

The non-school

MARCO MARTINELLI | TEATRO DELLE ALBE



Eresia della felicità by Marco Martinelli | Expo Milano and Festival di Santarcangelo

“This book discusses the invention of a theatrical method called the *non-school*, born in Ravenna and later exported throughout Italy and the world. Over the years, we have worked with many adolescents on texts coming from the classical tradition. We have staged the most “difficult” texts in the most “difficult” situations, often bringing teenagers from poorer areas together with others from more privileged contexts. This was the case in Scampia, the place narrated by Roberto Saviano in *Gomorra*, where we brought students from a well-off neighbourhood in Naples, Piazza del Gesù; in Mazara del Vallo, in southern Sicily, not far from Africa, a city which is half Sicilian and half Tunisian; in Seneghe, a beautiful village on the slopes of Montiferru, in the heart of Sardinia; among the huge apartment blocks in Comasina, a Milanese neighbourhood known above all for being the birthplace of the bandit Vallanzasca; in Lamezia Terme, one of the Calabrian towns under commission for mafia infiltration, set in a land of incredible beauty, working with Lamezia-born and Roma teenagers; in the streets of Venice and in Asseggiano, an outlying area where foreigners are the majority; in Emilia, devastated by the earthquake; and then abroad, in Mons in Belgium, in the villages of the Senegalese savannah, in the Afro-American community of Chicago, among the Puerto Ricans who live in the Bronx in New York, and in Rio de Janeiro.

In all these places, we met hundreds, even thousands of enthusiastic teenagers, who all willingly gave their time and passion to theatrical work, attentive and focused, like volcanoes full of unsuspected energy, and hoped that the intensity they felt on stage – where people who stutterer can sing with confidence, where the shy become lions, where life is turned upside down – would never end. In a word: they were in love. Love? What’s love got to do with it? It does have something to do with it. It’s like fire. The use of fire is one of the things that set humans apart from animals, at their very origin. Let’s try to imagine: Homo erectus must have taken fire, in the earliest stages, from natural events such as wildfires, caused by lightning or volcanic eruptions. If the first problem was how to capture it, the next problem was how to keep it alive. And this is a question that concerns us too, not just our ancestors: the problem is not how to fall in love, it is how to feed the flame. It seems that our ancestors found two ways to light a fire: either by using flint, or by rubbing two pieces of wood together. Between these two incandescent methods, it is the latter that interests us. This way of rubbing two pieces of wood together is the *non-school*.

Imagine your children or students as if they were donkeys, because they really are donkeys, and I’m sure that you will agree with me on this point. But imagine them as troubled donkeys, full of fears and shadows, and also unconfessed desires, unexpressed passions, hungry for life, for the unknown, for their dreams. On the other hand, imagine the venerable texts of theatre, all those dusty classics with unpronounceable names: from Aeschylus to the Aristophanes who appears in the title of this book, from Plautus to Molière, Shakespeare, Alfred Jarry and Bertolt Brecht. Now look at them together, the donkeys and the classics, the barbarians and the library: nothing could be further apart, you say?

The donkeys and the classics are kinds of wood that come from trees that grow far apart, at opposite ends of the forest, destined never to meet. But what if someone were to bring them together? And what if, in bringing them together, that someone discovered that they could be rubbed together, until they both reached a very high temperature? Until, rubbing them, a spark was born? Could this be the miracle of fire? No, that’s not possible, you must be thinking. My answer is: it is possible. And I have been experimenting with this way of *rubbing* for twenty-five years.

Marco Martinelli, *Aristofane a Scampia*, Ponte alle Grazie Editore, 2018.

Marco Martinelli and Ermanna Montanari: the Teatro delle Albe/Ravenna Teatro

Marco Martinelli and Ermanna Montanari established the Teatro delle Albe in 1983, along with Luigi Dadina and Marcella Nonni, and now act as artistic directors. United in art and in life, and having been awarded many prizes in Italy and abroad (including 14 Ubu Prizes, the Premio Duse, the Premio Associazione Nazionale Critici Teatro/ANCT and the Golden Laurel at the Mess Festival), they are the founders of an entire artistic community, passing down a poetics that draws from tradition, deconstructing it and concentrating their research on the actor and the spoken word. They create ideas together, working like alchemists, joined in their strong political and aesthetic effort, one of them particularly immersed in vocal research and staging, the other dedicated to writing and directing, with a pedagogical focus. They have been responsible for theatrical, cinematographic and musical creations presented at important national and international festivals, and editorial works released by prestigious publishing houses.

