produced an exhibition (output 1: *Segni Percorsi*) and a sited performance (output 2: *Tramandala*), in the Garbatella district of Rome. Specifically, the research-led project was initially inspired by the 'invisible' structural urban form of Rome, the 'Altera Forma Urbis' in the shape of a 'Star'. The aim was to explore connections with its contemporary structure focusing on the Garbatella district, area of study of the research. The final output (exhibition and a performance) was based on the findings of both historical and experiential analysis of the territory of the Garbatella district. The process in fact, revealed stories and characters that became the content of the storytelling of a site-specific performance for Teatri di Vetro 3, a site-specific theatre festival based in the courtyards of Garbatella's building lots. Methods used to explore these enquiries involved recent studies by Italian archaeologist Giuseppe Lugli and his son Pier Maria Lugli (2006) on the 'Altera Forma Urbis' of Rome; the use of location-based digital technologies (*Geo-Blog*) for mapping, and *Scenarchitecture*, a trans-disciplinary methodology developed by Moneta (2012) for reading and interpreting the Genius Loci. The project involved 12 students of Module of Scenography of MA Architecture course at University of Rome La Sapienza, that exhibited their works at Urban Centre of Municipality XI of Rome, and then devised and performed during Festival Teatri di Vetro 3. Output 1 was funded in kind by Roma Europa-Palladium Foundation and output 2 by the Municipality XI of Rome. Feedback collected during the exhibition and after the performance evidenced the engagement of the audience with the ancient and recent past of Garbatella. The dissemination of the work includes two published articles.

The origin of the project

Tramandala was a site-specific project that included an exhibition and performance both led by Andrea Moneta and devised and performed by a group of students of his Module of Scenography of MA Architecture course, University of Rome La Sapienza. The Performance was included in Festival Teatri di Vetro 3, in collaboration with the Roma Europa-Palladium Foundation and the Municipality of Rome. Tramandala project was divided into various performative moments within the TDV3 Festival, in particular between the Palladium theatre and building lots n.12, 14, 16 and 25 of the Garbatella, a popular district in Rome. On Sunday 17 May 2009 twelve students staged a promenade performance inspired by their research on the Garbatella district guiding the spectators through the various performances of the 'official' Teatri di Vetro Festival program. As final event, after reaching Lot 12, an installation-performance was created that redesigned the *Altera Forma Urbis Romae*, the original, secret structure network of Ancient Rome, that was used as the initial framework of the mapping carried out in the area by the students of the module, in the initial phase of the research. Going in parallel with the performance was Segni Percorsi (Path Signs), an exhibition of urban scenography projects of the Module of scenography of prof. Andrea Moneta, realised in the territory of the Municipality of Rome XI. The exhibition had the Patronage of the Municipality of Rome and was organised with the collaboration of Urban Centre Rome XI in the district of Garbatella, Rome.

The exhibition was held at the Urban centre from 16 to 22 May 2009. The site-specific design projects collectively depicted the stories of Garbatella district, putting together interviews with the inhabitants, archive data, practices, memories and imaginaries which emerged from the encounter with the territory, after an experiential perception mapping of the street and squares of the district. In the spaces of the exhibition, in addition to the display of the projects' drawings and digital materials, it has been displayed the methodology underlying the mapping work carried out on the territory, including the analysis' materials and methodology of the MA Urban, Theatrical and Digital Scenography of University La Sapienza, directed by Andrea Moneta, that acted as the research framework.

Tramandala and Segni Percorsi: a story.

