

19 JULY 1985. At 12:22, an Alpine Tragedy

It made its opening at the Teatro Sociale of Trento 19 JULY 1985. An Alpine tragedy by OHT | Office for a Human Theatre, dedicated to the Val di Stava disaster. Review

It is to a "lonely mountain valley" that Nietzsche compared "the form of the Greek theatre", in which "the architecture of the stage looks like a shining image of clouds, which the bacchae swarming through the mountain can see from above". In 19 July 1985, the work that **OHT | Office for a Human Theatre** presented as a national premiere in the sumptuous venue of the **Teatro Sociale** in Trento - as the inaugural event of both the season dedicated to drama and new trends in the Performing Arts - the famous expression taken from the Birth of Tragedy is projected on the gauze set on the proscenium, and yet it seems to constitute much more than an inscription. In the multiple conceptual intersections between tragedy and mountains, between art and biology, the work by **Filippo Andreatta**, produced by OHT with **Romaeuropa Festival** and **Centro Santa Chiara Trento**, finds its own precious place, explicitly declared by the subtitle: An Alpine Tragedy. The architecture of the show is the translation of a codified genre towards an atypical habitat and formal temperature, not immediately ascribable - except in the clear Nietzschean similarity - to the magisterium of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides: but today as then, it is for an act of guilty

hubris, of dramatic haughtiness, that a trail of blood indelibly stains a stage and a city.

It's 12:22 a.m. on an anonymous summer day more than thirty years ago when two sludge ponds, located on the slopes of Mount Prestavel, in eastern Trentino, undergo a structural failure, causing a flood of about one hundred and eighty thousand cubic meters of debris and slurry that invests and annihilates in a few minutes the village of Stava below. The following balance recorded 268 victims, dozens of whom were never recognized, and the annihilation of an ecosystem that - sustained for centuries thanks to the unstable and nevertheless valuable balance between nature and human action - appeared then irreparably compromised by wild economic speculation, by that industrial capitalism indifferent to the environments and destinies in which it finds its realization. The Val di Stava disaster, one of the most serious mining accidents ever occurred, thus constitutes the event that Andreatta and **Marco Bernardi**, author of the dramaturgy, put at the centre of attention, in an operation of recovery of a fragile memory that cannot fail to recall some prestigious chapters of the Italian theatre of narration, first of all Il racconto del

Vajont by Marco Paolini and Gabriele Vacis; and yet the identity of the collective OHT bends the original historical material to evanescent forms, even abstract, which, if on the one hand reverberate the tragic styles, on the other hand make the suggestions of musical theatre and a visual research of Castellucci's ancestry.

Of tragedy 19 JULY 1985 inherits the structure: a prologue, a parode, a succession of episodes, no longer entrusted to the interaction between the actors but to the dialogue between the sound and the musical element, the choir entrusted to the **Ensemble Vocale Continuum**, and a sophisticated visual plan. The latter is composed of a plurality of signs - the text and photographs of the time projected onto the fabric, the few scenographic elements, the lights - such as to constitute a true "score of images". Of extraordinary power, in this sense, is the snapshot on which the curtain of the Teatro Sociale opens, in an almost absolute silence: a giant fir tree suspended in the void of a space of milky whiteness, which for long minutes rotates slowly on itself, while the music by **Davide Tomat** progressively mixes natural sounds and noises - the flow of water, vague birdsongs - with *artificial* symphonic traces. Until the fall, the landslide, the crash.

It is here, in the juxtaposition of elements ascribable to human creativity and others foreign to them, that 19 JULY 1985 seems to place its poetic fulcrum, in an act that reflects on an aesthetic level the specificity of the Alpine landscape and its progressive anthropization. In this sense, there is an evident contiguity of

Andreatta's new work with the previous one, Curon/Graun, with which it seems to constitute a diptych dedicated to the apocalypse - merely of landscape in the case of the famous village submerged by Lake Resia, human and environmental in the case of the Val di Stava - caused by the technicalization imposed on the Alpine backdrops. However, if in the first instance the 2018 show seemed to investigate "the subjective dimension of the gaze" - as highlighted by Francesca Serrazanetti in her article in the magazine *Stratagemmi* - here it is above all the hearing that is the primary vehicle of meaning. Announced in the respective titles of the shows, the shift from a spatial-geographic to a chronological plane - the town of Curon Venosta in the first piece and the instant of time represented by a date in the second one - transfers the focus from the perceptive experience of vision to the rhythmic and sound one. What happened, with an exceptional intuition, in 19 July 1985 was to entrust the translation of this auditory dimension to graphic signs and scenic solutions. The projection of the text written by Andreatta, which retraces the events of the Prestavel mine and the ruthless exploitation that the Montecatini group first, and then Montedison made of the silver galena deposits, is followed in the second section of the show by the vision of Cavalese's seismogram, imprinted on a sheet dropped from above, from the sky, where the catastrophe would have originated. That sequence of lines, of nervous lines that a needle impressed while the mud erased existences and buildings, is a readable trace of the terrible time sequence of seconds and minutes used by the mud flow to

overwhelm Stava, reach Tesero, collide with the bridge on the main road and finally spread, with its load of bodies, in the Avisio valley. Time made a visual sign, time experienced through the gaze and changed into a shroud, in a single relic of 268 souls annihilated by the fury of mud, the seismogram - as well as the fir tree, or the photos of the town printed on sheets and suspended in the void only briefly - is collapsing under the weight of sloth, inexperience, imprudence.

In a significant deviation from Curon/Graun, however, 19 July 1985 does not annul the human presence, but entrusts it to a choir, which "since the Greek tragedy" - as pointed out by Andreatta in the director's notes - "corresponds to a declaration of war to naturalism in art". The irrepresentability of this Alpine tragedy, consequently, finds its natural outcome in the refusal of any actor, of any canonically interpretable dramaturgy, and in the choice to entrust a choir with the task of restoring an otherwise ineffable evil. The three choral interventions range from 'Ndormenzete popin, a mountain lullaby harmonized by Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli and here played off stage, to David Lang's *Again* - after ecclesiastes and finally György Ligeti's *Lux Aeterna*, both performed by the Ensemble Vocale Continuum in the scenic space dominated by the fir carcass. An organic monument to the tragedy, it is the fir tree that is the unconscious protagonist of a sequence of moving

efficacy, which makes the dry rigour of the show explode by contrast: it is on the tree that the photographic sheets, sheets woven with memories and now necessary to protect the dignity of a country and its inhabitants, are placed.

And yet, in a philological re-proposal of the profound essence of the Attic tragedy, Andreatta also entrusts 19 July 1985 with the task of a possible, albeit late, resolution. In the courtrooms, the Stava Valley disaster had the unacceptable result of the suspension of the prison sentence for all the defendants, almost as if to sanction the impossibility of translation into tragic language, and in its coessential path from guilt to catharsis. And yet here, at the Teatro Sociale in Trento, while the text flows on the fabric and recall the introduction in 2015 of the crime of environmental disaster capable of filling a twenty-year-old lack of jurisprudence, a community seemed to be reflected in the voices of the Ensemble Vocale Continuum and in the gestures with which Maestro **Luigi Azzolini** crafted the seven bars of silence that close Ligeti's piece, so as to prove the Nietzschean thesis for which "the audience of the Attic tragedy in the choir of the orchestra found itself, and after all there was no contrast between audience and choir". Here we are, exiting the theatre, in a collective, political, exquisitely theatrical reconciliation, that this time, has found in pain a saving way to trace and flood.