

## Xarxa Teatre. 25 years without borders



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## Prologue

*These things are well worth making known to  
those who do not know them; for they offer  
many strange marvels that should not pass into silence,  
because they are unlike anything to be found in the rest of the world.*

MARCO POLO.

*The Travels of Marco Polo*

Xarxa Teatre, always committed to the language and the culture of the Valencian people, has confirmed the viability of universal artistic forms that go beyond birthplace boundaries. Xarxa Teatre took up their place on the street stage in 1983, and since then their presence in the public space has been constant, reminding us through music, pyrotechnics and the artistic profession of the millenarian art of the theatre and of town and village fiestas.

The theatre group brought its actors and artistic creation to the streets at a time when there was no other choice of stage. In this way, the group constructed and explored new forms of dramatic communication between the actors and their spectators. Their dramatic proposals have taken root because the company knew how to grasp the opportunity to defend a new cultural model of making theatre.

Xarxa Teatre came onto the streets with the professional responsibility of those who know that resources will emerge from the capacity to imagine constantly changing spaces and scenarios. The group has visited over forty countries across the world and has been present in the streets, squares and avenues of both great capitals and other more modest cities. These Valencian actors have brought together people of all ages in a theatre without roof and without borders.

From Vila-real, Castellón, Onda, Borriana and La Vall d'Uxó came the eight actors that created the theatre group network with aspirations to go professional, at a time when the whole scene was a blank page: the public, the stagings and Valencian street theatre. At that moment, Castellón was playing a major role in the anniversary of *les Normes de Castelló* reminding all Valencians of the importance of this historical event in the official recognition of the culture and written language of the Valencian people, which for many years we had lived and breathed with no government support.

Now, 25 years later, Xarxa Teatre is an example of the cultural identity of contemporary Valencian theatre. Xarxa has known how to interpret cultural tradition to create an original aesthetic with which to compete in the international market. It has also seized opportunities to travel around the world as a Valencian group and become enriched through contact with other cultures, without, of course, renouncing its Valencian cultural origins.

The group chose a path of constant innovation, based on the commitment and responsibility to grow alongside others, other countries, with whom it set up ventures to jointly create shows like *El foc del mar* (The fire of the sea) and *Veles e*

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*vents* (Sails and winds). Xarxa's stagings have given rise to new ways of creating dramatic culture and new ways of modernising the popular fiesta, such as *Nit màgica* (Magical Night).

As Valencians, we are grateful to Xarxa for taking theatre forward through new conceptual initiatives and new avant-garde languages; but above all, because they have remained true to Valencian cultural roots in their art. Xarxa Teatre's repertoire includes such permanent and universal elements as popular music, pyrotechnics and interactive participation between actors and public.

For everything you have contributed to theatre, we heartily congratulate you on this anniversary. And more than that, we want to congratulate you for bringing us out into the streets and squares as spectators; moving spectators in these communal spaces of citizenship; spaces transformed by theatre to show us a world far removed from the daily routine, a far more magical and wonderful world.

Note on the structure of the book

The book is divided into two large sections. The first, entitled *Space*, and the second, *Time*. The first, *Space*, is made up of eight chapters, structured as a journey already begun and with no end, as seen in a sailor's compass or a wind rose. The group's history has been outlined following transversal criteria, from a perspective that prioritises the concept of space. This layout guides the reader along the same path followed by the street theatre spectator. First, the spectator hears the music, before locating the lights and the space where the actors perform (led there by the company's management) in front of the public, assembled there under the impulse of a festive event and, without a doubt, also turning into a new cultural occasion. Each chapter includes a section entitled *Meeting points*, in which individual contributions enable space to be located in subjective time through the memories of some of the many players in this exciting and passionate story. We wholeheartedly thank these contributors for their participation in the making of this book.

The second section, *Time*, deals with the evolution of the group. The time factor is an identifier that allows us to follow the events and works in the life of Xarxa Teatre in a sequenced flow. This account is, however, much more concise, since the history of Xarxa, the essence of the first fifteen years of its life, has already been published (see MAS-PIQUERVELLÓN, 1997). Moreover, we should not forget that the idea of temporality is exemplified here, particularly through images, real time in space, that illustrate the passage of time in its stagings and trace the living history, brimming with force, of the path the group has taken.

## Space

### 1. Live music

Much of Xarxa Teatre's success is due to the music of its stagings. It is simply impossible to imagine the crowds of thousands of people gathered at their shows without live music. This is the company's first and most representative dramatic factor, even more so than its use of pyrotechnics, although the fireworks are what have always aroused greatest interest among the critics and the public. In contrast, their music has generally gone unheeded as the prime order theatrical trademark it is in all the company's shows.

And this is indeed the case, because the musical space is the first element to reach the public. From the very beginning of the performance, the live music causes in the crowd an effect of amplified immersion of such magnitude that it is able, on its own, to hold the emotional attention of the spectators throughout. The boundaries created by sound submerge the audience even more than the walls of a closed theatre.

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This is the effect the musician-actors in *Déus o bèsties* (Gods or beasts) arouse when they come down, dressed as butchers and hanging by the waist, playing *Trencada de tambors*. In this piece, the percussion becomes a symbol or metaphor for the whole show to come; in the space of just a few minutes the image of descent and sacrifice, of sacred ritual and butchering is set. The visual images Xarxa has created can never be seen in isolation from the aural images associated with them. The only images are theatrical, synesthetic images. And music is the first contact with the audience, established without words, without significant distortions that distract from listening to the dramatic rhythm. Yet, accompanied by a much more compelling visualisation than the music itself, to the point that it would seem the music is not noticed too much.

However, if the performance takes place in a conventional closed space, the same theatrical approach is found, of immersion in the acoustic space. These sensations unfold when the guitar is heard at the beginning of *Don Quijote sueña de nuevo* (Don Quijote dreams again). The guitar's melody is inseparable from the blue lights that illuminate the figures inhabiting the dreams. The dreams are personified in whimsical spiritual, geometric apparel that glide along in silence. As in the previous example of *Déus o bèsties*, here the visual image of the personification of the dreams is a forceful symbol that somehow silences the solitude of the guitar. The dreams personified through the costumes of metallic rings and imaginative heads of a series of geometrical figures are the singular dramatisation of the mechanics of the universe for the disabled. Thus, the entire aural space of the music of the spheres is visualised to the strains of human harmony, to the chords of integrating union, to demonstrate that for the disabled, the world must be one without loneliness and without isolation.

We could go on endlessly with more examples like these; it is a dramatic constant in all their works. Clearly, the language of music provides us with the poetic semantics of symbols or metaphors with countless meanings. A language that the spectators would not easily read if it were not for the fact that their function is conceived from the position of emotional understanding. The spectators are plunged into an exterior aural identity, able to evoke sensory references from the very universe of knowledge, transmitted through culture; an emotional dialogue is established between what they already know and what they are seeing and hearing.

It is precisely this musical and dramatic approach that explains why countries so far from our borders and cultural references are so receptive to the works of Xarxa Teatre. And as ever, it shows the capacity of music to make any metalanguage understood between different cultures. The theatricality of the music has, therefore, enabled Xarxa Teatre to export culture and universalise the artistic truth of autochthonous references. Because if one thing is clear, it is this: its artistic work has always been created from its own culture, including musical culture. As Manuel V. Vilanova said in an interview with Antonio Alberola:

Our theatre is always based on traditions, painters or writers from our environs. Our aim is to show everyone the cultural reality closest to us. Pascual i Tirado, Ausiàs March, Porcar, our fiestas, the dulzaina, the *fallas*, pyrotechnics... The Castellón fiesta is redefined as an artistic idea. And part of our success is due to this: our spectators know full well that behind our artistic projects lies our own broad culture that gives them their base and helps to define them.

(*Mediterráneo*, 2-01-2005)

Just as important as the poetic and symbolic significance explained above is the descriptive and narrative function of the music. To narrate its stories through music, Xarxa has made use particularly of the *tambor* (drum) and the *dulzaina* (a reed instrument from the oboe family), traditional instruments dating back to medieval times that over the centuries have created precise, understandable festive codes for the population. Gradually, the company's musical team grew from the two initial players in *La bruixa Marruixa* (Marruixa the witch) to the 20-strong group of dulzaina players that participated

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in *Nit màgica* in Castellón's 2007 Magdalena fiestas. More than any other explanation, this indicates how significant the functions of music are and how it has provided the backbone for the company's entire artistic growth throughout these years.

There are numerous examples of the descriptive and narrative functions music plays, but we have to make a selection. In describing situations, such as the scene of the procession of boats from *Sant Pere, per sempre* (Saint Peter, forever), the music is truly what evokes all the seafaring sentiment of devotion, as though present and past time had created an eternal dimension. It is precisely the most idiosyncratic scenes with the performance space, let's say the most local, that are paradoxically those that best recreate the tonality of timeless sentiments.

The same occurs in the scene in which the musical score of Jesús de Monasterio's *Adiós a la Alhambra* is projected onto the main façade of the Torre del Infantado, in *Tierra de Júbilo* (Land of Jubilee). The music of the violin achieves a descriptive and narrative characterisation in accordance with the drama of the scene, as while the music is played, the audience watches the notes they are listening to at the same time, thanks to the 50,000-watt sound system. Here, again, the evocation of a nostalgia for the Alhambra is fused with the presence of the spectators – Monasterio's score and portrait projected as local symbols- to submerge us in a sentiment of spirituality and eternity. When music identifies our space, we might say it has a greater capacity to locate us in coordinates of timelessness.

The versatility of musical language has also been adapted to the blend of genres in one single work. Music has narrated the tragic and comic facets of its works, particularly in *Déus o bèsties* and *Tombatossals*. *Escorxador*, a piece from *Déus o bèsties*, ridicules the animal's tragic destiny and the sacred forces devoured by the passage of time, thus allowing a comic presence into the heart of the tragedy. In shows such as *Ibers* (Iberians), *El foc del mar*, *Veles e vents* and *Sedes Matris* however, sentiments of joy and happiness are narrated to contrast with the tragedy. In all these works, the musical thread is what explains the various significant nuances and precisely defines the contradictions within the narrated discourse, since the actors' interpretation, to gain effectiveness as a visual image, can only focus on gestures with a single-minded, amplified meaning, with no contradictory nuances, as though it were a sign hyperbole.

All the examples described so far have illustrated how Xarxa Teatre has dramatised the music in its shows, by using it discursively and dramatically in such a way that it is inseparable from the dramatic structure. Yet this way of understanding the dramatisation –always with a theatrical use of musical languages- stems from a long process of study, in which the receptivity of the word and of the music have constantly been experimented with; nonetheless, they have always remained faithful to their original commitment to the music of the dulzaina, long before the show *El dolçainer de Tales* (The dulzaina player of Tales) was even considered. In 1985, the group stated publicly to Pilar Alfonso:

Many people approach us to ask about the songs for the dulzaina. They want to know where we got them from, where they are going, if we can transcribe them. Or they just want to congratulate our dulzaina players. They are pieces that are not found in published music for dulzainas.  
(*Mediterráneo*, 7-02-1985)

By the time *La bruixa Marruixa* came out, the accentuated festive functionality of drum and dulzaina was established. While in this show, music and word were roughly present in equal measure, the music of the dulzaina would later gain ground at the expense of the word, as in *La barba del Rei Barbut* (The bearded king's beard) and *El dolçainer de Tales*, to the point where it dominated completely, as for instance, in *Nit màgica*, *El foc del mar* and *Les rates mortes* (The dead rats). However, these latter works fused the tradition of the dulzaina with other more contemporary music.

The presence of word and music as explanatory elements of dramatic discourse has evolved differently throughout the group's history. Three clearly contrasting stages can be distinguished. In the first, covering the period 1983 to 1989, music gains ground on the word, despite the attempt to hang on to the latter in *El.lisístrata* (Lysistrata). In the second stage, Xarxa Teatre's most emblematic, the sounds and melodies construct all the explanatory discourses of their stagings. This

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period began with *Ibers*, in 1990, and continued through *El foc del mar*, *Veles e vents*, *Déus o bèsties* and *Les rates mortes*. And in the third stage, the dramatic function of the word begins to reappear as a narrative element, yet with a stylised presence, and never predominating dramatically. This phase now coexists with the second, begun in 1999 with *Sedes Matris*, and continuing with *Tombatossals*, *Don Quijote sueña de nuevo* and *Tierra de Júbilo*. The transition between each phase always takes place after exploratory investigations have been made: some stagings serve as discoveries that will be taken up at a later date; this is the case of *Nit màgica*, without words, which anticipates the second stage; or *València, llum del Mediterrani* (Valencia, light of the Mediterranean), which foreshadows later creations that once again make use of the word as a narrative element.

Although the group's artistic evolution is divided into three stages, this evolution has always been cyclical and rooted in its origins. As if, let's say, in the first stage the two dramatic styles –with words and music, and without words- are found in a more primitive state. The more elaborate, re-worked results of the artistic concretions, already present in the first stage, will appear in subsequent phases. We must therefore speak of a constant review and permanence of ideas, in a temporal dialectic of present and past without discontinuity, since many of their bold proposals were developed from the bases of experience and innovation, from both a technical and artistic perspective, in a continuous interdisciplinary and transtemporal progression.

The musicians –actors, interpreters and composers- have contributed to spreading Xarxa Teatre's home grown theatrical style. While maintaining their autonomous status as creators, they have been able to respond to the needs of the company's directors, ultimately responsible for the staging of all the group's work. The words of the company's co-director, Manuel V. Vilanova, illustrate what the authorship of street theatre consists of and clarify the relationship established between the authors and other teams involved, such as the musicians:

I should admit that I am about to explain the creative process that occurs in Xarxa Teatre –the group I co-direct with Leandre Escamilla–, which does not mean that other street theatre companies use the same creative formula. In the end, the most important thing in the creative process is its final concretion: the work of art/theatre. So when the authors of Xarxa Teatre's shows write a dramatic text, they do so in the knowledge that it will later be enriched by the set design, the music, costumes, make-up, actors and the mise-en-scène. In our case, the same people who write the text are also responsible for directing the work of all those involved in the process. The final result of the process is therefore the responsibility of specific individuals and consequently, the responsibility for perfecting the initial dramatic text lies exclusively with its authors.