The experience with Teatri di Vetro 3 stems from the interest that the Module of scenography and the MA Urban, Theatrical, Digital Scenography have developed around the theme of urban transformations, identifying in the XI ° Municipality (Ostiense and Garbatella districts), as the place in which exists a concentration of most evident and substantial urban modifications of the city of Rome. The first operational step of the project consisted of a "mapping" of the aforementioned territory realised by the 70 students of the Module, in a sort of a direct survey on the field that took into account -above all- the perceptive and relational side of the student/observer, during a personal and subjective exploration of places and people. The aim of the mapping was to record their own feelings and moods, to discover the hidden stories of the places, to experience direct contact with the inhabitants and then, to report all of this in the form of graphic indications, texts, photos, videos, interviews. The fact that half of the students were Erasmus, coming from all over the world, and that most of the Italian students were not originally from Rome, facilitated the impartiality of the operation. Not being familiar with the place, objectified the sensory inputs, avoiding the bias of "already seen" or "already heard" that would have damaged the essential 'open minded' approach that could guarantee the success of the operation. Perception Mapping was inspired to Psychogeography methods of engagement with the territory (Debord et al, 1981; Powell, 2010), but also to *Scenarchitecture*, a trans-disciplinary methodology developed by Andrea Moneta (2012), that uses the process of reading, understanding, and interpreting the Genius Loci as an in-depth exploration and expression of Spatial Practice and community engagement. The mapping, although it was necessarily an act as disconnected as possible from one's own certainties and knowledge, nevertheless needed to be linked to the intimate structure of the city and its history. Only an approach that had considered the evolution of the events that generated the relative places, could have guaranteed a stronger formal result related to the relationship with the context. The places of the starting points of these three mappings into which has been divided the XI Municipality (Ostiense, Garbatella, Parco della Caffarella), had been identified by referring to the design of the Altera Forma Urbis Romae, an incredible system of relationships - voluntarily kept secret for centuries - which links the urban structure of the city of Rome to the design of a "Star" shape.

The Star of Rome and Garbatella

The 'Star of Rome' was a research study by Pier Maria Lugli (2006), that identified the hidden alignments in the topography of ancient Rome and the reconstruction of the "Altera Forma Urbis" of the city, or its 'other' (secret) form of Rome. This interesting study was taken up by prof Gianfranco Moneta within his academic research on the urban morphology and transformation of the city of Rome and applied to the Module of architectural design at University La Sapienza. Here, he implemented the shape of the Star of Rome on the architectural design of the contemporary Rome, giving to his students the possibility to experiment this incredible urban 'structure' linked to the origins of the town, with their architectural design projects. Gianfranco Moneta had the intuition to

'expand' the Star that was originally built in the first and then fifth mile from the city geographical centre of the Republican age, towards the seventh mile of the contemporary city limit of Rome. In this way, he could reconstruct the 'image' of the Star on the consolidated city, included in the GRA (Rome's Ring Road), to investigate both the permanence and innovations in the structure of the urban system. Each point of the original Star of Rome, the nodes, axes and inflections, identifies positions and alignments of the monuments of ancient Rome. There are therefore interesting correspondences with the updated, 'contemporary Star of Rome': in particular, in the Municipality XI, on which this research study is focused, at node n.13, derived from the place of the "House of Augustus", today we can find the Garbatella Metro station; in the node n.61 "Spine of the Circus Maximus" we can find nowadays, the Basilica of San Paolo; the node n.79 of the "Divi Claudii Temple" identifies another historical place of the Ancient Rome, but outside the Roman walls: the "Temple of the God Redicolo" in the Caffarella park. The current research project selected these three historical landmark point of the original Star of Rome as starting points, therefore, not linked to the history of a specific monument, but related to the intimate relationship they have with the overall structure of the city (the 'image' of the city), a relationship that binds the parts to the whole and which considers the whole as an inseparable set of parts or elements. This is the evidence of a very important aspect of urban and architectural design in Ancient Roman times, that has been structured and defined as 'Architecture by Element' into a design methodology by Gianfranco Moneta in his book Logica e Complessità dell'Architettura (2002).

All the information collected by the students during the 3-hours mapping activity in the Garbatella district were organized and metabolized in two A3 documents. In each document was reported the single path done by the student, including all the information collected; using this material, each student realised draft proposal for a site-specific performance. The individual performances had to be inspired by the stories identified during the mapping, so to create bespoke related urban scenography designs. The mapping material was requested in the Google Earth .kml format, and reported by each student on the same platform, a useful location-based digital tool to collect all the traces of the paths taken in the mapping, and as a database of all the related information acquired (photos, notes, graphic indications, etc.). Subsequently, the students met together in small groups to build the design proposal for the final exam. They started to put together elements derived from the initial ideas of their designs, or from their personal engagement with the territory. No specific text was previously assigned. Students had to explore and devise stories inspired by the urban spaces, the architecture, the characters that lived there - real or imaginary – met during their urban 'derive' within the district. This incredible and rich material made up of annotations, ideas, insights, images, offered an equally rich production of operational and design proposals, which then merged into the design material exhibited in the "Segni Percorsi" exhibition held at Urban Centre in the following weeks.

