

PROJECTE INGENU (Barcelona)

Changing the role of theatre in society

IN AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE IT IS DIFFICULT TO FIND FUNDING FOR NEW OR INDEPENDENT ARTS AND CULTURE INITIATIVES, IT MIGHT SEEM FOOLHARDY FOR A GROUP LIKE PROJECTE INGENU TO LAUNCH A THEATRE COMPANY AT THE HEIGHT OF AN ECONOMIC RECESSION IN SPAIN. NOT ONLY THAT, BUT THE THINKING BEHIND THE INITIATIVE WAS SO REMOVED FROM THE TRADITIONAL FORMS OF THEATRE IT WOULD SEEM TO HAVE NO CHANCE OF SURVIVAL. BUT, MAYBE BECAUSE OF THE UNIQUENESS OF THE VENTURE AND ITS STRONG CONNECTION TO HUMAN VALUES, IT GREW AND DEVELOPED INTO SOMETHING THAT NOW RESONATES ACROSS THE BARCELONA THEATRE SCENE AND BEYOND.

Founded in 2014, the Barcelona-based independent theatre company Projecte Ingenu is a collective of theatre practitioners (writers, actors, directors, technicians and designers). Their aim is to develop theatre as an art form to research the human condition. In practice they want their productions to be 'powerful human encounters', which 'take away the social codes' that restrict such encounters. Projecte Ingenu is not interested in theatre as entertainment. Not that they want to exclude or alienate people with their productions. Indeed, the aim is to transcend entertainment and to invite engagement on an intellectual and emotional level for human understanding and development. Projecte Ingenu sees its role as an agent of change on two fronts: changing the role of theatre in society and also changing society, by using performance as a basis for engaging with the self and the community. This means the company is not market-orientated, which presents challenges with regard to financial sustainability; but through a range of partnerships and a lot of personal commitment by the participants, the project has achieved much in its short life. Increasingly recognised as an exciting production company by critics and audiences alike, what is even more impressive is the success of the Slow Theatre concept that underlines Projecte Ingenu's work.

Projecte Ingenu sees their venture as particularly relevant for young people. They rework classic texts with and for younger audiences and develop new devised pieces. To date, they have presented productions of *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Top Girls*, *Yerma*, *The Tempest* and *Faust*. In order to develop their shows, they use a technique which they call Slow Theatre. This is based on the Slow Movement philosophy, which means a longer development period than conventional theatre, making the process part of the production, emphasising cooperation and team building, not only with the cast and crew but also with the potential target group, moving past the traditional idea of audience and wanting to engage people as participants in their creative practice. The ambition is to enter into and

produce a high-quality experience for all concerned. In addition, the idea of expanding the 'slow' hypothesis to all aspects of the company's functioning is interesting with regard to Projecte Ingenu's development and management. (The theory behind the 'Slow Movement' is not just to slow things down but to use time in a more considered and sustainable way by focusing attention in the right places.)

Projecte Ingenu's approach is not easy to sustain but they highlight two very important factors in their success to date: a high level of networking locally, regionally and internationally and the commitment of stakeholders - not least the members of the Projecte Ingenu itself.

Their unique approach to their work has attracted a range of supporters, including the cultural centre Nau Ivanow who provide them with a base for meetings, rehearsals and events and Teatre Akadèmia, who commission and present their shows. They have also toured to places like Calaf, Gerona, Berga and the Shakespeare Festival at Globe Neuss.

INTERVIEW

Marc Chornet (MC) & Neus Pàmies (NP) - members of Projecte Ingenu - by Sandy Fitzgerald (SF).

SF: Why was Projecte Ingenu founded and how?

NP: The original group met in college (Institut del Teatre, Barcelona) and we were students looking at a future that didn't hold out much hope for people who wanted to work in the formal theatre sector and be creatively free. College was a place to investigate and explore but it was not the same out in the marketplace. The group was formed because Marc and another student invited others to join a group they were forming and that became Projecte Ingenu. Initially, we were a research project looking at theatre practice and how we might marry this with personal development. We were actually looking for a possible new model for the contemporary actor because most of the group were looking to be actors, at the time. We began with acting workshops based on the ancient Greek chorus: vocal experimentation and experimentation with the space, like outdoors. But this wasn't an academic or formal research group. We wanted to play: to move, to be physical, to be like a child exploring. To be naïve (hence the name). This was after years of being told not to move when acting. And all of this led to lots of talking and lots of ideas, which ultimately led us to the core idea of being human and what this means...the human experience and the human encounter and to people like Grotowski, Pina Bausch and the visual artist Marina Abramović. And singing too. We invented our own games.