Their pedagogical practices include the *non-school* – a reference point in Italy and abroad – that Martinelli describes in his *Aristofane in Scampia* (Ponte alle Grazie Editore), published in France by Actes Sud, which won the Prize of the National Association of French Critics as “Best book on theatre in 2021”.

The Teatro delle Albe created and operates within Ravenna Teatro, recognised by the Ministry of Culture as a Production Centre and supported by the Municipality of Ravenna with a five-year agreement and by the Emilia-Romagna Region with a three-year agreement, accredited as a training body for live performance by the Emilia-Romagna Region. The Production Centre carries out its activities at the Teatro Rasi and in Palazzo Malagola, where the vocal school having the same name and the Centre for Voice Studies founded and directed by Ermanna Montanari, together with Enrico Pitozzi, are also located.

The *non-school* from Ravenna to Europe and the world

Since 1991, working with high school students and in a close collaboration with local institutions, the Teatro delle Albe/Ravenna Teatro has held the *non-school*, a theatre-educational experience based on the energy of adolescents that is capable of unleashing the art of drama. Over the years, in Ravenna, it has seen thousands of kids develop enthusiasm for the contemporary stage and has deeply revitalised this city's theatre culture. It has taken on the importance, for which it is acknowledged, of an actual period of training.

The origins of the *non-school* lie in that need for a relationship with the other which drives the whole artistic process of Teatro delle Albe/Ravenna Teatro. An ethical and aesthetic élan, a vocation for broadening out, for influencing and being influenced. An alchemical progression that breaks through roles and generations, that flows through a subversive contact, far from the preconceived schemes of theatre pedagogy.

The *non-school* is at once an artistic and educational experience with an important aspect of integration, multidisciplinary approach, cooperation and considerable fallout at social level. It is in fact an invaluable occasion of encounter and comparison, through theatre, among adolescents from different backgrounds, highlighting many of the priorities established at international level such as active, global citizenship and an intercultural attitude.

In 2001 the *non-school* began to travel with its principles of a theatre made up of kids and linked to the outer cities of the world: Marco Martinelli and his actors have worked with adolescents in many Italian cities, from Milan to Mazara del Vallo – as part of the triptych produced by the Ravenna Festival *Ravenna-Mazara 2010* – and Naples-Scampia. In the latter case the *non-school* was transformed with the name *Arrevuoto* and created shows that drew great attention from the media, from the President of the Republic and from writers such as Roberto Saviano. The *non-school* has also appeared in various places in Europe and the world including Chicago and New York (USA), Dakar (Senegal), Caen and Limoges (France), Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), Mons (Belgium) and Nairobi (Kenia).

In July 2011, in the prestigious context of the international theatre festival Santarcangelo 41, directed by Ermanna Montanari, a new and festive course of the *non-school* of Teatro delle Albe was developed, *Eresia della felicità*, a “Majakovskian version” of this thirty-year experience, which involved 200 young people from all over the world who, directed by Marco Martinelli, wielded Vladimir Majakovsky's verses in a large open-air theatre workshop.

In 2012, *Eresia della felicità a Venezia*, once again directed by Martinelli, was the central path of the important Giovani a Teatro project of the Fondazione di Venezia that saw the active participation of seventy young people of the most diverse

nationalities, just as in 2014 in *Eresia della felicità a New York* Martinelli involved teenagers from Manhattan and Harlem – students from La Scuola d'Italia Guglielmo Marconi and the Corpus Christi School, in collaboration with IACE.

In 2022, Marco Martinelli rewrote and directed *The Birds*, one of Aristophanes' masterpieces, for the energy and comic fury of sixty teenagers from Pompeii, Torre del Greco and Naples in a production by the Archaeological Park of Pompeii, in collaboration with Ravenna Festival, Teatro delle Albe/Ravenna Teatro, Teatro di Napoli-Teatro Nazionale, ERT/ Teatro Nazionale and Giffoni Film Festival. After the highly successful and festive outcome of *The Birds*, the Archaeological Park of Pompeii and Ravenna Festival are imagining together with Marco Martinelli a three-year period of work dedicated entirely to the comedies of Aristophanes, directed by him.