The idea of giving visibility to this original methodology and territorial analysis' material was enthusiastically welcomed by the Urban centre Director, Federica Zampa, who asked to include an official opening of the exhibition and launch of the project for sharing all results in the programming of Urban Centre's events. TraMandala project and methodology, and its final performance were then exhibited in the same places from which the territorial analysis began, and in the same performative areas of the Festival Teatri di Vetro 3. The Urban Centre, in fact, is a space created in the former garage of the local market in via Passino, a central place in Garbatella that represents a point of reference for the inhabitants, a place where memories and social practices are condensed and that it also actively participates in the activities of the TDV3 Festival, since its first edition.

The design of the exhibition run in parallel with the territorial analysis, that generated a set of 70 maps displayed simultaneously with Google Earth on the satellite cartography of Rome. This geo-referenced map on Google included all 70 different paths of the students and their materials, triggering a series of important considerations on the use of urban spaces, on their attitude (or not) to catalyse the attention of those who use them, unknowingly. This generated some interesting questions: why were some paths followed more than others? Why have certain places been reached and others have been avoided? Why do some "weak" historical signs remain and other "strong" contemporary signs dissolve? What is the role of architecture in the relationship between spaces and paths? These and other questions required a qualitative leap in the research activity carried out up to that moment: it was necessary to make the analysis work explicit through the devising of a performative event that would make the research intuitions react with the same places that generated and suggested them.

Twelve students of the Module of Scenography that Moneta led at the Faculty of Architecture decided to embark in this operational proposal, for the realisation of a site-specific project and final performance using the mapping analysis carried out by all the students of the Module. The project was subsequently proposed and then enthusiastically accepted by the Director of the Teatri di Vetro Festival Roberta Nicolai. She understood the importance of an operation which, on the one hand, could offer a live performance generating from the absolutely different and unique point of view of a student of architecture; on the other hand, it could build a live event inextricably linked to the festival spaces which - by chance – have been confirmed, in their locational identities, by the very same mapping of the students graphed on Google Earth. In three months the twelve students and five assistants of the Module devised a performance using all the traditional stages of a site-specific performance. It included designing for a promenade live performance journey across different places, and an in-a-round spatial configuration for the final scene, all in the places of the Garbatella district. It also included the identification of the themes, the construction of the characters, script writing, music and soundscapes, design and creation of CosProp (costumes as wearable sets) and portable, cycle-mounted scenes. Being part of a site-specific theatre festival that used different locations, the students' performance was designed to be a 'fil rouge' to link the different places and performances of the festival. A sort of walking performance that had a number of 'stations' used for our storytelling, inspired to the Garbatella district. Students had to solve problems related to lighting, but also to a complex audience management through the Lots. On a marketing side, a coordinated image for the communication of events was also professionally realised.

The success of the final performance called TraMandala, despite the unexpected challenge of having to manage a larger audience, that was beyond expectations, was great. The students' performance not only could withstand the feared comparison with other professional theatre artists performing on the same event, but it was able to engage the audience with untold stories of Garbatella and related to the heritage of Ancient Rome. The project showed that theatre is alive where passion, commitment and dedication are. It also demonstrated how academic research can creatively be carried out on the territory sharing the results with the inhabitants, through innovative - but concrete - methods of participation. On the same evening, in fact, our "spectactors" could experience both the TraMandala performance and explore its themes by visiting the Segni Percorsi exhibition at the Urban centre, seamlessly, between performance spaces and exhibition spaces. Last but not least, the experience produced a team of people, no longer individual students, but as in a real theatre company, a heterogeneous bunch of characters and therefore, performative specificities, which was then identified with an absolutely perfect name: *'The GarbaTellers'*.

Conclusions

During this project in which the world of higher education meets the delicate yet ruthless world of theatre a "short circuit" on tiptoe, happens, triggering two virtuous mechanisms are generated. On the one hand, the students can better understand the tight requirements and timeline of the theatre professional practice, that is quite different from the muffled, "enchanted" world of the academy. An opportunity to test themselves with the rigour made up of responsibility towards a work team, a schedule and an audience; on the other hand, when the university reacts with the world of art, very interesting synergies are produced, bringing a little freshness and healthy 'madness' into the creative process of theatre. These "virtuous contaminations" can remain mere didactic exercises, or even a missed opportunity; sometimes, instead, and this was the didactic goal of our project, these contaminations could set in motion a fresh, ruthless creative performative process. Its value lies in being generated by a logical as well as abstract process, which result can be classified as truly artistic.

