PERFORMANCE OPERA — What It Is

Our urgency as artists is also to define with exact words the activity we do, deepening what each chosen word properly means.

PERFORMANCE

- The term ‘performance’ derives from the verb perform (c. 1300), meaning: ‘to carry into effect, fulfil, discharge,’ via Anglo-French performer, altered by influence of Old French forme ‘form,’ from Latin forma from Old French parfournir ‘to do, carry out, finish, accomplish,’ from par- ‘completely’ (see per-) + fourir ‘to provide’ (see furnish).

- The Latin preposition per- indicates ‘passing through a space and extending or spreading over and around.’ As a prefix to a word it functions as a superlative, complement or continuation.

- The Latin noun forma origins from the Greek phorēsis, ‘the act of carrying,’ from phorein ‘to carry, wear,’ frequentative of pherein ‘the action to bring,’ in the same way that it means ‘bearing,’ ‘posture’ and seemingly ‘aspect,’ ‘resemblance’ and ‘image.’

- The Latin for-ma also connects to the Sanskrit root DHAR, which has the meaning of ‘holding, supporting, containing,’ and desinence Sanskrit MA. DHAR-MA means ‘stationary, fixed,’ (in Hinduism meaning: the eternal law of the cosmos, inherent in the very nature of things). However for-ma is a term that responds to the Sanskrit term DHAR-I-MAN, meaning ‘form, shape, figure and image,’ and also ‘the choice and the way to dispose of a matter, whatever it is, in the human labour.’

Therefore, according to the etymological derivations, the meaning of the word ‘performance’ can be said to be acting in support of the image.

OPERA

- The Latin noun opera means ‘labour, work.’ It also implies the idea of opus in alchemy. In XVII century Italy, the term opera was used to define ‘the labour that a person accomplishes in a day,’ at first referring only to ‘manual labour,’ and later also to ethical and moral action, as well as intellectual, artistic, and scientific labour. Io opero (literally, ‘I operate’ or ‘I work’) is a more refined Italian expression than the simple io lavoro, ‘I work.’

Eventually, according to the etymological definition of the two terms, ‘performance opera’ can be said to mean I work/operate (or, ‘a work’) acting in support of the image.

In fact, when we perform, we actually create a work — even though ephemeral — consisting of live images, which in turn produce meanings.

With the expression performance opera we don’t intend to define performances, which are mainly choreographed or structured a priori in every part. Our stance is that a performance should always remain open to the unpredictability of process, even though methodologically well-reflected and organised.

As it was for the alchemists engaging in their philosophical quest, a performance opera is a vision and the result of a creative process, there in the space where it takes place, the laboratory to play out new challenges.