The prizes received by the *non-school*

2006 Marco Martinelli receives the 2006 Premio dell'Associazione Nazionale dei Critici di Teatro for *Arrevuoto: Scampia - Napoli*, a three-year project directed by Martinelli and promoted by the Teatro Mercadante in Naples.

2007 The project *Arrevuoto: Scampia - Napoli* (directed by Marco Martinelli, curated by Roberta Carlotto and promoted by the Teatro Mercadante in Naples) won the 2006 Special Ubu Award for "the social, pedagogical and human value of the project, carried out in a particularly difficult social context, and for the expressive force of its staging".

2012 *Eresia della felicità* - a project directed by Marco Martinelli, won the Ubu Special Prize at the "Oscars" of Italian theatre, conceived by critic Franco Quadri, crowning the 21-year-long experience of the *non-school*.

The jury, made up of 54 critics from the national theatre scene, expressed its motivation as follows: "*Eresia della felicità* by Marco Martinelli/Teatro delle Albe (Santarcangelo and Venice), an extraordinary alchemy of Majakovskian poetry and adolescent energy, pedagogical impetus and theatrical questioning, innervated in the 'asinine' and 'Dionysian' vocation of a teacher-child who is intent, with the entire project of the non-school, on 'saving the world with kids'."

2021 The National Association of French Critics chose *Aristophane dans les banlieues* by Marco Martinelli (Actes Sud) as the "Best book on theatre of the year". The book is the French version of *Aristofane a Scampia*, published by Ponte alle Grazie in 2016, translated and edited by Laurence Van Goethem, in which Martinelli narrates, as in a novel, the adventures of the *non-school* around the world, from Ravenna to Dakar, Scampia and New York.

Publications and films dedicated to the *non-school*

Various **publications** have been dedicated to the *non-school*, including:

Noboalfabeto 21 lettere per la non-scuola by Marco Martinelli and Ermanna Montanari, in "Lo straniero", year 5, no. 19, Rome, December 2001; *ARREVUOTO Scampia Napoli*, ed. by Maurizio Braucci and Roberta Carlotto, dramaturgies by Marco Martinelli, L'ancora del mediterraneo, Naples-Rome, April 2009; *Aristofane a Scampia* by Marco Martinelli, Ponte alle Grazie, September 2016; *Aristophane dans les banlieues. Pratiques de la non-école* Marco Martinelli, Actes Sud-Papiers, October 2020.

Numerous **films and documentaries** have been dedicated to the *non-school*, including:

Suburbia Molti Ubu in giro per il pianeta 1998-2008 (2008), by Marco Martinelli and Ermanna Montanari, directed by Alessandro Renda, ubulibri, Milano; *ERESIA DELLA FELICITA' A VENEZIA* (2013) by Alessandro Renda, produced by Fondazione Venezia, Euterpe Venezia, Giovani a Teatro, Ravenna Teatro/Teatro delle Albe; *Eresia della felicità - Le cinque giornate di Milano* (2016) by Alessandro Penta, produced by Olinda, Teatro delle Albe/ Ravenna Teatro, Ravenna 2015 capital of culture; *THE SKY OVER KIBERA* (2019), a film by Marco Martinelli, produced by Ravenna Teatro/Teatro delle Albe in a collaboration with Fondazione AVSI, Vita non profit magazine, Kamera Film, Antropotopia; *fedeli d'Amore* (2021), a film by Marco Martinelli, produced by Teatro delle Albe/ Ravenna Teatro with Antropotopia in a collaboration with the Italian Institute of Culture in Abu Dhabi, the Emilia Romagna Region, Assicoop Romagna Futura general agent for UnipolSai Assicurazioni

Eresia della felicità | Festival di Santarcangelo [trailer](#)

Eresia della felicità | Milano [trailer](#)

Mighty Mighty Ubu | Chicago-USA [trailer](#)
The Sky over Kibera | Nairobi-Kenia [trailer](#)

Excerpts from the press about the *non-school*

"A miracle took place in Scampia. Arrevuoto, a theatre project by the Teatro Mercadante of Naples, this year presents its second movement, *Ubu Under Fire*, a rewrite from Alfred Jarry. About a hundred Scampia kids who act classics of the theatre under the direction of Marco Martinelli [...]. Marco Martinelli is a very fine director of genius who manages to remain faithful to a text and to betray it, as only the best theatre succeeds in doing. He brings together the surreal dimension, making it a concrete and not only metaphoric instrument for understanding his times. All this with the language and faces of kids who, through Jarry, want to talk about their own days. [...] The actors, a hundred or so, are not just outer city kids acting instead of pushing drugs or shooting, it isn't a distraction, an end of term play, but simply the best that Italian theatre has produced in recent years [...]"