(*Fiestacultura* nº 9, p 41)

Hence, the quest of how to capture in music what the show aims to communicate, either through traditional music or pieces composed specifically for each show, starts off from the guidelines set by the directors. From the very outset, Xarxa has worked alongside the Vila-real dulzaina player, Pascual Juan, on this task, and rapidly incorporated its own staff of musicians, plus musicians contracted ad hoc for specific performances, as live music began taking on an increasingly important role. Xarxa Teatre has had the support of numerous composers in the creation of its theatre soundtracks: Pascual Juan, Joan Igual, Dídac Ràmia, Rafael Beltrán, Vicent Borrás, Ramón Paús, Jorge Gavaldá, Àngel Lluís Ferrando, Jaime Gosálbez, Bernat Pellicer, Juan Pascual, José R. Pascual, Matilde Salvador, Els Llauradors, Jesús Palos, David Cervera, Al Tall, Amsterdam Percussion Group... a long list to which must be added the musicians, both vocalists and players, but,

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given their large number, they will be included in the staging credits.

Interest in bringing back the music of the dulzaina gave rise to *El dolçainer de Tales* in which Pascual Juan played the part of the dulzaina player who was attributed, as the only dramatic function in the work, with playing the classical repertoire of the village fiestas. This is the only production in which the whole dramatic structure is determined by the presence of musicians as main actors, as any dramatisation of the fiesta using contemporary criteria would have been impossible without them.

With this show, music was truly integrated to create a totally new genre of street theatre, now a long way from using the language of music as a mere accessory to add vitality. And with this began the complicated process of learning how to dramatise music to develop its own narrative, descriptive and poetic functions in making large format theatre for mass audiences. To a greater or lesser degree, this successful work contributed, even in France, to restoring the prestige of the largely forgotten dulzaina, on the verge of disappearing from the musical scene. However, it has become the most emblematic instrument in the works of Xarxa partly also as a result of Pascual Juan's own personality: the musician has rescued and written down much of the festive heritage (until then lost or with no score) for the collective memory of the Valencian people.

The presence of music in the regions of Castellón, based on the historical events of the village of Tales as the cradle of dulzaina players, is expanded with new, extremely enriching musical references such as the rhythms from the music of the Moors and Christians, highly symbolic for the Valencian peoples, although more firmly rooted in the southern regions of Alicante. This meeting of two musical spheres –from north and south– led to the creation of *El foc del mar*, a show that truly represents the style of the company, and finally shapes the music of the previous show *Nit màgica*.

In these two stagings, the number of musicians always depends on the number of spectators with whom they are going to interact. For this reason it tends to vary, as when 150,000 people attended *El foc del mar* at the *Festival Internacional de las Artes* in San José, Costa Rica. For this event, a new structural version of the show had to be improvised and provided with considerable amplification in the form of an 80,000-watt sound system:

On this occasion, the musicians did not accompany the actors on their traditional route among the crowds, as is usually the case in this show; the space was so huge that the director of the festival, Dionisio Echevarría, and Leandre Escamilla took the judicious decision to keep the musicians on the stage, and provide them with a good sound system. This ensured that everyone present was able to appreciate the quality of the musicians; the Costa Rican media also underlined this fact and highlighted the quality of the musicians. (Joan Ninot, *Castellón Diario*, 14-04-1996)

Following *Ibers*, *Veles e vents*, *València*, *llum del Mediterrani*, *Sedes Matris*, *Déus o bèsties*, *Tombatossals...* the composition of the music became so spectacular and complex in its fusion of rhythms and instruments that each one of the dramatic soundtracks staged deserves its own particular study. The posture of each character is defined to the millimetre with its identifying auditory sign, as explained at the beginning of this chapter. Practically a choreographic working of the actors' interpretation, seen for the first time in *Ibers* and transferred to *El foc del mar*, although the latter work differs substantially from the former. Because of this need to choreograph the actors and the musicians, the musical duration of these works has a closed structure that obviously affects the characters' interpretive rhythm, thus creating a tight collusion among all the artistic teams involved, in order to match the times allotted to each sign language. This task is actually of titanic proportions and can be appreciated by seeing or hearing any fragment of the stagings and soundtracks that Xarxa Teatre has produced.

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Like, for example, *Déus o bèsties*, in which twenty-one hitherto unheard pieces of music are played, each one without interruption, by the characters of the butchers and the musicians. Here, the presence of the musicians never been overlooked, and this must largely be due to the fact that they are also actors in the show, as in *El dolçainer de Tales*, *Nit màgica*, *El foc del mar* and *Les rates mortes*. Nobody knows better than the members of the company the effectiveness achieved in *Déus o bèsties*, since this is the show in which they have come out to greet the audience more often than any other. Wherever it has been put on, *Déus o bèsties* has always provoked reactions of admiration. Indeed, a reviewer in Caracas noted the following comment by a Venezuelan woman of Galician ancestry at the end of the show marking the closure of the *Festival Internacional de Teatro* in Caracas:

It's the first time in my life that I've heard a Galician bagpipe accompanied by percussion instruments. They had some enormous side drums that they played masterfully, along with some other strange smaller ones; we also enjoyed the excellent playing of the sax, trumpet, guitar, tambourine and even a simple earthenware pitcher. (Carlos Giménez, 1-04-2002, *El Nacional*)

Their capacity to integrate other musical and dance groups into the company itself has strengthened the spectacular nature of many of its productions, particularly in shows created to celebrate festive events or other significant occasions. Among these, we would highlight *València, llum del Mediterrani* which incorporated the live voice of a soprano and a group of dulzaina players, *La Xafigà* from Muro; *Benvinguts a les estrelles* (Welcome to the stars), with the participation of four traditional dance groups and a choir; *Magdalena, vítol!* and *Sant Pere, per sempre*, with Castellón's *Grup de danses*; the inclusion of Gregorian chant and bell ringing in *Sedes Matris...* and most recently, *Tierra de Júbilo* in which the ringing of the bells contrasted with the Celtic rock group *Luétiga*, the percussion for the *Baila de Ibio* dancers and the music of Jesús de Monasterio.

The command of the musical spaces in the squares and streets throughout these twenty-five years are captured in the company's videographic memory. The days of Xarxa Teatre actors singing the songs in *La bruixa Marruixa* and *La barba del Rei Barbut* are now a long way off. However, Xarxa has shown its ability to start a new path in theatre music. And even if only for the emotion that this represents, they will celebrate this anniversary in a conventional theatre, with the opera *La filla del Rei Barbut* (The bearded king's daughter) by the Castellón composer Matilde Salvador.

## 2. Fireworks and stage lights

How can you act with fire to make things more fun without scaring the children? The company's actors probably dwelled on a similar question while they were learning to handle artefacts that were somewhat dangerous to steer among the crowd. Since, from the outset, in the children's performances *La bruixa Marruixa* and *La barba del Rei Barbut* they were acting in the presence of fire and pyrotechnics in versions adapted for the youngest audiences. And ever since then, these dramatic resources, so fitting for street theatre, have held no secrets for them.

When fireworks become art, they always arouse great admiration and we forget the danger of fire; in contrast, real fire always reminds us of the tragedy and fragility of human life. In other words, fiction or reality. But if fireworks are transformed into characters, and their use dramatised in a theatrical performance, as Xarxa has done, the contradiction between fiction and reality ceases to exist. They are now a theatrical reality –fictitious- created by the authors to awaken certain emotions in their audience.

When Xarxa Teatre designed the dramatisation of the *correfuegos* (running with fire), *Nit màgica*, they set out to create a

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show, to entertain the public with a theatrical fireworks project that would exclude the real emotions of danger. The dramatic purpose was centred on interaction itself, on the continued duel between actors and audience, in enhancing all the drama of this dialogue with fire between the two:

We wanted to create a show that would retain the taste of adventure and odyssey of the *cordaes* [strings of firecrackers], while reducing the risk to participants to a minimum. This was not an easy task to take on at that time. It took us several months just to convince the rest of the members of the company. Everyone agreed that the exhilaration created by the free use of *cohetes borrachos* [literally, drunken fireworks] in the streets was an element of animation that should not be lost. We stuck to our guns and did away with the loose rockets. And I think this was one of the many merits that should be attributed to *Nit màgica*: the taming of an aggressive nineteenth century fiesta into a modern participative fiesta. (Manuel V. Vilanova, *Levante-EMV*, 20-03-2004).

This inoffensive way of making theatre through pyrotechnics is the characteristic that most closely defines Xarxa Teatre. Although without forgetting its most innovative contribution in this field: dramatising it, lending it theatrical meaning, narrative functionality and ascribing it a type of dramatic genre. A genre able to express emotions at their fullest, whether they be emotions of happiness or tragedy. Finally, it is particularly noteworthy that the genre they use as a vehicle for their work, always characterised as tragedies to be performed in festive atmospheres, reflects the very nature of fire itself, in that it is an element that either protects us or attacks us.

Who is the main actor, now, of *Nit màgica*? In 1986 it was obviously San Roro who spoke directly to the public in a speech; but now that the exhilaration of the fireworks draws more than 40,000 people, and the speech has turned into a clamour for collective participation, frankly, it is no longer clear that our initial answer holds. Some years ago the leading role was snatched away from San Roro by the white lights of the pyrotechnics and the fire-bulls that appear throughout the course of the event. This work is a clear example of the transformations that have taken place and of the vitality of street theatre; but above all, of the company's commitment to the loyalty of its crowds.

In contrast, the title *El foc del mar* is a clear, unmistakable reference. Fire is the protagonist, and the only character that is individualised in its own nature of fire, while the remaining characters are present as a chorus throughout the work. And that is not all: these characters are subordinate to the fire, whether they be human puppets or *ninots*. The marionettes – actors- walk, moved by the fireworks, in search of the *ninots*. Their movements always leave the imprint of the dance and the fire. One of the most amusing examples is the fan of fire that *la monola* flutters, or the *moro de filà*'s fiery scimitar. The other group of characters, the *ninots* of the *falla*, also takes the form of a chorus and would have no life of its own if it were not for the fire that lights the *falla* and the whirling windmills of white light at the end of the performance. This exemplification of the apparition of fire personified in theatrical characters, in three different levels of gradation and protagonism is, perhaps, the most important dramatic success of the work. This structure, and not just the presence of the *falla*, probably explains why it has continued to triumph for so many years in shows all over the world.

While it may be, in fact is, somewhat difficult to explain the existence of characters of fire, there is no mystery in explaining its narrative functions. Its very cause-effect relationship is instantaneous, which makes it much easier for the audience to understand. In *Ibers*, when *Tritón* appears with the flaming trident, many more messages are generated because the arguments contained in the discourse are also multiple; the force of the fire narrates the fury of the divinity; the direction in which it is pointed, towards the ground, indicates the intention to cause a natural disaster originating in the

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earth –the volcano-; and the white with darkened golden light tells us it is a signal of divine castigation of the human race, which is then revealed to us.

One of the most important areas of dramatic research Xarxa Teatre has undertaken was to understand the potential of fireworks; this has required a great deal of training so that actors, directors and authors might direct them properly. The desire to advance the spectacular side of street theatre performances has necessarily led down this path.

In truth, the entire preparation phase, in which meaning is assigned to the fireworks, and the whole process of dramatisation, are the most time consuming, since as an element of the set, pyrotechnics must help to make sense of the action. Leandre Escamilla explains that to design the effects of fireworks lasting just 30 seconds on stage can take three hours of preparation (in an interview with Albor Rodríguez, in Caracas. *El Nacional*, 17-04-1995). This task does not end once the show is premiered however; it must then be adjusted once the persuasive effect of the fireworks has been tested in front of the public. Plans made in the firework design stage are short lived, since the number of spectators anticipated and the venue must always be taken into account to ensure that the display of colours, shapes and movements of fire and figures will be right for the scene and the pace of the actors.

When Xarxa Teatre committed to perform *Veles e vents* in Calais before an expected 150,000 spectators, it had not previously been staged on a large scale. Despite this, pyrotechnics predominated in the show Xarxa prepared. It was designed as a macro-performance in which ten pyrotechnicians took part under the direction of Luís Brunchú. Prior calculations foresaw the use of 3,000 kilos of black powder in 8,000 shells. This force would narrate the events of the work inspired by Ausiàs March's poem of the same name. The pyrotechnic display was designed to reflect both in the sky and in the water, with lights projected on surrounding buildings helping to magnify their potential. In addition, the marine location would multiply the force of the lights and sounds by creating a huge mirror of reflections between the sky and the water, thus amplifying the resonance of the sounds in the open space. Logically, this is the show in which artistic design must be most closely adapted to the real needs of each space, as the appropriate aquatic surroundings may not always be available.

The pyrotechnic images created following the experience of *Veles e vents* mark a turning point in the artistic evolution of the company's use of fire and lighting, although both elements were present from its beginnings, as Leandre Escamilla points out:

Pyrotechnics has become one more factor in the drama and staging. It has taken on the status of an actor and helps to explain the performance. It is one of Xarxa Teatre's key insignia (*Heraldo de Castellón*, 4-01-2004)

While the proficiency gained as specialists in the theatre of fire was in qualitative terms highly professional as compared to their previous shows, and even though it was now on a large scale, they still had not fully developed the pyrotechnic potential as an ephemeral art on the same level as their plastic art, music or stage designs. But this –historical-differentiation is no longer evident, since their classic shows continue to tour: *Nit màgica* and *El foc del mar* have been revised and updated to inflate the new artistic and poetic functions of the pyrotechnic spectacularity. In this way, the dramatic functionality of the previous pyrotechnics has been considerably strengthened.