MC: The truth of the human encounter was the starting point of Projecte Ingenu. How to be together. How to take care of each other. This is always at the core of our projects: for instance in the show in *Faust*, one human cleans another human, or in *Vaig Ser Pròspero* (recordant *La Tempesta*), taking care of an old man.

SF: But then you began to use this concept of Slow Theatre. How did that come about?

NP: There was a children's book called the Turtle Knowledge and we used this, as a reference. We were the Turtle. In the Catalan language there is a word that is impossible to translate into English called 'BADAR' and it kind of means doing nothing, being in the moment. This became important to us. For example, to go to the mountains and practice 'BADAR'

MC: This went back to trying to connect theatre and us as actors with a humanistic approach to life in general. What we saw was a disconnection between art and society. In the theatre 'business', at least in Barcelona and I would say, the rest of Spain, the professional companies have a very defined model: two weeks' rehearsal and then the show goes on. The main aim is to get seats filled. What we were interested in was how to change the role of theatre in society, to make it more relevant, and through this, to help change society. This is when we discovered the Slow Movement. What we liked about this philosophy was the concentration on quality over quantity, taking time to care for and understand everything we are doing. To overcome the crisis of time-poverty we have today. And to especially take care of each other and our future on this planet. We came up with the idea of Slow Theatre which, for us, is a constant search for connections that return us to humanity, does not have limits and is all the time crossing borders.

SF: And then Projecte Ingenu was born?

MC: While we were involved in this process, a venue owner from Barcelona, Ramon Molins, approached us and asked if the group would be interested in doing a production of Hamlet. This was our first show.

SF: Projecte Ingenu has been very successful with regard to its mission and the public reaction to its shows but how do you make money to survive?

MC: Money is not the ultimate aim but sustainability is. We are very strong on our principles and that is what sustains us. We are not market-orientated, like most professional companies, and look more to how our work will benefit society. In line with our philosophy, we look for deep connections with communities and places.

NP: But in fact, some of us are now living from Projecte Ingenu. We are attracting support. Although it is very difficult to secure funding from the state for a project like ours, we have received terrific help from a small number of dedicated supporters like Nau Ivanow, the cultural centre where we are based, and Teatre Akadèmia here in Barcelona. Then we have received some small grants and were a partner in the EU-wide programme Creative Lenses for the past four years. With regard to the shows we do, these are partly commissioned and partly paid for by box office receipts.

MC: At the moment it is project-to-project, but I think long-term sustainability is linked to the Slow Theatre idea. Everyone - technicians, actors, etc. - is involved and the feeling of being part of Projecte Ingenu gives the possibility of surviving. People are now receiving prestige by being involved. We manage the money in an honest and open way. Everyone is involved in the decisions.

SF: Would you describe this as political theatre then? For instance, back in the 60s or 70s there was a wave of Agitprop theatre groups that were very actively political. Would you see yourselves as activists?

MC: Yes we are. But without pamphlets. For instance, our last show, inFaust, is very critical of capitalism and is also very feminist. Remember Projecte Ingenu was born at a time of great upheaval and crisis in Catalunya and in Spain. We had the Indignados movement, that was a response to the economic crisis, the constant corruption revelations and the drive for Catalan independence. We didn't want to further polarize or escalate the situation. We wanted to find ways to give people, particularly young people, a chance to have a voice and to explore their dreams for the future. This is why we chose the name Projecte Ingenu, which means 'naïve project' in English. We didn't want to enter the public realm with a fully-formed manifesto that people had to take or leave. We wanted to engage in a process with people to discover our humanity together. The idea is to open up a space where we can take risks and experiment. Where we can develop artistically and creatively outside of the constraints of selling tickets and filling seats. I used to think people did not think but in fact, people do not see. Everything these days is underlined. In our shows, nothing is underlined.