Roberto Saviano, La Repubblica, 2 April 2007

"I saw an amazing actress the other night, a woman with 1,000 voices [...]. The American stage debut of Ermanna Montanari wasn't the only reason to see *I Polacchi* an hour-long Teatro delle Albe adaptation of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu the King* at the Museum of Contemporary Art [...] a complicated project, sponsored by the Istituto Italiano di Cultura Chicago, the Consulate General of Italy Education Office, Northwestern University and others [...]. Pa Ubu, a grinning symbol of voracious stupidity in a fat suit, was played by Mandiaye N'Diaye. [...] For two weeks, these actors rehearsed with 10 students from Chicago's public schools. These students were born in Nigeria, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Cameroon and Haiti. They played a roving, malleable chorus of Ubu's followers. The director Martinelli knew how to show off these young actors to advantage. Teatro delle Albe must return, soon. For a production exploring the cyclical ravagements of mankind, *I Polacchi* was a tonic".

Michael Phillips, Chicago Tribune, 11 June 2005

"The challenge was almost too much: to put together real actors and teenagers with zero experience, who moreover speak another language, and create something new from these unusual bases. Ravenna's Teatro delle Albe, a company [...] that has been exploring the area of cultural contamination for years, succeeded. Its show *I Polacchi*, produced with the contribution of ten students of African origin, was staged last weekend in Chicago, achieving a good success with the public and critics. But above all, it achieved the goal of helping young people who have to build a future for themselves day after day in a country that only took them in a few years ago [...]"

Alessandro Ursic, Peacereporter, 14 June 2005

"[...] here it is, the extraordinary choir made up of two hundred young people from all over the world who, outdoors, at sunset, recite verses by Majakovsky, directed with compelling energy by Marco Martinelli."

Renato Palazzi, Il Sole 24 ore, 17 July 2011

"[...] *Eresia della felicità*, the *non-school* of Marco Martinelli and the Teatro delle Albe: every day, outdoors, two hundred young people from all over the world, in a circle and wearing yellow T-shirts, learn to converse, interact with each other and play the young Majakovsky, each with their own story. There is no plot, and no performance either. It is beyond any genre, but it is moving and full of hope".

Anna Bandettini, la Repubblica, 16 July 2011

"There is always a particular strength and depth in the works that Marco Martinelli has been producing for many years with young people, adolescents and children on various occasions and in different places in Italy. The latest of these rich and elaborate works of his debuted at the Teatro Grande in Pompei and then went to the Teatro Alighieri for the Ravenna Festival.

In this case as well, the operation brings to light different signs and directions, making contradictions explode and setting in motion a wide range of thoughts and reflections. [...] It is clear that everyone is actively convinced that the show is a stone thrown boldly into that harsh and immovable social situation. And it is equally clear that something, which perhaps they had never thought of, took shape in each of them, modifying their view of the present, suggesting how much strength there is in collective action and showing how crucial it is to invent new forms of reflection on what surrounds us and the things that affect us most closely, both as individuals and in a social context."

Antonio Audino, Il Sole 24 ore, 12 June 2022

“[...] I witnessed an undertaking that seemed to me to have the civil sarcasm of an Ennio Flaiano and the boyish iconography of Lele Luzzati, but also the resolute and decisive connotations of modern sociologists such as Goffredo Fofi, deeply human writers such as Elsa Morante, and those who speak of innocence such as Peter Brook. [...] That forger of emotions and senses, Marco Martinelli, has elaborated, based on Aristophanes, a ballad, a school of life, a crossroads of classes and encounters, a divertissement for small and shameless adults who touch the souls of interfaced adults.”

Rodolfo di Giammarco, *la Repubblica*, 10 August 2022



The Sky over Kibera by Marco Martinelli | Nairobi-Kenia



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Uccelli by Marco Martinelli | Pompei



fedeli d'Amore by Marco Martinelli | film