As a consequence of this, we can only speak of a qualitative and, more than ever, accumulative progression of the presence and dominance of fireworks and lighting in each of their productions, in an attempt to maintain the degree of large format spectacularity begun with *Veles e vents* and which has been retained, definitively, as a highly defined stylistics in Xarxa Teatre. Naturally, the company has considerably enhanced the artistic and technological complexity of its ephemeral pyrotechnic art since it superimposed a poetic language of symbols and metaphors –in *Veles e vents*- on each of its dramatic functions, which resulted in a predominance of the visual elements of colours, shapes and movements of fire and pyrotechnics.

*Veles e vents* presents countless spectacular moments of ephemeral art, as the subject continuously lends itself to this

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purpose. Its poetic images are recreated very imaginatively, perhaps the most difficult being the representation of the mutation of the vessel and the sailors: the transformation of the idyllic spaces of the sailing boat into the futuristic spaces of the petrol tanker, and the metamorphosis of the sailors into mutants. Fireworks and lighting are the main languages used to narrate this spectacular change, with blue lights and a dense cataract of white “water”, darkened by the tempestuousness of the winds. When the stormy sea becomes calm, the mutants are revealed, the leap across centuries of time appearing to have lasted just a few seconds. An effectiveness that can only be achieved through a visual, spectacular poetics, as spectacular as that of the ensuing fire that fills the sky with smoke and fire.

The presence of fire is also one of Xarxa’s identifying features, used in all its stagings from the beginning. An astonishing image, one that will stay with all of us forever, is that of the balls of fire in *Déus o bèsties*. The fireballs are lit from the ground at the height of the bull’s horns, while it is tied up; once they are burning, they begin their ascent, increasing in strength, until they reach the highest heights and turn the whole stage set over from one side to another, like the swinging of bells. Bells that transport us to the domain of the cult of the bull in religion, the tradition of the bull of Saint Mark, but that tell us, with the help of fireworks, the tragic future of the butchered bull. Critics have never failed to praise the plasticity of this staging, of which has been said:

The potency of the sound, spectacular effects and an impressive pyrotechnics section [...] this passionate vision is highlighted with a set of plastic images of great beauty that astonished thousands of people [...] The stage is transformed, the fireworks jump in the air covering the heads of the crowd with ash. The bull continues its journey around the world; it visits the fiestas and in the end, inevitably, it dies. But the chain of evolution continues and its meat reaches the abattoir, the final stage of its peregrination through the world. Swinging fire, fire that comes out of the sky and reverberates the square. (Josep Maria Marsal, *Diari de Tarragona*, 18-09-2003)

While fire is generally associated with the presence of bulls in dynamic images, a very different example can be seen in *Sant Pere, per sempre* where seven static bulls of fire, with contrasts of light and smoke, rest on the containers in the Grao de Castellón port, while the public cannot take their eyes off them as they represent, with the fire on their horns, the signal fires that illuminate the scene.

However, it is in the religious or symbolic sphere where the resource of pyrotechnic fire has been most used to outline the very high silhouettes in the air. These include the silhouette of the Virgin of Lledó in *Sedes Matris* and *Magdalena, vítol!*, Santa Marta in *Desembarc moro* (The landing of the Moors), The Virgin of Covadonga in *Tierra de Júbilo*; and also the Dame of Elx in *Elx, un llegat de cultures* (Elx, a legacy of cultures), or the dove of peace in *Tombatossals*.

Fire as a source of real light, discerned in the church tower, has been dramatised in shows such as *Enfarolà del Fadrí* (The illumination of the Fadrí) and *Al-imara*. In these works, pyrotechnics has enabled us to visualise an entire language of signals that would have been sent out to the population from the steeple or bell tower. On other occasions, such as in *Desembarc moro*, the 1,500 signal fires are turned into an ancestral lighting stage element that takes us back to a historically evocative past, of war and watchfulness on the beaches. The light from the signal fires in the darkness of the night can also have the opposite effect, that of a spiritual peace among the crowd as they, surrounded by signal fires, watch the performance of *Tierra de Júbilo*.

On the other hand, fire as a destructive reality of burning and war provokes images of more intense spectacularity because tragedy demands a greater presence of light and pyrotechnic effects. This is reflected in *Sedes Matris* where the intensity of natural fire is distinguished from fire resulting from war. In other works, light or pyrotechnics may predominate,

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depending on the space; for example, in *Tombatossals*, where the language of lights is used to depict war on the stage surrounded by the audience, while the pyrotechnic installations are placed on the roofs of nearby buildings. These two languages, used simultaneously, create a more real and aggressive materialisation of the wasps' attack in the combat. But lights and fireworks are not always used together to depict images of destruction; at times, a single light, projected onto engraved images, covering large areas of space, is what re-creates the reality of destruction, like in that of the trees in *Tombatossals* or life in *Veles e vents*.

The dramatic reality of the symbols of fire has truly opened the door of success for the company among the people of Castellón and beyond local boundaries. The symbolism of the fiesta is the unifying force, the significance shared by all participants, as it is a ritual of fertility or of purification. Making theatre with the fiesta of the *gaiates* in *L'encesa de les gaiates* (switching on the platforms of lights that form part of the Magdalena fiestas), of *fallas* in *El foc del mar*, of the Forcall devils in *Nit màgica* and of carnival in *Les rates mortes*, is a symbiosis strengthened with the guarantee of success, because the theatre's spectator is also a citizen with roots in the ancestral festive tradition of fire, in whose presence emotions are aroused, as Josefina Arribas writes:

The smell, the noise, the vibration, the tricks of forms, create a physical-psychological sensation in the spectator that demonstrates the ludic nature of pyrotechnics. We are thus witnessing a social art conceived as a group spectacle in which men hold onto their ancestral fear and admiration of the flames' magic and, at the same time, feel like lords of fire, taming it, moulding it to their own liking, as a goldsmith works his precious metals. (ARRIBAS, 1988, 445)

The art of traditional Valencian pyrotechnics had almost died out, simply because tastes had changed. Only aerial displays using large shells were admired, and wooden structures had been abandoned –hoops with flares, cones, baskets, fans, ears of corn, windmills, fire puppets-, that had delighted the public squares, together with the fire-bulls. However, luck and determination made their recovery possible in the field of public entertainment. Further help was provided by Pasqual Martí, the third generation in a hundred-year old family of pyrotechnicians, when he gave Manuel V. Vilanova an old wooden fire-bull. From then on, the rebirth of traditional Valencian pyrotechnics for street theatre achieved unimaginable success, success that began with the design of the *correfuegos Nit màgica*. The words of Vilanova illustrate this success:

I believe that Xarxa's merit lies in its inspiration in the Valencian traditions. That's why *Nit màgica* does not have dragons, because they were never part of our tradition. Our reference was the bull. Many bulls of fire – *embolados* [with balls of fire on their horns] with hoops, fire around their necks...- these filled our festive traditions. And this was local material that had been ignored until then, from which we took our inspiration to complete the new show we were working on [...] Nowadays there are two different concepts of how to do *correfuegos*: the Catalan and the Valencian. The first is defined by Comediants, the second begun by Xarxa Teatre. (*Levante-EMV*, 20-03-2004)

*Nit màgica*, despite its highly defined dramatic structure, has evolved through innovative additions, particularly at the end of the performance: moments of true delirium in which the climax of the show is accentuated to become an episode of collective mass catharsis. This show of animation is, without doubt, the one that has most firmly taken root in the Magdalena fiestas in

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Castellón, to the point that it is a constant fixture in the fiesta programme and is capable of drawing crowds of around 50,000 people.

*El foc del mar* and *Les rates mortes* dramatise the ritual of the fiesta of fire in a different way, without intermingling with the public, but seeking their presence while they act among the crowd in a parade paying homage to the symbolic values of fire. A Lent and Carnival fire that burns the evil spirits on the gallows -*Les rates mortes*- or a Mediterranean spring fire fiesta -*El foc del mar*- that celebrates the good omens of art and fortune.

Xarxa Teatre has been favoured with the collaboration of many professionals in the design of its lighting and pyrotechnics, a long list of people that we do not want to leave out. Lighting designers like Christophe Le Bideau, Joseph Solbes, Àngel Carrasco and José Hernández Marques. And pyrotechnic designers such as Pasqual Martí, Vicent Martí, Lluís Brunchú, Caballer, Tomás, Germans Brunchú, Peñarroja, Zamorano Caballer, Vicente Marzá, Eladio Martí, Vicente Galdón, Vicente Caballer, Caballer S.A. and Cañete. All these people have contributed to making theatre, street theatre, spectacular, whether in the popular format of the Valencian tradition, or in the other more eloquent format of great aerial pyrotechnics.

Yet without doubt, their great dramatic innovation lies in having made theatre with fire like theatre with words. Their theatre of fire is the staging of spectacular firework displays and a type of entertainment in the street; but above all, it is theatre. Because it is structured as a genre, with characters, with symbolisms and with a creative purpose. All stemming from the traditional culture of fire, identifying symbol of the Valencian environs, that they have been able to universalise wherever they have performed: right across the globe.

### 3. Space and plastic art

Xarxa Teatre is a street theatre group. This is, naturally, an obvious remark. However, we would hasten to add that this definition is insufficient in any analysis of the group's work in a wide variety of urban settings and arrangements, since what we find in Xarxa is the systematic practice of *street transformation*. Not only on a functional level, with the eruption of the fiesta in daily life (as in the case of many similar groups), but also through an alternative *plastic reading* to that normally made of the spaces in which the show is put on; a plastic reading that occurs through the company's theatrical lens which filters and colours the space in accordance with its premises.

In its first shows (*La bruixa Marruixa*, *La barba del Rei Barbut*), Xarxa emphasised the first of these mechanisms: streets became a play area in which the reality of daily life was put aside (and, in practice, ignored in the same way as the retinue ignore the vehicles they come across along their route) and a very direct, effective ludic concept of space is what triumphs. With *El dolçainer de Tales*, however, a subtle transformation of the urban setting occurs, from the very moment that the action takes us back to a more or less recent past; thus the fiesta the spectators experience, far from being their own, is in fact that of their grandparents. The magic of theatre, and most particularly that of Xarxa, means that today, audiences are able to *live* and not merely *see* the fiesta brought to us from a previous time; this may be due to what Pasqual Mas, Adolf Piquer and Xavier Vellon define -hitting the nail on the head- as "theatre of traditions rather than traditional theatre". In other words: critical reading and equally critical deconstruction, as opposed to the uncritical assimilation and mechanical reproduction of patterns inherited from tradition (MAS-PIQUER-VELLON, 1997, 11-17).

This determination to transform is much more evident in *Nit màgica*; in effect, this show marks a crucial turning point in the group's pyrotechnic stagings. Examined in the corresponding chapter, it isolates, enhances and transforms a series of points on its route, until it manages -in the most monumental performances- to completely *re-clothe* the entire dramatic space, as in the finale of the *Nit màgica* performed to celebrate the Fiestas of the Magdalena in Castellón.

This conviction to transform is even clearer in *El foc del mar*, when the *ninots* are picked up, creating a series of passage ways through the crowd that are previously known only to the actors. In this way, as frequently noted, the initially chosen

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space is transformed, as a result of it being superimposed by the dramatic space. This superposition is never mechanical and, as mentioned above, is known beforehand, particularly when the performance does not move through an urban setting, but in large open spaces (squares, wide avenues, parks etc.) that are otherwise seen as uniform and homogeneous spaces. Naturally, the physical configuration of the urban spaces chosen and their previous selection predetermine the morphology, the rhythm and the development of the subsequent route, as is clearly reported in a French newspaper:

Chaque tournée est précédée par des visites de repérage qui permettent à ces perfectionnistes de connaître les lieux où ils pourront accrocher leurs étranges machines pétaradantes, les lieux qu'ils illumineront de leurs fusées (*Le Dauphiné libéré*, 11-01-1992).

The constant evolution of Xarxa's stagings has in fact heightened this tendency. Indeed, the re-reading of space in later shows has increased. One-off shows such as *València, llum del Mediterrani*, *Sant Pere, per sempre*, *Sedes Matris*, *Magdalena, vítol!*... go far beyond the simple functional occupancy of a predetermined space. In the first of these, the projections of coloured lights blur the silhouette of the architectural framework chosen (the *Palau de la Música* in Valencia). In the second, beyond doubt a complex show from the point of view we are concerned with here, port containers are transformed into other objects, such as bullpens. In other words, they are dramatised in the same way as real objects are on a stage. This transformation reaches its decisive moment when the harbour cranes no longer form part of the stage set and become real pieces of stage machinery that enable the movement of either parts of the set (such as the boats) or the actors themselves.

In *Sedes Matris*, the show commemorating the centenary of the construction of Castellón's Cathedral, the material and immediate reality of the Cathedral's façade is replaced by the scenographic reading of its construction, in a period distanced from the present, in a game in which the artifice surpasses its model. In *Magdalena, vítol!*, *El Fadri* (the cathedral bell tower) even loses its essential vertical state to become the path trodden by the city's first settlers, with their primitive *gaiatas* (lights), in a displacement of meaning that creates a complex phenomenon of symbolic reading. Through this horizontalisation of the scene, *El Fadri*, the most important beacon in the city, is integrated with the primitive beacons of those who first trod the path from the mountain to the plains. Note also in this case that what is objectively vertical becomes, for a few seconds, horizontal. This procedure, clearly *revolutionary* from the point of view of the laws of perspective, that over so many centuries has marked different stage conceptions, fits in well with set designers such as Ming Cho Lee, Richard Hudson or –especially– George Tysin, whose ideas present points of contact with the contemporaneity of Xarxa's stage designs (DAVIS, 2001).

