



Culture as space of encounter, resistance and reconstruction

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As the day and the night make the rhythm of the world's history, violence and its opposite, the respect of the others, are the backgrounds of the history of humanity. Denying the violence, seeking to erase is an illusion, it is like trying to win over the night. Even if it is lighted up from all the sides, like some cities shinning in the night, and we don't see its darkness with our eyes anymore, violence is still here.

So, we have to look at violence's face, in order to understand its functioning, how it begins, which are its deep roots that help its growth. In the same way, the functioning of the human being has to be understood, not only by specialists, psychologists, ethnologists, sociologists, but also by each of us. It is the first step in the transformation process of our society.

1) Culture, space of encounters

“Who is he, the one I am hitting?” calls immediately the next question: “What is this something in me that is hitting him?”. But often, the answer is just silence and inner fog, and it happens like question was never asked.

It seemed essential to me to put back to the every day life those spaces of fundamental questioning, as much in the countries in war as in the so called countries in peace.

To explore the mystery, one has to express it. Who am I? Who are you? You are a mystery for me if I am a mystery for myself. Discovering you, I will discover myself, and if I discover in you, who is so different from me, parts of myself, I will discover that in the same time I am unique and strangely like you, that we are sharing the same story, the story of “human beings”, and that we have to write it, together.

To write. There is the privileged field of expressing and sharing. And I think that it is not only the right of the writers and philosophers, but it's everybody's right. Expression is a part of the mystery of the being, and we called it “art” without leaving a real place for it.

In our society, where are the spaces for expression and reflection that would permit to work on the discovery of oneself and of the other?

Being a professor of philosophy for a few years in Paris, I quickly understood the limits of that teaching, more and more accessory in school and not open to everybody. The nature of school is to be a democratic space of learning, because its mission is to be open to all the children with no concern for the origins or social categories they come from. That's why I chose school to open those spaces I called “Writing and acting workshop”.

And the person that comes to create this space of discovery inside the space of learning is not a professor and has no knowledge to deliver. It is a revealing of the artistic energy we all have. It is an “exterior intervening person” who pushes away the classroom door, as well as chairs and tables, and suddenly, in this traditional school environment appears a magical scene, which is possible everywhere there are girls and boys, women and men together, ready to meet but without the essential bond.

We can bring about the Encounter, and it is the part of the exterior intervening person. Intervention is a medical word and that's why I am attached to it. It means there is an illness and the necessity for an intervention in order to heal it. This necessity is big, urgent, and the illness of the soul. Marcus Aurelius wrote, centuries ago: “Philosophy is medicine for the soul”. And time has come for philosophy to be the preoccupation of all, if we want to practice Peace.

Children are the greatest philosophers and questioners. They come to life and never stop questioning it. When small, they are often already haunted by the idea of death. In the workshop I created in kinder gardens I heard this everyday: “ Must I really die? ” asked the children. “ Must my parents die before me? ”. And if the suffering involved in these questions doesn't find an answer, it returns into violence. Violence against the other, which means against himself.

In French suburbs where conflicts are numerous and where I regularly work, a group of teenagers wrote a story that is theirs and it's a story of a 17 years old who kills another boy because of a sordid reason of deceiving. We explored this murder they wanted to write about, and one of them finally said: “The murderer, when he kills the other, it's his own life that he blows away. He thinks he kills the other, but in fact, he kills himself too ”.

Another added, “It's because he doesn't care for life” and another, “Because his own life is worth nothing. He doesn't know the value of life ”. Then, there was a silence. They were discovering together that they never thought about the value of their lives, and that when they tried to destroy other's lives, it was their own lives they were destroying. In order to end up with it. With the suffering. With the absence of hope. With the feeling they are put aside from a society, which forgot to leave a place for them. With the poverty and the injustice. With the ever lasting need for love.

In the emotion of this moment, they became conscious of themselves, and in the same time of the others.

This new conscience appeared after the Second World War and the horror that took place. It put the basis for a real world peace organisation. But it is all the time endangered by longings for political power. We have to make stronger the assembling and uniting of people and make bigger their action. This strength needs room to appear and confirm itself in order to share the suffering produced by the way our century and our societies separated different cultures, religions and social categories. When suddenly, those beings, so different, understand together, that they all have the same fear of dying, the same need for love, the same fear that they are not good enough, they understand the need for sharing the suffering and for overcoming it.

In a very short time, in the discovery of the fears of the others, the walls fall down and appears then the desire to defend together the same condition, with its rights and its duties: the condition of human beings.

2) Space of resistance and reconstruction

In wartime, those spaces become even more necessary, spaces of vitality and resistance against death and suffering that leads to madness.

The workshop I conducted in Sarajevo helped me to check how the expression of suffering in front of the unacceptable builds this System of resistance. First, the burden of each and everyone, put on the paper, then into an independent artistic form created by a group united in the making of an art work, permits to everybody the sharing and makes lighter the insupportable weight created by the violence of the war. But also, in the same moment, victims of war discover a new responsibility, the responsibility of playing a part in the world process of peace. Who can better than those caught up in war, work to preventing that it happens elsewhere?

This mission that I gave to the young and the children I worked with in Sarajevo, gave a completely new meaning to their lives. One of them writes to me from Bosnia: "For me, the wound of the war is incurable, my life will never again be what it should, but to know that I can help other children discover the treasure that is their life, gives me the desire to live."

They fulfil their mission, every day. In Blois, small French town where we played "The Dictionary of life" wrote in Sarajevo and performed by young French and Bosnians, the audience didn't want to leave the theatre after the performance.

So, in the emotion and the silence that followed those words wrote in the war, we started a debate. A 15 years old French girl stood up: she was crying. She told to the Bosnians “ I want to say thank you. And in the same time, I am ashamed. It took so much dead, so much suffering, you had to come all the way here, to make me understand the value of my life ”.

And Emir from Sarajevo answered: “So, all our suffering is not for nothing, and it's great because what is the most hard to accept about suffering is that it is useless.” By a show, by a play travelling from town to town, a bridge is built. By words came from the war, conscience wakes up the peace. For a new generation, hungry to understand, to understand itself, those spaces of expression and reflex ion make a field for encounters, résistance and reconstruction. And the suffering of everyone becomes the base of an Artistic Production that goes back to what for art is born: to find ourselves, centuries after centuries, to recognize ourselves in the work of those before us, to define and assemble ourselves, with our differences, in the universality of our condition. Those spaces must be at the crossroads of differences, in order to make stronger the bridges, the bonds made by those which became conscious of the respect of oneself and in the same way, of others.

The multiplication of associations that try to ease the suffering of minorities (Associations of immigrates women, beaten children, junkies, etc) is of course necessary, but there is also the necessity for fields of encounter, where the diversity of suffering will build bridges that unite us.

This trans-disciplinary, trans-associative approach is the base of a vital consensus, still to be organised as an international net. We all can be, whatever our specificities, builders of bridges, linkers of souls. The fields of application of philosophy are everywhere where humans live: we just need to abandon the worshiping of intellect where we put it and go back to the real function it has and which makes us all artists, go back to the art of living.

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