SF: There is a lot of emphasis nowadays on audience development but you see your audience as much more than ticket buyers?

MC: Yes, we are all collaborators in this process of research around what theatre means in the wider sense. As part of this research, we organise events during the year that investigate and examine what this idea of Slow Theatre means and how it can have an impact on society. For instance, we organise this intensive five-day festival called Escena Germinal, which is an encounter between theatre arts practitioners and citizens. It is an encounter investigating different ways to make the theatre experience real and relevant and always thinking of the audience as active participants. With regard to the shows we think of our audience as people who come to live together with the actors for an hour or two. It is a real experience. We believe the audience has to practice the experience of theatre. We have a database and people can engage at different levels. For instance, every Monday morning we have a free training to join audiences to the creative moment. They join the process. People say to us theatre is dying but when they engage with our process they think maybe this is not the case. It is the institutions that have to change. For instance, gender equality is a big issue in the formal theatre scene.

NP: Our aim is to change people's lives, to change our lives, through this experience with Projecte Ingenu. To have time for deep experiences, which is hard to find these days.

SF: Now that you are somewhat established and certainly receiving a lot of positive critical recognition for your work, how do you think the future looks for the company?

NP: It is not easy to survive but we are becoming more and more mature and looking to ways to both be sustainable and spread our philosophy. We are exploring international possibilities and looking at the wider context for our work. How this will translate into living from our work, I don't know, but by naming our challenges, it allows us to engage with them. We would like to bring the 'slow' philosophy to everything we do, including the management and finances. To look at the long term.

MC: We now have arrived at a point where we feel that what we do is really important to us. We feel we have crossed a border and have created some possibilities for theatre to have more possibilities.

NP: The common problem is that everyone wants to create but to create the same thing. I saw this in Chile, where people are looking to the USA. Our message is to reconnect with what is important: with the self, with humanity. With your past. With what is part of you.

MC: But there is a danger. Tradition is often connected to fascism. The only possible answer to capitalism or fascism is humanism.

NP: Connecting people in an increasingly disconnected world is our mission.

NIEUWE HELDEN - NEW HEROES (Amsterdam)

We believe in the importance for people to be seen and heard

IN A WORLD WHERE THERE IS NO LONGER ONE TRUTH, ONE SHARED IDEOLOGY AND EVERYONE MUST DECIDE FOR THEMSELVES... NIEUWE HELDEN CREATES MOMENTS IN WHICH YOU CAN ENCOUNTER YOURSELF, THE OTHER AND THE WORLD... WE CREATE THE COMMON GROUND...PLACES OF CONNECTION, WONDER, AMAZEMENT, SURPRISE, CONFUSION AND IN THE END: ENCOUNTERS.

In 2008, three students (Lucas De Man, Bas van Rijnsoever and Wouter Goedheer) met at the Theatre Academy in Amsterdam and began to formulate an idea that would take art out of the traditional venues and contexts and move it to the public space. This resulted in the company Nieuwe Helden (New Heroes). Each project that the company produces starts from a subject or theme and aims to create a dialogue with the 'right' audience. The approach is one of commitment and projects run for several years and contain multiple outcomes. There is no fixed approach to the work and each project is different, depending on the situation. This might include performances, podcasts, documentaries, exhibitions etc. There can be up to 10 or 15 projects running at any one time.

As the work became known and attracted funding (in 2017 grants were received from the Performing Arts Fund NL, the Amsterdam Fund and Bank Giro Loterij Fund), Nieuwe Helden also took on international projects and in 2018 started to work in South East Asia and the USA. A feature of the company is that no one is employed and all, including the directors, are on freelance contracts. Everything is linked to project funding and the flexibility around this. Nieuwe Helden calls this a 'networked business model', working with over 200 makers, thinkers and creators who come together in different formations for each project. With few overheads, the company is incredibly flexible.

Regarding their working methodology, once a potential theme has been identified, they begin a process of research – interviewing people who have lived experiences and have different perspectives on that theme. This crucial research phase also helps to shape the purpose of the project, what difference they want it to make, and who it is for. This can result in very different venues and audiences for their projects: traditional arts venues or public spaces like farms, universities or banks. For instance, a project called 'The Elderly and Desire', an intimate theatre play about aging and passion, started with