Finally, although we could go on, we should note Xarxa's very recent *Tierra de Júbilo* (2006), in which they not only used lighting effects projected onto buildings, but also transformed the whole urban setting one hour before the beginning of the performance. As the Cantabrian press reported:

An hour before [the start] the old town will take on a special atmosphere: all electric lighting will be turned off, and replaced by the light of torches that will be lit on the balconies and the bells will be rung, all of which will create a "different dimension" and will announce that "something big" is going to happen. (José María Gutiérrez, *El Diario Montañés*, 20-04-2006).

Similarly, the group's special productions in specific spaces (the opening of a new building, for example) present the same characteristic and can be read with the same conviction to transform: thus, in the show to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Pamplona Swimming Club (2006), the dramatic space was predominantly in the air, the walls and the upper sections of some of the buildings, with the exception of an inflatable bull, that combined the two planes –the ground

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and the air- when it reared up. In addition, at the opening ceremony of the Hotel Westin in the city of Valencia (2007), the singular character of the hotel (a three-storey building surrounding a huge inner courtyard with gardens) allowed for even more complex tricks: the inner walls became the floor where the dancing took place (and the spectators, on their balconies, were then *seen* at the same time as the fictitious floor created for the dancing); the central garden, in turn, was transformed into an artificial garden superimposed on the natural one; cranes, actors and inflatable monsters thus passed through the supposedly invisible boundaries marked by the roofs of the building and “entered” into the courtyard, from above, ignoring the doors ...

At this point, we might think that in the great shows of the nineties (*Veles e vents* and *Déus o bèsties*), Xarxa in some way renounced this conviction to intervene. This is true, but only partly so. Indeed, it is correct to say, and as Manuel V. Vilanova himself recognises, that the challenge they accepted in 1994 to perform in Calais for the opening of the Channel Tunnel (which spawned *Veles e vents*) meant that a show had to be created that could be satisfactorily seen by such a large number of spectators. The final decision (more so in *Déus o bèsties*) was to create a frontal and at the same time, vertical set. While in *Veles e vents* the irruption of the winds broke this frontal plane for a few minutes, and at the same time it may be interpreted as a kind of transition from previous works (specifically, *El foc del mar*) to this new production, this concession did not exist in *Déus o bèsties*. But in both cases, pyrotechnics was in attendance to help the creators of these projects, providing both with a depth projected into the sky by the fireworks and thus furnishing a dramatic space of a complexity and density that amply exceeded the physical limits of the staging space: the platform on which the action took place, to be precise.

And that is not all, because while a certain traditional conception of space is still found in *Veles e vents* (the boat is raised on the ground [=sea] in an easily recognisable form), in *Déus o bèsties* the experience of these singular shows is used (particularly *Magdalena, vítol!*, with its staging and the descent of *El Fadrí*) and the spectator is offered an illusory frontal set, which is not what it seems, but in fact is the vertical projection of a predominantly horizontal space; in other words, precisely the opposite process to that seen in the case of the transformations to the Castellón bell tower. In effect, the four *levels* or areas of performance superpositioned in this frontal macro-set have no *logical* reading, they do not exist in reality; at most, they announce a *symbolic* (not physical) descent of the figure of the bull, from the caverns at the beginning to the abattoir of the present ... But from the point of view of verisimilitude, practically the entire performance should be acted out on a single level: the ground. The reason, mentioned above, is clearly highly pragmatic (to provide a good view of the show), but the solution is much more original and, above all, much more complex than the impression gained from just a quick glance at the work.

Despite the above, *Tombatossals* is without doubt the show in which all the previously experimented relationships with space are best consolidated. Indeed, the combination of stillness and mobility present in *Veles i Vents* is found in this vibrant re-reading of Josep Pasqual i Tirado’s classic work. Likewise, the incorporation of the vertical dimension takes on a unique relevance and goes beyond the use, still anecdotic, of the crane seen in *Sant Pere, per sempre*. Furthermore, the narrator, the author himself, dematerialises his voice and moves away from the story represented by means of a system of projection above the stage space. Finally, the risks involved in all frontal stagings are removed by playing with a double stage that obliges the audience to divide its attention between four focal points of interest: the aerial space, the two large stages at ground level, and the shopping-trolley-boats that act to link the two.

Obviously, if *Tombatossals* is, today, the most consummate example of what we are outlining here, Xarxa’s previous show, *Ibers*, must also be recognised as a perfect illustration of the play of tensions stemming from the representation of history (the crisis of primitive ways of life in the contemporary world) that *ignores* the spectators and their involvement, often forced, since the dramatic representation takes place among the audience. This technique, previously tried out in *El foc del mar*, is strengthened by the more purely narrative character of *Ibers*. In summary, this attitude is also requested of the audience in the case of *Tombatossals*.

This refunctionalisation of the urban spaces in which Xarxa performs occurs, aside from its technical perfectionism, as a

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result of the judicious combination of two factors: the *festive* and the *aesthetic*. The former we will deal with in the corresponding chapter; the latter we address here.

The transformation of the dramatic space through symbolic and ideological readings as described above is not the only tool Xarxa uses to ensure that its performances enter into dialogue with the existing spatial framework. Indeed, from its very first stagings, the group was concerned not only to acquire a highly defined, widely recognisable plastic art, but also to give these plastic ideas a precise dramatic function. Moreover, this process has increased with each staging, to the point where it has now become a distinctive feature in the company's recent productions. We now examine this in greater detail. Despite the simplicity of its first productions (*La bruixa Marruixa*, *La barba del Rei Barbut*), the group already manifested a conviction to go beyond the most well known resources in the field of children's street theatre. Indeed, their giants, masks, massive heads and long legged figures go further than anything that tradition might have established: the involvement of the Bagatela puppet group in making the puppets may possibly explain their both traditional and innovative nature, and the fact that they have –in all cases– a mobility and expressivity that we can only glimpse from the early recordings of those performances.

As mentioned above, the growth of the company led to its most ambitious show *El dolçainer de Tales*, grounded on a huge amount of anthropological documentation (undertaken not only by Xarxa's directors, but particularly by their advisors: Vicent Serra on the texts and Diego Ramia, the music [RAMIA-SERRA, 1987]). Thus, a thread already evident in the group's first tentative dramatic steps (with *Teatro Carbonaire* in La Vall d'Uixó) was crystallised, and soon would become a distinctive feature of the group's plastic work: inquiry into, and creative dialogue with, the roots of Valencian fiesta. *El dolçainer de Tales* and *Nit màgica* were the first practical outcomes of this characteristic, to which the group has essentially remained faithful. In *Nit màgica*, the use of plastic imagery from the *santantonadas* (Saint Antony fiestas) - clearly visible in the costumes- was combined with the recovery of the tremendous visual value presented by fireworks, in a symbiosis that has kept this production in a perennial state of grace.

However this went further, since this approach to the plastic of the *santantonadas* would inevitably lead to the Western artistic avant-garde movements that in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century discovered in folklore a fascinating source of figures, colours and rhythms. Joan Miró and Picasso both showed an interest in these issues and references and used them in their work. In the case of Miró, furthermore, the show *Mori el Merma!* by the group Putxinel·lis Claca (1978) had demonstrated that the transposition of Miró's two-dimensional surrealist figures into three dimensions (from canvas to stage) was not only feasible, but also theatrically very effective (VILANOVA, 2006, 55-56). From there, Xarxa went a step further in *El foc del mar* for which Amat Bellés, responsible for the plastic dimension, designed an imagery based on reminiscences (not copies) of Miró, both in the costumes and in the *falla* figures (created by Joan Ninot with sculptor Pepe Ferrer), with hints of Picasso in the masks. To this was added, almost inevitably, Calder's mobiles, to construct the platforms that transported the *ninots*. Names to which the sculptor and painter Niki de Saint Phalle should be added, who has had a visible influence on the form and volume of the *ninots* and with her colour combinations.

From then on, the plastic avant-garde would continue to be present in practically all Xarxa's shows. This is clearly the case of *Les rates mortes*, in which the peculiar expressionism of James Ensor not only becomes the foundation for its plastic universe, but also the axis on which the staged work turns, the social criticism –often fierce– that the Flemish painter poured into his paintings. Equally obvious is the case of the constructivist references in many of the group's most recent shows, such as the stilt walking and skating characters with geometric shapes for hats. The expressionist touch of the mutant boat in *Veles e vents* should also be noted, with its crew's tubular-ten-tailed wardrobe (by Maribel Peyró, Maribel Monleon and the company itself) and make-up, without a doubt one of their best results (together with that of *Les rates mortes*), created by Lupe Clemente. The same should be said of the moving winds of that work, which goes back to the plastic universe that, with good fortune, was experimented with previously in *El foc del mar*.

The regular and systematic use of lighting effects to create virtual stages has likewise become a feature of Xarxa's shows in recent years. Similar aesthetic resources are also found in these virtual stage sets. For instance, in the most visually

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complex shows (such as *Tierra de Júbilo*), the projections onto buildings, one of its most obvious characteristics, offers images not only of the composer and musician Jesús de Monasterio (accompanied by his scores), but also of cave paintings and illustrations from medieval manuscripts. And the conjunction of wefts, colours and drawings reminds us of a geometricism found both in the decorative arts of many civilisations (from Celtic to Islamic) and in folklore from all over the world. This combination of shapes and colours can equally transport us to the more proximate fields of contemporary abstract art.

More examples? When we look at the projections onto the Church of Santa María in Elx (*Elx, un llegat de cultures*), the range of colour in the virtual groves of date palms before us cannot fail to remind us of the paintings of the *douanier* Rousseau...

In summary, it is clear that the plastic approach used, which has taken on an increasingly essential role in recent stagings, has not only complemented the careful –and judicious– use of the spatial peculiarities in the locations of Xarxa's shows, but has also been able to *transfigure* these spaces, making a reality of what in principle could seem to be the dream of any street theatre group: the clear distinction between the setting space (streets, squares... in their pre-show state) and the staged space (the same locations after the process of transformation they undergo for the show's performance). If this has been possible, it is clearly because the design of the work (the dramatic space, in the end) has reflected not only on the physical characteristics of the space, but also on the symbolic and narrative values that it had to integrate. One of the main distinguishing features of Xarxa's work is the amount of effort put in at the design stage; in this task, the set designer/head of plastic design plays a vital role. For this reason, Amat Bellés, Pasqual Arrufat, Carles Abad or Joan Ninot, each one in his specific field, are an essential part of Xarxa and jointly responsible for its success.

## 4. The actors, with Xarxa

One fine day, some thirty years ago, when at last the conditions were right for us to begin evaluating what Francoism had meant for our country, as Valencians we came to realise that our theatrical heritage had been thrown on the scrap heap, pillaged and/or prostituted throughout Franco's long dictatorship. The theatrical spaces, so important in a country –a pre-1939 country– so European, its texts, its authors... And of course, its actors.

Fortunately, the history of the theatre has also been the history of resistance over the centuries; without doubt, this tradition is the reason why, below the ashes of a badly scorched theatre, there remained enough sufficiently warm embers to fire the enthusiastic start that Valencian theatre experienced from the seventies onwards.

However, the cost was extremely high. Manuel V. Vilanova has explained this on numerous occasions: if Xarxa makes street theatre, it is because when the group began to consider theatre work on a regular basis, there was practically nowhere suitable to do so in any of the districts in the north of the Land of Valencia; thus, in March 1982 he wrote:

There are no suitable venues. Most of the theatres that were built during the Republic have either been destroyed, or turned into cinemas, discotheques or fertilizer stores. The channels of diffusion, marketing or criticism do not exist. But what is more serious is the confirmation that [the districts of Castellón] are an authentic theatrical desert. (Saó, March 1982)

A quarter of a century later, we now know that this initial lack of conventional theatre venues was decisive in Xarxa's destiny as a street theatre company. Perhaps what has not been noted to such an extent is that the interruption of traditions and acting schools left a decisive mark on the new Valencian creators who started to make a name for themselves during the nineteen eighties. Indeed, where do you start looking for trained actors? At that time, renovation had just begun at the

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*Escuela Superior de Arte Dramático* in Valencia (HERRERAS-MOLERO, 2005) and the private or local council schools were no more than vague ideas. The problem was clearly aggravated if these new actors had to work in street theatre, a tendency then practically nonexistent in this area.

The first years of Xarxa's career were therefore marked by the need to train actors in very different ways. Internal training courses, frequently (and necessarily) resorted to in independent theatre, on one hand, with the perennial complicated problem of who would train the trainers first. And on the other hand, an intense search for expertise from beyond our borders. These were the paths chosen early on by the Vila-real group. Indeed, in raising standards among the company's actors, Manuel V. Vilanova went further and also made contact with the fledgling street theatre movement in Catalonia and, through Toni Cots, with Odin Teatret, directed by Eugenio Barba, which clearly had a crucial influence on Xarxa's first steps in staging and street shows (doubtlessly more than those designed for smaller venues and audiences) and – above all– with the practice of *exchange* (BARBA, 1986, 231-239) that favoured a free-flowing fruitful dialogue with tradition. Also, of course, in the type of preparation and acting work, which combines the specific tasks for each actor (regular physical training carried out regardless of the production in hand) and the use the director-demiurge puts this to. This philosophy of theatrical work gives us a better understanding of some of the statements to come from Xarxa's directors, such as “we tell the actors that the less they know about a show, the better. That way, they are more creative in the performance” (as told to Cristina García, *El Periódico Mediterráneo*, 24-12-2004). Or, as Francesc Massip recently said:

The production [*El foc del mar*] ratifies the work method advocated by its directors, consistent with capturing the spontaneous creativity of the actors during the rehearsal process, haggling with them over the show's content: previous knowledge of the plot may condition the innate creative capacities of the actors. (*Avui*, 17-01-2005).