The methodology's logical process that has been used during the project is the starting point of a research that derives from architecture, although it is necessarily linked to an overlap between humanistic and scientific disciplines. History as a process; the city as a set of physical and anthropic relationships, visible and invisible; Place as the collector of this heterogeneous but absolutely necessary set of elements for urban development; they all worked together within the themes of the research. Hence a necessarily long and tiring process, made up of intermediate steps in which the student acquires a method, applies existing knowledge and learns more skills. A student, starting from his/her own skills, can challenge the attitude with a team becoming a specific 'cog' of it in the performing machine. Student learns to respect the schedule and needs of the client, while always keeping alive the artistic sense of the creative proposals; A student learns how to be part of a great team by sharing passions, emotions, difficulties, disappointments, gratifications. Therefore, the student has the opportunity to grow not only as a professional, but above all as a person, acquiring the awareness that culture, in general, and art, in particular, are not abstract discourses, but the result of the construction of an idea and its realization through a methodology, whose final outcome generally reflects its deep understanding and truthful application.

The research highlighted that the difference between those who produce art for the theatre as 'professionals', and those who relate to theatrical art through a university driven experience, is precisely in the specificity of the creative process. While for the former it can arise above all from experimentation, from improvisation on a theme, from the evolution of an approach based on the teaching of the great masters of theatre, or refusing all of this starting from scratch, with 'carte blanche' or zero point. We are talking about a long and continuous path over time made up of infinite adjustments, of imperceptible but substantial changes that make every detail absolutely irreplaceable in the construction of a performance. The academic experience, on the other hand, free from all the aforementioned dramaturgical responsibility of theatre made of research, unaware of the syntactic and performative 'weight' that each theatre production entails, places the research's outcome as the content to work with, the final result to be proposed to the audience. Specifically, in our project, the analysis of the territory through a perception mapping and the reading of the places and the people that lived there, constituted the body of work to distil the final script of the performance. Students of scenography module after the devising process became also performers, mostly without any training, they went on stage practically "without a net", yet performing unique shows, built and adjusted until a few moments before the debut. The final output of the students, even if confined in the boundaries of amateurship, showed hard work, experience and the depth of an operation which was aimed at revealing the Genius of the Place with its peculiar identity and character, and provoking intense spatial experience in the audience. The performance delivered the rich content of stories and characters collected through the analysis of the territory with particular

attention to architecture (intended as a generator of space) and to the system of relationships that the inhabitants have established with these places.

Project lead and coordinator: Andrea Moneta

Tutors: Tiziana Amicuzi, Emanuela Bonella, Maurizio Crocco, Simona Ortolan;

Collaborators: Francesca Mazzara, Gianluca Moranda;

Students:

(Name, character's name and production roles)

- Joachim Unternaehrer: Doorman; costume design, scripting, exhibition set-up;

- Diana Ciufo: Bike-direction, Future-turistic guide; bike set-up, costume design, music;

- Ernesto Di Giorgio: Bike-Snail, Lamp-man; costume design, bike set-up; exhibition set-up;

- Rami Limam: Bike-Star; bike set-up, exhibition set-up;

- Agnese Samà: Bike-Bale; exhibition concept and set-up; photographer;

- Filippo Rocchi: Gate-Man, costume design, bike set-up; exhibition set-up;

- Elena Presutti: Carlotta-Fountain; costume design, exhibition set-up; music;

- Annachiara Eliseo: Drying rack, Stairs-woman; assistant director, costume design, exhibition set-up testi, set-design;

- Marta De Marchi: Drying rack, Window-woman; secretary, assistant director, costume design, exhibition set-up, scripting, set-design, music;

- Layla Di Felice: Drying rack; drammaturgy, directing, costume design, set-design

- Allegra Albani: Membrane, Gate; graphic design, comunication;

- Francesca Mazzara: Membrane, Window; exhibition set-up;

- Daniela Martinotti: Urban Hotel; light designer, costume design, a costume design, exhibition set-up, scripting;

- Marco Sidoni: Bike-Bale;

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