Training also demands intense, specific preparation, constant factors for Xarxa's actors, of whom high physical qualities are demanded, together with proficiency in very specific techniques for the job: with pyrotechnics, stilt-walking or large inflatables, for example. We would also add that, as these shows are conceived for a large audiences, the predominant norms in much of Western theatre (such as economy of gesture and the law of minimum effort to obtain maximum effects) must give way to the need for these audiences to be able to *see* the actors and *understand* what they are doing in these large scale shows, for which Barba's techniques make a great deal of sense (BARBA-SAVARESE, 1986, 195-208; MASGRAU, 1998). A further factor, as Leandre Escamilla points out so accurately (ESCAMILLA 2005), is that the foreground shots and even detailed close-ups of the actors provided by audiovisual media distort the necessary magnification of the actors' work, to the point that it can appear pompous. Nonetheless, for those who hold this opinion, it is sufficient to compare these close up views of the actors in large scale shows with the work of the same actors at street level (from *Nit màgica* to *Les rates mortes*). If it appears that the actors' body movements and gestures are overacted here, the masks and costumes offset –or distort– their expressivity, while the need to maintain a constant state of tension in order to move rapidly and effectively through an equally mobile crowd requires their movements to be extremely concise and clean. And we should not forget that they are the same actors in both cases.

Different aesthetics? Simply different distances between actors and spectators, circumstances that require acting techniques that vary in their end result but that are very similar in their conception and approaches: physical preparation, the autonomy of each actor over his or her work, the specific relationship each one has with the stage and pyrotechnic elements he or she is responsible for and, finally, the conception and structuring of the shows from acting practice and not acting practice from a rigid, predetermined text (or a textual design). As Leandre Ll. Escamilla points out:

When we come up with the idea for a new piece of work, the first stage involves a lot of deskwork. We analyse the

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previous production, mistakes ... and when the subject is clear in our minds, there is a period of reflection and documentation: this is the decisive moment of creation [...]

Then we look for the right drama for the staging; this is where the creative team comes in - the stage designer, illustrator, various advisors, and they lick it into shape. A conglomeration of people always participate in shaping the work, and the actors come in at the end and also contribute ideas. A show is the sum total of all this creativity.

(*Heraldo de Castellón*, 4-01-2004)

The learning process based on the acting suggestions put into practice by Odin Teatret was also supplemented by the experience of groups like Comediants in their shift from indoor theatre to street theatre (for further analysis see PIQUER, 2002, 97-100). In any case, by the eighties Xarxa was making substantially higher demands than those usually found in Valencian theatre at that time, in which the concept of *professional theatre* was more a desire (or a long-term project) than an evident reality.

During this early stage Xarxa also looked beyond the above-mentioned training sources. A third factor came into play, a factor that would soon take on maximum importance: the desire to connect its incipient dramatic work with the rich tradition of Valencian (and by the same token, Mediterranean) large-scale spectacle. This tradition combines extreme physical activity with outstanding rhythmic capabilities and a highly complex, polished concept of representation: for example, disguise as a consubstantial element in many fiestas. The fact that all of these, or the vast majority, are *street fiestas* conditions their physical characteristics; for instance the fact that they are *exhausting*, since the exhaustion of those taking part has a ritual component inherent to the very idea of the fiesta. Moreover, the first members of Xarxa verified from the moment they first made contact with *La bruixa Marruixa* that although much of their audience did not have clear notions of the idea of theatre, they did however show great *festive* competence.

In *El dolçainer de Tales*, the company's experiments with the codes of the fiesta are well known. However we cannot appreciate that the actors have assumed the role of *festero* (fiesta-participants). Or, more precisely, that the actor has taken on the acting codes of fiesta participants. In fact, the actors in this show play the part of *festeros* from the past and put a visible ironic distance between the spectators and themselves at various points in the play; in the priest's sermon this is particularly obvious.

Thus, it was essential to go further: to transform not only the acting patterns, but also the very concept of *being an actor*. The result, naturally, was *Nit màgica*. We can therefore understand the surprise shown by some of the Latin American audience when they attempted to fit Xarxa's work into the model of cultured Western theatrical tradition:

Everything came to an end, and after the applause, the audience seemed as if they were waiting for more sensations. Is this theatre?, asked one girl to nobody in particular. I wouldn't know what to tell her. Perhaps pre-theatre. (Eloy Yagüe Jarque, *El Nacional*, 19-04-1995).

But let's go back to the actors. The undisputed success of *Nit màgica* lies in how it continually plays along the tenuous boundary between the ludic space and the spectators. The game, the provocations, the continual transgressions (on both sides) forces the actors to bear an exhausting physical and psychological tension. When the show is over, covered in sweat whatever the weather, they experience a kind of delicious freedom that takes us back to the very essence of the theatrical game. There is no room, however, for improvisation, nor for forgetting the rules of the performance: handling the fireworks, possible responses to all types of reaction from the crowd, the strict observance of timing on a meticulously

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pre-set route... Rules that must be learned both through vicarious experience (the example given by the veterans) and through physical training.

All of the above may lead us to think that, paradoxically, Xarxa had drifted towards the fiesta in the strict sense and that the actors stopped being actors and became *festeros*. Yet that is not the case: because Xarxa, in *Nit màgica* and in all its shows grounded on the fiesta (in the end, all of them), *make theatre* out of the fiesta. *El foc del mar* is without any shadow of a doubt its best example; as of course, are all their other interpretations/deconstructions of festive acts; those of the Magdalena in Castellón, but also *La quema de la sardina* (The burning of the sardine) in Murcia, the carnival of Vinaròs, the landing of the Moors in La Vila Joiosa and a long etcetera.

This *making theatre out of fiesta*, discussed in another chapter, logically has repercussions at an acting level, since the *festeros* turn the strict following of ritual, set by tradition, into one of the cornerstones of their work. The *festero* apprenticeship is almost exclusively vicarious, and the constant innovations are always subject to a previous period of quarantine. In Xarxa's shows, however, the actor has an autonomous space: the training system enables the directors to take advantage of the suggestions and contributions from the actors, and at the same time, the *transformation of space* rather than their fitting into the space allows the fiesta always to evolve in very varied circumstances due to the actors' capacity to adapt. This explains why *Nit màgica* can be performed in very different spaces without ever losing its essence or its configuration... because Xarxa has known how to go beyond the fiesta and make theatre. And the actors play a crucial role in this transformation.

Physical work is therefore demanded of the actors. As mentioned above, the actor is required to be able to regulate his or her work in proportion to and depending on his or her distance from the public. Of course, the problem of voice remains. Since *El dolçainer de Tales*, Xarxa has not used the spoken word in its shows. The *official* explanation for this, given by the directors of the company themselves, is that Valencian texts made their productions difficult to understand outside Catalan speaking areas; in the words of Vilanova:

Gradually we began defining our drama in accordance with the immense international market that was opening up before us. On the way, we had to give up the use of the spoken word so our message could cross borders. But we have never lost the traditional identity and the contemporary theatrical art that have always characterised the group. (As told to Antonio Arbeloa, *Mediterráneo*, 2-1-05.)

This *deprivation*, if it is the right term, of a resource that Western theatre has taken to its extremes, forced the company to search for systems of expression that could replace the resource of speech. This is clearly visible in *Ibers*, the most purely narrative work in Xarxa's second period (as defined in the chapter on music), but also in *Veles e vents* or *Déus o bèsties*. However, while in the latter the stories contained in the narrative tale can be understood in isolation (and the narrative thread can be followed without, for example, having identified the worshippers of Mitra), *Ibers* deals with a story with all its letters, in other words, with a narrative thread controlled by a strict causality, with highly defined characters played by specific actors. In the end, Juan Mandli's collaboration in the direction turned out to be essential in helping each of the actors to *construct* his or her personality and transmit it to the audience, without resorting to a more or less rudimentary mimicry (which tends to be the easy solution in many similar occasions).

We mentioned above that the spoken word disappeared from Xarxa's shows after *El dolçainer de Tales*. However it has been reincorporated to a certain extent in recent projects. Speech is used in commemorative events, where an explanation of antecedents and an introduction are necessary to *situate* the audience and tell them of the reasons for the performance (*València, llum del Mediterrani*; *Prohibido bañarse* (No bathing allowed) or *Tierra de Júbilo*). In other cases, the spoken word not only provides a background, but also, through its texts, supports the development of the work (*Sedes Matris*, *Don Quijote sueña de nuevo*). Finally, in *Tombatossals*, the voice –dematerialised– of the author (of his silhouette, to be

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precise) acts as a gateway to and commentary on a very familiar story, but now *re-read* by the group.

While the above examples share a common feature in that voices are detached from the actors, the group goes a step further in *Prohibido bañarse* (2006): the commentaries, all of which are dematerialised (in other words, separated from the actors) are introduced in certain scenes, in which the actors are obliged to match their acting to the rhythm of the lines they are supposedly speaking. Does this mark a step towards the group's recovery of the spoken word? An isolated event, motivated by the particular attributes of a specific space? It is still too soon to say.

In this review of the aspects of acting technique training, an experience should be mentioned that has not continued, but that we imagine has had great relevance. This is the case of *El-lisístrata*, staged in 1989. The show was conceived for and performed in a closed space, directed by Édison Valls and performed by a group of young actors, some of whom had links with Xarxa while others did not. This staging incorporated text, and in addition, responded to an old claim the group had made in its early years: to *also* become a theatre company that played in the theatres that, in the mid-eighties, were making a comeback or had opened in the Valencian region. The experience did not gel, mostly because of the reactions it provoked in an (influential) section of Castellón society (MAS-PIQUER-VELLON, 1997, 78-79).

Although it was not a success, the experience represented an important milestone on the group's learning curve, not so much in dissuading them from making new attempts in the same direction, as in affirming the need for a process of direction and of directing actors. It was essential to adapt and match the task of directing, initially undertaken very competently by Manuel V. Vilanova, to the increasingly complex challenges the company was accepting in terms of its aesthetic approach and, above all, the complexity of its *mise-en-scène*. Here, Leandre Ll. Escamilla played a vital role in taking on the tasks of director's assistant in *El dolçainer de Tales* and, since *Veles e vents*, as co-director with Manuel V. Vilanova.

Trained in Valencia's *Escuela Superior de Arte Dramático*, he would incorporate the knowledge he acquired there into the work of the company, even though the school offers no specific course on street theatre. His practical knowledge of acting techniques and his undeniable teaching skills and capacity to see the full picture turned out to be decisive in providing consistency and density to the work of Xarxa's actors, as well as affording them a versatility that would enable them to take on a wide range of diverse roles.

Likewise, we owe some of the most sensible reflections on the work of the actor, and with the actors of Xarxa, to Leandre Escamilla, reflections that coincide with those of Manuel V. Vilanova in his defence of street theatre. Specifically, in an article from 2005 entitled *Dignificar la calle* (Dignifying the street), he values the principles of working with street theatre actors:

Faced with this obvious artistic contempt [in much of the theatre profession], our attitude, inevitably, is to demand of ourselves that we become the best in our field. How can we achieve this? Through training. But contrary to what many might think, this training cannot be limited to a series of acting techniques. (p. 15)

And why not, for example:

Actors who handle huge inflatables are criticised, without seeing that the importance lies in the handling of the monster. Proposals are analysed from the front row without taking into account that there may be spectators some 200 metres from the stage. (p. 17)

Indeed, as mentioned above, the street actor, far from constituting a secondary category, faces a two-fold demand: firstly, specific, intense and continuous physical preparation; and secondly, a capacity for reflection, improvisation, that is

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essential when in many of Xarxa's shows, the pyrotechnical staging cannot be rehearsed. How many theatre actors would agree to open a play without having done a lighting test, for instance? The physical and psychological training is not so much a moral demand as an imperative need: not being fit may represent a risk, for the actors themselves, for their colleagues and for the public. Moreover, the capacity for communication between the actors is also essential to the show's success; again we wonder, how many actors of spoken drama could perform their part without seeing the colleague with whom they are conversing and at the same time prevent this from unbalancing the rhythm of the show? This is precisely what street theatre actors frequently have to do.

## 5. Company management

Xarxa's directors are a good example of enterprise and of entrepreneurs in the framework of the profession and theatre management, perhaps because they have been capable of expanding and developing a company that has travelled the world, visiting more than forty countries on four continents. A professional career driven both by the firm resolve to make theatre and by the tenacity to learn.

They started out with a simple structure that sufficed for the seven initial members of the group. That moment in history was very exciting for the world of the theatre and for the political evolution of the country. In those years, everything was still to be done at an autonomous regional government level. As its growth allowed, Xarxa Teatre transformed its organisational structures to be competitive within the sphere of street theatre. Hence it went from being a cultural association between 1983 and 1985, to a jointly owned partnership from 1985 to 1993, until finally, in 1994, it adopted a modern company structure. Currently, it employs a permanent staff of 37 people and can call on numerous external collaborators that enable the company to extend and diversify its artistic projects.

From its base in Vila-real, where Xarxa has always had its headquarters, the company has travelled to perform its shows wherever it has been required to do so. And on this note, they have always been in demand all over because they have always stood out in a limited field of specialised theatre, and because they have always known how to adapt to opportunities to grow and take on more complex artistic projects.

They gradually began to weave a network of infrastructures to draw Castellón's theatrical market together. It is important to note that the group started off from a theatrical and cultural situation that we would today call "virtual": with no theatre or conventional hall, no large premises in which to rehearse and without knowing who would hire their services. On the other hand, despite these hurdles, the political climate in the country was an optimistic one for the cultural sector. They were days full of enthusiastic defence of democracy, after it had been threatened by the attempted military coup d'état in 1981.

This confidence in the future and the re-established democratic stability provided a golden opportunity for street theatre groups that managed to turn themselves into the best antidote against the hijacking of liberties. Historically, the identification of the streets with demands for individual liberties was paradigmatic of the carnival fiestas (VILANOVA, 2006). And now, after so many years of prohibition, the carnival was reinstated in many towns, and much more firmly established, during the eighties.

This context is precisely what explains many of the decisions Xarxa Teatre made, now that it was able to perform *La bruixa Marruixa*, help to re-establish the carnival in La Vall d'Uixó and perform in a musical fiesta at night, all in the same day; and the words of Vilanova himself were not in vain: "You must remember that we are talking about the most hard-working theatre group in the Valencian Community" (to Miguel Moliner; *Mediterráneo*, 16-09-1987). During those years, the *correfuegos* and the carnivals in La Vall d'Uixó and Vinaròs, together with *La quema de la sardina* in Murcia, became spaces for experimentation and a never-ending source of artistic truth in the streets for the actors and musicians of Xarxa. When they created the show *Nit màgica* in 1986, with the dramatic structure of the *correfuegos*, they still had no idea that in 1993 they would take it to Santiago de Chile, within the framework of the incomparable Festival of Nations, the UNESCO

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world theatre festival.

The decision to venture abroad, from as early as 1988, was as vital and necessary for the company's survival as taking on production initiatives from other countries. The result of these projects had by now turned Xarxa Teatre into a clear reference in Mediterranean culture, since they had consistently and successfully consolidated an artistic image, inspired in Valencian cultural roots, as explained in greater detail the corresponding chapter.

In fact, the linguistic roots and use of local songs in *La bruixa Marruixa*, *La barba del Rei Barbut* and *El dolçainer de Tales* initially guaranteed that Xarxa's creations would quickly become established. However, once they entered the national and international theatre circuit, they realised they had no choice but to change the design of their works in order to solve the problem of translations and intercultural communication. At this point, they abandoned the spoken word, but maintained the narrative discourse of the dramatisation and heightened the spectacularity of other languages such as music, plastic art, body language, lighting and pyrotechnics.

Likewise, they restructured the organisation without threatening the company's viability. And despite their precarious financial situation, they continuously invested in theatrical infrastructure and interdisciplinary training. Thus, they were able to put on large-scale productions of a most spectacular nature. These make up their current repertoire of large touring productions: *Nit màgica*, *El foc del mar*, *Veles e vents*, *Déus o bèsties*, *Tombatossals* and *Les rates mortes*. The case of *Ibers* was an exception, withdrawn from the repertoire at the height of its public and critical success, due to difficulties in managing a performance before audiences that far out-numbered the provisions of its original design.

With this single exception, all the other large-scale productions have been continuously performed in both national and international markets, since they have become classic stagings over the years. And this is what best demonstrates Xarxa Teatre's business acumen. The considerable risk of investing in a range of such complex productions has earned them a highly competitive position in the difficult world of theatre. In the end, time has proved them right: street theatre can also be universal, a theatre with no boundaries.

However, this way of understanding theatre, highly risky and distanced from the conventionalisms of closed spaces, involved an apprenticeship in a long list of resources with professionals from various technical fields. For example, how to make giants dance, make the fire-bulls run, keep your balance at great heights and the risks involved in pyrotechnics. They immediately (as outlined in the corresponding chapter) structured new acting techniques with the aim of teaching future actors solely from the base of pragmatic competencies, predominated by the integral character of knowledge in very diverse areas.

Management of their experience in training actors led the directors of Xarxa to set up Volantins, a young company designed not only to deal with Xarxa's complementary areas, but also to help train up younger actors to take over when older members left. This interest in creating a school has improved Xarxa's operations as a whole, by guaranteeing the production of smaller scale works, maintaining stability in production of shows for children and, above all, increasing their capacity to tour with large format productions.

Nowadays, the determination to champion actor training from the outset is probably the human resource that most sets Xarxa Teatre apart from other similar companies at a national level. This reserve of young actors is what has allowed the company to put on its artistic creations in various places at the same time; up to four stagings have been performed in different localities during the same period.

In this way, the company has grown while avoiding the dangers of a misunderstood professional romanticism. It has clearly learned from the business environment in Vila-real, but even more so from the most dynamic managers of the tile production sector. Perhaps the ceramic tile business model applied to Xarxa's management explains the history of its business success, as they have judiciously sought out very diverse resources for survival, while never losing sight of economic viability as a private company:

We have always been a somewhat different company. We considered that the important thing was for the company to

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be as strong and efficient as possible so the work of all its members and its artistic creations would be fully protected. This has led us to not depend too heavily on institutional support and to create our own circuits of diffusion. Doing a good job and the success of our shows has brought the rest (Interview with Manuel V. Vilanova; *Viladecans al carrer*, 1997).

From another point of view, institutional recognition arrived following the production of their first three shows at the beginning of the group's artistic and professional career as a stable company. Since 1988, when they were granted the status of an officially approved company by the *Generalitat Valenciana* (regional government), they have not been absent from the international stage and have constantly made Valencian street theatre visible.

On various occasions, France has placed its trust in the company to organise events of international prestige and important media cover. Yvon Diraison, theatrical advisor to the French minister of culture Jacques Lang, offered Xarxa Teatre their first decisive chance to triumph in the European market. Diraison was organising the *Festival des Arts dans la Rue*, the FAR, in the Breton town of Morlaix when (as a result of Xarxa's success in the 1989 festival) he involved them in a project to co-produce a show for the opening of the 1990 festival. The artistic framework of the co-production proved exciting to both Diraison and Xarxa. This was a decisive moment in the future of the company's artistic approach, as it accepted the commitment to create a work inspired by the great Spanish avant-garde painters and, jointly, the art of the *fallas*.

This way of approaching creative work with greater artistic challenges, not only from an acting position, led Xarxa to develop the company's other production initiative. Nothing less than organising an integrated supply chain for all types of artistic resources. Thus, the Stage Creation Centre was born, to ease the supply of the artistic infrastructure.

After *El foc del mar*, other commissions came from France, such as the invitation to participate in the Albertville Winter Olym-

pics, where they performed in the closing ceremony on the Val d'Isère ski slope; they also performed at both the opening and closing ceremonies of the Festival International du Film Fantastique d'Avoriaz in 1992.

During 1992, projects carried out in the European Union represented 64% of the company's total output. It was therefore logical that the next co-production, the most important to date, would also be offered by another European institution: the Scène Nationale de Calais, organisers of the opening ceremonies for the Channel Tunnel. After following the work of various European groups in a process to decide which should be given charge of the closing ceremony, Xarxa Teatre was their final choice. By then, the company had consolidated experience on the international circuits and provided 90% of the finance for its own projects.

In record time, and with a total of 150 participants, including actors and collaborators, they were able to create *Veles e vents* from their base in Castellón. Only the session for the pooling of ideas in the final rehearsals of the production took place in a hangar at the Bassin Carnot in Calais. At that point, during the last weeks of the production process, they coordinated with the other companies, organisers, volunteers and journalists involved in the event. This was a major challenge to efficient management during which they shared artistic experiences with the population of Calais: not only in finishing off the *falla*, with the *falla* artists from Borriana teaching local technicians interested in learning, but they also ran an intensive training course in street theatre to thirty-five volunteers from the city in preparation for their participation in the performance of *Veles e vents*.

Logically, the fact that the company had a budget appropriate for large-scale productions in *El foc del mar* and *Veles e vents* gave them a great deal of stability on the international theatre circuits, where they have been billed to open and close festivals and all types of large events. The success of the aesthetics of the new large format, begun in the nineties, at the same time brought professional consolidation at a high level and the economic unfolding of company management.

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Indeed, commissions from Europe have allowed them to continue producing large format shows created expressly to commemorate important historical events: in Oostende, *El ball de les rates mortes* (The dance of the dead rats); in Gante, *Carolus V*; in Saint Raphaël *El pescador y la princesa* (The fisherman and the princess); or, to give a further example, in Lille *Les 10 fallas* (The 10 fallas).

This efficient incorporation onto the European stage is also explained to a large extent by fortunate coincidence of time, since in the European market, street theatre managers and producers have, to date, been a very scarce commodity, to such an extent that Xarxa has managed to be very competitive in the large format sector for the last twenty years, to the company's great professional merit. Furthermore, they have been successful despite the lack of a level financial playing field, since, unlike Xarxa, companies in other European countries enjoy a great deal more protection from their home institutions. Their success has aroused so much interest that during the Bilbao Dance Festival, a day was spent analysing how Xarxa Teatre operates as a company, in other words:

The fact that Xarxa has established a significant international presence in spite of the scant official support it receives and in spite of having achieved this global presence from the periphery of the peninsular, specifically from a province with no presence in the Spanish mass media and with many artistic precedents in the export of cultural activities (*El Mundo. Castellón al día*, 29-10-06. For further analysis see: ESCAMILLA-MARQUÉS-VILANOVA, 2004, 107-117).

The fact is that in other countries, an international theatre company is seen as an image of industry and culture that should be promoted, with the aim of helping it to expand into a first class artistic market. Despite this disadvantage, Xarxa Teatre has known how to struggle to win its place as an international leader in street theatre, precisely by competing with a highly Valencian, highly personal image that cannot be transferred in any way.

Yet the range of initiatives they promoted in the national market before their triumph in the international market should not be forgotten. These included managing the *Festival de teatre de carrer de Vila-real* (Vila-real Street Theatre Festival) during its first six years, publication of the books and music from its shows, the creation of their Volantins company mentioned above, and their support for the *Teatre de la Resistencia*. However, it was the city of Castellón de la Plana, as a large market demanding creative projects to modernise (from the eighties onwards) its Magdalena fiestas, that truly boosted the entrepreneurial, management and artistic talents of Xarxa Teatre. On their home ground, in the district of La Plana de Castellón, long before in other cities, is without doubt where they first developed the idea of the theatre as a form of communication in a constant learning process.

Indeed, the Xarxa Teatre Stage Creation Centre has never lacked opportunities to design original dramatic works linked with the capital of the area. By covering a social and cultural need in Castellón, they have been able to experiment, as though in a laboratory, with the evolution of the creative and artistic component of theatre in different sectors and spaces. The presence of Xarxa Teatre in Castellón society has radically modified the way citizen participation is understood in festive and theatrical events. As a consequence, we should speak of a before and an after, clearly marked by the modernisation of its fiestas.

In summary, the various artistic projects designed for the Castellón de la Plana fiestas (*Enfarolà del Fadri*; *Tombacarrers*; *Magdalena, vítol!*; *Magdalena Circus*, *La Galania* and *l'Encesa de les Gaiates*) are now a clear indication of how deeply rooted Xarxa Teatre is in the city. Maintaining their commitment to the same city has in fact led them to develop the potential for growth in the form of a new company, Velam Productions, charged specifically with the management, production and creation of commissioned projects.

The *Magdalena Circus*, an international programme of street circus, takes advantage of the good climate to enjoy the

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show in a square, and present it to all types of audiences, not just children. An approach to circus that comes close to the spectator, without the need to invest in big tops and lighting. While this has a fixed venue, in contrast *Tombacarrers* traces its route through the most central commercial streets of the city. This lively parade is made up of international groups and other national companies, together with members of Volantins and Xarxa Teatre. Within the context of this *Tombacarrers*, the dramatic resources originally created for Castellón make most sense, like the family of artefacts composing Magdaleno the bull, Magda the cow and the calf Xarxalena; and not forgetting the cave painting figures in honour of the painter Porcar, and the animated figure of Tafolet.

This experience and efficiency in creating artistic projects has gone beyond the boundaries of the immediate locality to expand outside Castellón, both in Spain and in Europe. This has led the group to undertake street staging projects where fiesta and theatre are linked, to gain in spectacularity before the attendant public.

Another of the group's aims is to increase its scope of influence through written communication; as a step towards this goal, they brought out the magazine *Fiestacultura*, Xarxa Teatre's channel of communication which has been on the market since 1999. The magazine has facilitated the marketing of street theatre and has provided a platform for debate on the problems of the sector. At the moment, it is the only magazine devoted exclusively to street shows, festival programmes, and dramatic culture in a wider spectacular and cultural sense. In sum, *Fiestacultura* is gradually making history with its testimonies; but above all, it has managed to prevent this experience from going unnoticed by the profession, both on national and international circuits.

Times have changed greatly in the most recent history of street theatre groups. From being creative forces at a European street theatre level, a lot of talent has taken flight to other sectors. When Comediants organised the Festival de Tàrraga, programmers from other countries flocked in search of the best offers in the art. At that time, everything was rosy for theatre groups on the peninsular; but in some way, that was a permanent guarantee of a future, since viability has always been conditioned by legislation (ESCAMILLA, 2005). And in this country, cultural policies have notably harmed street theatre companies and favoured repertory theatre in indoor venues.

For this very reason, after demonstrating the viability of this type of theatre in the contemporary arena for the past quarter of a century, the official cultural institutions need to be more involved in the historical recognition of Xarxa Teatre in the world of theatre. Today's cultural policies should at least take account of the diversity of theatre, the whole spectrum of the profession, together with its establishment outside the large centres like Madrid and Barcelona. The Xarxa Teatre company was born outside these centres of cultural power, but it has astutely managed its resources to the point where the company has strengthened the professionalisation of the theatre sector at an international level.

## 6. Spectators, by the thousands

One of the theoretical problems (another) facing street theatre is that of substantiating its audience. The standard mechanisms used in studies on how theatrical work is received are lacking in street theatre. To start with, the most purely quantitative only make sense in closed theatre venues: seating capacity and occupancy, ticket prices and total sales per show, type of venue, etc. But in addition, more sociological mechanisms such as monitoring the audience during and after each performance (using surveys and interviews) depends, in the end, on the fact that the audience will be made up of the same individuals during the whole performance, a fact that in street theatre is not always clear.

Naturally, attempts have been made to overcome these obstacles, such as the surveys carried out in 2005 by Eunestar among the public attending the nine street festivals that form this organisation (VILANOVA, 2006 b). Although the results were interesting, we have to recognise that more representative samples are needed in terms of geography and over a longer time period, and that no other similar experiences are available in this country. We must therefore work in an area that oscillates between theory (with sensible approaches such as those of PIQUER, 2002, 100-102) and what is confirmed

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on a day-to-day basis.

All the above helps to explain why street theatre has so many problems in reaffirming its existence, given the difficulties of quantifying and analysing its public. To this must be added the fact that the street theatre audience that does not *pay* individually for a seat will, as a rule, not be taken into consideration by institutions and researchers as much as those who do pay ... although, we believe the critical capacity of the spectator is not necessarily sharpened by having to hand over the price of a ticket, but that –quite the opposite– the fact that spectators are not bound by any economic restrictions may also make them *freer* to express an opinion about what they are watching, since they will not be influenced by the idea that if someone has fixed a certain ticket price it is because that is what it is worth... even though the spectator might not be able to make head or tail of what it represents.

Nonetheless, the fact that the street theatre audience does not fit with the generic parameters of the theatre-going public by no means denotes that we are dealing with an indeterminate or slippery reality. Quite the opposite: we have a series of data and reflections that give us a better picture, although we do recognise that we still have a long way to go. The article by Pasqual Mas “*Crear público*” (Creating Public) (2005) will help us on this journey, many of whose reflections (to which we fully subscribe) we outline here. Firstly, Mas highlights the intercultural nature of the street theatre public, as compared to closed theatre audiences:

While [indoor theatre audiences] appear to be cultured individuals –many with higher education– and in the main with a medium or high economic status, [the street theatre public] comes from all cultural, social, economic and age groups in society (p. 7).

Secondly, Mas introduces a very important distinguishing feature: the *endurance* capacity of the street theatre public, as opposed to greater *stability* of indoor theatre-goers, who only leave a performance before the end in exceptional circumstances, while “in the street, in contrast, when people are not enjoying themselves, they leave, and that’s the end of it” (p. 7).

Thirdly, Mas stresses the fact that going to see a show in a closed theatre involves a favourable predisposition on the part of the potential spectator (who takes the decision to attend or not), while “in the street the person is often a passer-by who becomes a spectator that has become ‘caught up’ by the seduction of the performance” (p. 9).

A direct consequence of the above is that if we suppose the indoor venue spectator maintains his or her favourable predisposition during the whole of the performance (which obviously does not mean that he or she might not be terribly critical of that particular show), in the case of street theatre, the agreement established between the spectator and the staged action must be reactivated on a practically continuous basis. As Mas himself points out, “street theatre must brandish all the mechanisms it can muster in order to capture [...] a heterogeneous public” (p. 9).

Nonetheless, these particular characteristics of the street theatre spectator have not led us into the trap of considering him or her less able, less *competent* than the indoor theatre-goer. The Eunestar survey makes this point very clearly, since although “a significant number of people [attend] who are not habitual consumers of theatre”, the fact is that, as the author of the article states:

The level of education [of those in attendance] is far above the average level for each country; the under 25 year-old group is the largest in the former Eastern European countries, while the 25 to 49 year-old age group predominate in the other festivals (VILANOVA, 2006 b, 38).

Having reached this point, the classic quote from a historical figure in street theatre, Peter Schumann, creator of the mythical US group Bread and Puppet, who asserts that “the show must be made so that a five-year-old girl can

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understand: in the street, the show must be stupid, it must be tremendously concentrated” (CRUCIANI-FALLETTI, 1992, 110), is only correct on one point: that referring to *concentration* (although perhaps it may be better to speak of *rhythm*); however, he is completely mistaken in his reference to *stupidity*, a term that in the end just goes to show that Schumann himself implicitly accepts the two-category theatre hierarchy: one higher (*intelligent*) and one lower (*stupid*). Is it necessary to spell out which role would be performed by indoor theatre and which by street theatre under this division?

Before going any further, a further possible mistake that may be drawn from Schumann’s statement (and we are not referring to the covert slight on the female sex: why mention a girl and not a boy?) must be put right. The excerpt from Manuel V. Vilanova’s article refers to the relatively *young* age of much of the public in attendance. Bearing this in mind, we believe we are in a better position to understand that the concentration (or accelerated rhythm) mentioned above does not necessarily imply a simplicity or straightforwardness of the proposals: the video clips and publicity are examples of precisely the opposite. Likewise, street theatre shows must also display this quality, in which a rejection of the pursuit of simplicity is essential if it is to be understood correctly.

It is in fact, this very simplicity that often becomes a trap that much street theatre falls into and mistakenly leads to its being put on the same level as children’s theatre (which it turn, may or may not be simplistic, a highly debatable issue). Indeed, as Xarxa’s directors have repeatedly shown, spectators of their conceptually most complex show (*Déus o bèsties*) need no previous knowledge of the anthropological theories of Ángel Álvarez Miranda (1962) in order to enjoy the performance: in the end, everything rests on the fact that the group’s visual presentation can be read on a variety of different levels.

Furthermore, we must not forget that the spectators, however heterogeneous they might be, have an *encyclopaedia* of images, references and sensations that they can bring into play to decode the setting before them. What becomes essential is for the work’s creators to have a previous knowledge of this encyclopaedia and have the capacity to connect with its users (intellectually, plastically or through the senses). This is precisely what happens with Xarxa: in their first shows, arising out of the Valencian-Mediterranean setting, they found a space shared by actors and spectators in the universe of the fiesta. To their great credit, they were capable of extending this shared space not so much through a superficial approach in their productions for different types of public, but rather through a two-fold mechanism that has turned out to be essential in understanding their tumultuous success. Firstly, their ability to *detach* the common assets of the *fiesta*, understood as a manifestation accessible to all, from the specific festive universe. This obviously explains why *Nit màgica* is a *universal* show in the strict sense of the word, or how *El foc del mar* can be perfectly understood by people who have no idea of what *fallas* are, and for whom the Miró-Picasso aesthetic of the work may lie a long way from their own reality. Secondly, Xarxa has also been capable of recognising the conflictive that is hidden behind the idea of the fiesta: its theatricality, its *tragic* nature, to be precise. A dramatic and tragic meaning that must often be sought in the founding myths of religions, which the creators of the group deliberately capitalise on (ESCAMILLA-MARQUÉS-VILANOVA, 2004). A tragic meaning that embeds dramatic tension in their work and makes it more easily understood by their audiences.

Up to here, this chapter has dealt with more theoretical aspects. However, it should be remembered that the street theatre public plays a significant role in that it forms part of the spectacular and spatial design of the shows. In fact, the history of Xarxa would largely make no sense if we were to ignore this factor. For example, Manuel V. Vilanova has mentioned on numerous occasions that *Ibers*, in our view, one of the company’s most *complete* and stimulating shows, died of success, if the expression is valid: conceived to be performed before a crowd of, at most, two thousand, it had to be withdrawn when it began to draw crowds of thousands, since most of them would not get a good view, if any at all, of the performance. The quick reflexes of the company’s directors enabled them to look for alternatives: *El foc del mar*, for instance, posed a very different relationship with the public than, to mention one case, that of *Nit màgica*. While in the latter the active participation of the public is encouraged, and they are involved in the unfolding of the performance, in *El foc del mar* the spectators become spatial references amongst which the actors circulate, thus avoiding problems caused by having to actively involve a large number of spectators and similarly, getting round the difficulties of aesthetic

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understanding that the show may throw up, or helping to resolve these difficulties after the initial confusion that, at times, occurs when the public is not used to the group's aesthetic, as Joan Ninot reports on the occasion of a performance of *Nit màgica* in Caracas:

It is true that there was some confusion at the start. The crowd in Caracas were unaware that much of the show takes place on the move, and were expecting to sit down to watch the performance. This initial situation soon dissolved into mutual agreement reached through the popular Valencian music and the contagious smell of the fireworks. (*Castellón Diario*, 30-04-1995)

Nonetheless, while we might define the above as a *restrictive function* played by the public in the development of the Xarxa aesthetic, the opposite must also be remembered: that stimulating the public implies that the creators of the performance have to meet the challenge of producing a show for a large crowd of people. As previously mentioned, Xarxa took this challenge on when they accepted the commission for the opening ceremonies of the Channel Tunnel, with an expected audience of 150,000. Or that took shape in the staging of *Déus o bèsties*, and that, in recent years, has led them to increase considerably the use of audiovisual resources in order to reach a larger audience, without any loss of value, via television or new communication technologies. This is clearly a direction for further development in the coming years, as we consider it only fair that Xarxa's spectators should be able see the projections they deserve and that can nowadays only be achieved through television and Internet.

In light of the above, one of the greatest risks that this growth can entail should be noted: dying of success. Or in other words, the risk of reaching a point where the need to satisfy the demands of an increasingly numerous public comes into insurmountable conflict with the standards of quality required of a company of Xarxa's calibre and background. To date, fortunately, this risk has been avoided and the most appropriate solutions have been found in each case to maintain proximity with the spectators... despite the physical distances imposed by the dimensions of the space in which the performance takes place, or the size of the crowd. *Déus o bèsties* is exemplary in this respect: the combination of the music, pyrotechnics, stage design and acting achieves the target of making us all feel we are close to the story and forgetting the real distance that separates us from the stage.

So near despite being so far, then. This is complemented with the opposite situation: so far despite being so near, in the cases where the actor-spectator connection is much greater and means that Xarxa always wants its audience to keep some *distance* from its production, so they can intellectually (as well as through the senses) understand it and, if necessary, also judge the *case* put before them. While this situation is particularly visible in *Les rates mortes*, the combination of distance and proximity reaches the height of expression in three other shows that are perfect in this aspect: *Veles e vents*, *Déus o bèsties* and *Tombatossals*. This combination is, without doubt, the key to the company's success in front of crowds from so many different countries.

All of the above would be incomplete without an estimation of the number of people that have attended one or other of Xarxa's productions over their twenty-five year history. If we go back to 1993, Manuel V. Vilanova then calculated that around five million spectators had seen the group's performances over its first ten years (as told to Daniel Llorens, *Castellón Diario*, 5-08-1993). In terms of theatre audiences (not only Valencian), this figure is exceptionally high, but now, fifteen years later, it seems extraordinarily modest, since at that time, in 1993, the company's international career had only just begun.

In these times, moreover, Xarxa can be proud of having drawn more people to some of its performances than, as Nel Diago notes in his contribution, those attending the great mass events of recent times. Examples of particularly significant landmarks include the 80,000 spectators at Vilnius in 1993, a crowd of 250,000 congregated in 1995 in Rostov, or 45,000 in Caracas the same year; and the following year 80,000 in San José, Costa Rica... Or a few years before 40,000 in Nîmes

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(1991), 50,000 in Lisbon (1992) and 150,000 expected in Calais in 1994.

The somewhat dizzying figures could obviously go on and on in this chapter. This is not, however, our objective here. Rather, we want to emphasise the fact that once they reach a certain point, the numbers in themselves stop being significant, but rather their value lies in what they symptomise: an overwhelmingly positive reception, because such a large mass of spectators would not be possible unless they were given a good welcome; if this were not the case, they would disperse before the end of the performance.

It should also be noted that many of Xarxa's successes, and record-breaking crowds, occur beyond the boundaries of their home ground. The percentages of 1990 seem a long way off now, when 64% of their performances were given here, 17% in the rest of Spain and 19% abroad. Fortunately, the figures for 1992 have not been repeated, when they were 17%, 19% and 64%, respectively. We say *fortunately*, because these figures reveal the practical *exile* to which the Valencian and Spanish institutions condemned the company in the midst of the frenetic calendar of commemorative events that took place in 1992.

This is the order of things; we can confirm that the percentage is usually around 50%; in other words, about half Xarxa's performances take place in the Land of Valencia (demonstrating that the group is a prophet in its own land). The other fifty percent is divided between performances abroad, the majority, and in the rest of Spain, in a ratio that in some years reaches 2 to 1.

Finally, these percentages would be incomplete if we did not bear in mind that the Valencian spectators, despite everything, are privileged, since they have the chance to see not only large-scale productions, but also those of a more modest format and a number of shows created for specific events. This does not rule out the fact that, while in Castellón the bond between the group and the spectators is practically total (the unforgettable rhythmic chants of "Xar-xa te-a-tre!" from the tens of thousands gathered to celebrate the end of the *Nit màgica* during the Magdalena fiestas), in other places – particularly in the city of Valencia– its performances are much more infrequent and as a result, Xarxa is much less known and appreciated there than it deserves... and certainly not through the company's own choice.

In summary, we should underline three aspects that typify Xarxa's relationship with its public and that, to a greater or lesser extent, are present in the vast majority of its shows. Firstly, its capacity to build direct bridges between the show and the spectator, regardless of the creation's specific format or size: in every case, the spectator feels very close to, if not directly involved in, what Xarxa sets before them.

Secondly, the company's productions are designed to make spectators adopt not only a position of emotional or aesthetic adhesion, but also to encourage them to use their powers of reflection. Thirdly, unlike many groups, Xarxa has been capable of capturing the essence of a receptive attitude (essentially vital, ludic and open to auditory and visual stimulations and suggestions) that street theatre involves and, as a direct result, is able to reach audiences of all ages from very different cultural, social and geographical backgrounds. This leads us to think, if we are not mistaken, that Xarxa will have an audience for many years. And always in their thousands, of course, because despite what those in more conventional positions in the theatre might think, quantity here is not a detraction, but rather a very positive factor: the best proof of the effectiveness (at all levels) of its work.

## 7. The fiesta, much more than a substratum

The Western world, now so developed, is experiencing a considerable nostalgia for its fiestas. Not the fiesta we might know in our own environs, but rather the fiesta or festival in the anthropological sense of the term. As a result, many societies that in their day, in the name of modernisation, got rid of their fiestas, have now thrown themselves into the quest for their festive roots, to a greater or lesser extent forgotten if not totally eradicated. And what of those societies that, in contrast, did not completely abolish them or for a variety of reasons (ideological, political etc..) kept them going through thick and thin?

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Now they can clearly be proud of their rich festive heritage.

But we must not claim we have been cheated. This determination to revive the fiesta takes place in completely different circumstances from those that witnessed their birth and saw them flourish. As Ariño points out, there is a *nostalgia for Dionisos* (ARIÑO, 1999), but no wish to see the return of the god himself. It is obvious that this nostalgia is stronger in the case we are dealing with here: the case of a *revival* (or, why not, a *reinvention* of the fiesta). However, the fiestas that have stayed alive and come this far with more or less guaranteed continuity, rather than nostalgia, what they reveal is *dynamism*.

It is clear that from an academic perspective we run the risk of becoming confused and opting for reconstructed and/or reinvented fiestas, since those that take charge of the task are usually folklore experts, anthropologists, historians... in the end, intellectuals. And they set great store on the references and footnotes that confer meaning to their research. The living fiesta, on the other hand, can make us (those from the world of *culture*, as it is normally understood) feel anxious or uneasy, since the dynamism we refer to above is what causes heterogeneous elements to be added, year after year, from a variety of sources, and results in deformations, transformations, reinterpretations etc., that often make the academics' hair stand on end. As an example of this phenomenon, we only have to turn to the case of the *Festa d'Elx*, very alive today and, at the same time, subject to tensions arising from two contradictory forces: those who consider it as a modern-day fiesta, and those who would like to see it kept as closely aligned as possible to its history, even though this means putting a stop to the continuous evolution of the *Festa*. To conclude these introductory remarks, we should bear in mind that some years ago, the Italian historian Franco Cardini warned against the enthusiasm of researchers in the field of the fiesta who, in their excessive desire to set and purify, with tedious frequency end up paralysing (or, if you like, killing off) the fiesta (CARDINI, 1984).

Fiestas at the crossroads then. Halfway between the conservationist impulses of traditions and the necessary transformations that this world is constantly undergoing. Faced with this complexity, a theatre company that wants to use the fiesta has various options. The most commonly chosen path is without doubt to pick out and use a series of more or less attractive or typical elements from the fiestas, but with no previous reflection, no desire to produce their own discourse with which the fiesta can be fitted into their dramatic praxis.

Fortunately, this was not the path Xarxa Teatre took. Indeed, from the first moment (again, we must cite *Nit màgica* and *El dolçainer de Tales*), the group strove to work out a concept of the fiesta that was in no way abstract, but exactly the opposite, highly defined both geographically and historically and, needless to say, never losing sight of the fact that any interest in the fiesta has its clearly ideological side. We now examine this aspect in greater depth.

To begin with, Xarxa's interest in the fiesta is linked to very specific geographical coordinates. The stereotype of the *Mediterranean fiesta* used by other companies to spare themselves greater exactitude is of no use for their purposes. We should not look for references of vague telluric forces, generic seasonal rituals or indeterminate spirits of nature in their theatre. The concept of fiesta that Xarxa bases its work on is obviously that we will find by examining the Valencian festive calendar or –if we do not want to be so specific– that of the western shores of the Mediterranean. The *santantonadas* in *Nit màgica*, the *fallas* in *El foc del mar*, or the ritual fiestas of the bull in *Déus o bèsties*. Bearing in mind this interest to geographically specify the festive substratum, we understand that, on the occasion of the group's first international tours, Manuel V. Vilanova always tries to clarify the confusions expressed in some publications (particularly French and Italian), incapable of going beyond a vision replete with stereotypical Spanish folklore.

Hence, in response to the review that highlighted the *Spanishness* of *El dolçainer de Tales* (Catherine Mounier in *Turbulences. Journal des Septièmes reconcontres internationales de théâtre et jeunes spectateurs*, Lyon, June 1990) or exclamations like “Ces diables d'andalous”, referring to *El foc del mar* (Marielle Creac'h, in the same journal), Vilanova energetically attempted to right these confusions, and in a report entitled “*Saturnales catalanes avec Xarxa*” stated:

We have just simply demonstrated our culture. Now that the motorway joins Barcelona with the rest of Europe, it is

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easy to travel and reveal something of Spain that is not simply clichés: flamenco, bulls and the Costa Brava. (D.M., *Ouest France*. 11-07-1990).

Indeed, this successful defence was comprehended and supported, from the very beginning, by the Festival de Morlaix and its director, Yvon Diraison. The result: Xarxa has exported across the length and breadth of the globe a concept of unmistakably Valencian culture and fiesta, far removed from stereotypes and exorbitant generalisations. Another reason for the members of Xarxa to feel proud of themselves.

A purist attitude? The defence of one's own culture? Not so much that, we think, as the unavoidable necessity to clarify, beyond any doubt, the festive references on which the first shows to tour abroad turned, and without which these productions would, in the end, be difficult to understand.

However, this by no means implies that Xarxa makes concessions to any type of localism. Indeed, from its very beginnings the group (its creative members) has taken great pains to build bridges between its festive references and those of its audiences. Not so much in the morphology or the representation of the fiesta as in the social and cultural functions the fiesta has at the heart of all societies. The strong cathartic element of *Nit màgica* is a clear example of this: dozens of thousands of spectators in all the world have jumped, shouted and raced with this show... they have got rid of tensions and left their daily lives to one side for an hour, despite knowing nothing of the *santantonadas*, traditional Valencian fireworks or burning bulls. This does not mean, of course, that during their international tours, Xarxa has not been met with one surprise or another on recognising elements of their own fiesta in other festive cultures: in the end, many elements of folklore are common to all cultures.

This geographical precision with which motifs and themes from folklore are theatrically used is associated with the conception of folklore (and obviously with the fiesta) as a historical phenomenon. As mentioned above, there are no vaguely nebulous mythical pasts (the group always deals with legends and myths as historical realities) nor circular time that eternally returns things to their origins: the concept of progress and advance is embedded in the ideological interpretation of Xarxa's shows. The primitive boat in *Veles e vents* is reconstructed at the end of the performance, but its crew is not its original one; a disturbing synthesis of contradictory realities: this is precisely one of the characteristics of the advance of our civilisation (of *progress*).

However, this interest in specifying the historical roots and causes of the birth, evolution and death of our fiestas does not mean that Xarxa is paying tribute to *archeologism*. Indeed, their shows do not set out to be erudite reconstructions or investigations, but aesthetic recreations, freely put together and based on certain thoroughly studied materials. The case of *Ibers* typifies this. The primitive culture of the island condemned to be destroyed by Western civilisation is the Iberian culture... The synthesis between a past, our past, and a reality (capitalist colonialism) that is a perfect vehicle to generalise what is dramatised in this play: the destruction of cultures and peoples (through all ages) in the name of other, supposedly superior, cultures and peoples. Obviously, they could equally have drawn on the iconography and rituals of, for the sake of example, the Polynesians. However, what they intended by resorting to *our* Iberians was –as previously stated– to prevent the strict fidelity to history from killing off the necessary generalisation of the message, or the no less necessary effect of *surprise* in the crowd, examined in the corresponding chapter of this book.

Finally, we must comment on the *ideological* reading, in the best sense of the term, that the group has always made of the festive materials they have worked on. The Carnival of Vinaròs in 1991 (the *Ice project: carnival against the war*) was designed as a route around the streets of the town that would cause an effect of surprise by brutally contrasting what is popularly understood as fiesta and the situation they were condemning in this case (the first Gulf War); the carnivalesque parade thus became a type of theatrical *via crucis*, shocking and effective from a critical perspective.

To avoid ambiguity, here we should highlight an essential aspect of Xarxa's critical and ideological interpretations; they do not in fact resort to *strange* elements or those that are external to the references they are contrasting: the company's great merit has consisted of knowing how to extract the critical potential from the very interior of the festive universe in

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which they are working. Not by chance did we use the term *via crucis* above, as in the end, the Passion of Christ is the final part of the cycle begun precisely with the Carnival. And in the same vein, Manuel V. Vilanova and Leandre Escamilla have repeatedly referred to their stagings as *tragedies*; tragedies in their essential sense, that found, for instance, in the initial moments of classical Greek theatre. As Vilanova states:

It is not surprising [...] that in a region where the popular fiestas frequently combine characteristics of tragedy with the most entertaining elements of the fiesta, theatrical productions emerge which go more deeply into this binomial. We will probably never know the exact reason why Xarxa Teatre's street shows abandon comedy and turn into tragedy. Indeed, as Xarxa's directors, for many years both of us said that any one of our shows would end up becoming a tragedy. What drew us to actually doing this was more an impulse than any prior theatrical reasoning. They were such festive tragedies that we were constantly hearing decent people saying that for such serious subjects that we were working with, the style we used was not the most suitable. And yet the tragedies appeared to us with increasing clarity during the creative processes.

(VILANOVA, 1998, 126-127; text rewritten and extended in MARQUÉS-ESCAMILLA-VILANOVA, 2004, 71-82).

All of the above helps us to understand the way Xarxa has been able to take theatrical advantage during its twenty-five year history not only of the overall concept of fiesta (as clearly outlined above), but also of certain of its components. We now turn to some of the most significant examples of this. Firstly, the basic concept of the fiesta as an interruption, or better, the turning upside down of the daily routine. Xarxa uses this essential component of Carnival in various shows, rejecting –as indicated above– possible cyclical interpretations and reinforcing the element of subversion of the established order that Carnival has always had.

The frequently cited example of the *Ice project* would spare us additional examination of this aspect, if it were not for the fact that in *Les rates mortes* the group takes a further step in making thorough use of the second of the festive components we want to highlight here. This is the element of the Carnival fiesta as a space –and time– for the satire that questioning (inversion of) the established order implies. Indeed, the world upside down is more, much more, than a simple game of opposites or impossibilities: it is also the expression of a state of desirable and enviable things. A world in which all those holding power, of all types, are brought together as a result of a processional ceremony (a grotesque civic procession) enthroned on a giant toilet and presented with an explosion of fireworks that turns into pyre which consumes them all... This is, in sum, *Les rates mortes*.

From satire to parody; this is the third component of the fiesta that Xarxa uses in its productions, although to a lesser extent than satire. There is, for instance, the parody of ecclesiastical discourse by the priest in *El dolçainer de Tales*, or that of our civilization in *Ibers*; a civilization whose *superiority* is *demonstrated* by means of robbery, cheating and drunkenness. For its part, the criticism of the contemporary world that, according to the interpretation of the show's authors, we find in *Tomba-tossals*, is transformed into parody in the staging, by means of a procedure as simple (but as effective) as that of illustrating a story devoid of any heroism or any mythical disguise; the wardrobe and the construction of the characters in the play leave no trace of epic readings; the shopping-trolley-boats mentioned previously uncover what lies behind the invasion of the Columbretes, and the *Philistines* that live there have nothing to do with Goliath... Thus, the parody works to favour the demystifying and critical reading that Xarxa wanted to impress on the spectator. As the journalist Susana Barberá

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notes:

The main theme is the constant ridiculing of the motives for starting wars. *Tombatossals* returns sad and distressed as a result of having lost practically all his men to conquer four uninhabited, barren islets, only to satisfy the fickle desires of the capricious *Infantona* (*Levante EMV*, Castellón edition, 17-01-2002).

Parody we said, not superficial twist of style. We consider *Tombatossals* to be the paradigm of the group's ideological intentionality: "It's a text about peace, it is against war even though it was written in a period between wars in the 30s" (statement from Manuel V. Vilanova to *Levante EMV*, Castellón edition, 17-01-2002). And it is this intentionality that pervades the mise-en-scène; or better, it is impeccably interwoven within it; the two stages cleverly mark not only the supposedly physical distance between the Court of the Rei Barbut and the Columbretes, but also the symbolic distance between the culture of aggression and unpolluted nature; the route, with the shopping-trolley-boats advancing through the crowd turns the spectators into unwitting accomplices to the aggression; in the end, the public watch without intervening because they think that story has nothing to do with them (doesn't this remind us of many of the attitudes we adopt in the First World?); the vertical scenography and the way the aerial space is made use of, finally, assures the significance of the message and the birth itself of the protagonist, the Earth, explains their rejection of a policy, that of the Rei Barbut and the *Infantona*, which is objectively suicidal for the interests of our planet... A parody, yes, but in no way insignificant.

Thus far we have emphasised the most transgressive aspects of the fiesta, but we must not ignore other of its components that take a different direction and are also present in Xarxa's theatrical praxis. Specifically, those that contribute to making the fiesta not so much critical and questioning as a social cohesion mechanism. The fiesta commemorates the events unique to the social group, traces its history (mythical and/or legendary) and helps to build a sense of solidarity among those who share common identifying marks. These identifiers may come in all shapes and forms: aesthetic, sentimental... from the most sophisticated to the most basic and elemental (sounds, tastes, smells, gestures, etc.). In this vein, when Xarxa revived the traditional Valencian pyrotechnics, it was firmly committing to this conception of fiesta in the Valencian setting and similarly, when it introduced taurine or historical-folkloric references (the *Xarxarola*) in its first children's performances. And above all, when it used perfectly localised festive resources to stage *El dolçainer de Tales* with its string of popular dances, the characters from the mystery plays of La Balma or references from taurine components of the Valencian popular fiestas (RAMIA-SERRA, 1987; MAS-PIQUÉ-VELLON, 1997, 45-59).

In all events, the fact that they have not remained simply on the surface of the fiesta's social function (the introduction of symbols, icons...) and have known how to extend bridges towards other cultures and traditions (far removed from those of Valencia) testify to their indisputable merit.

Nonetheless, the way this conception of the fiesta is handled theatrically takes two forms, depending on the origin of the staging. Thus, when this comes from a proposal put forward by the group itself (like *Déus o bèsties*), the dramatisation is not short of critical reflection, irony or even satire. The result is the creation of procedures for adhesion and immersion (as in the strong example of music, examined in its respective chapter) that do not crush their spectators' capacity to reflect. In contrast, when the show is created as a commission, the group's handling of the project is much more respectful to the references chosen and may even be more moving. This is the case, for example, in the Cantabrian trilogy (if we might use this term) through which they constructed a series of plastic references to, firstly, the cultural and historical identity of Torrelavega (*Torre de la Vega*, 2001 and *Torrelavega, cruce de caminos, confluencia de culturas*, (Torrelavega, crossroads, confluence of cultures) 2002) and shortly afterwards, to that of Cantabria in general (*Tierra de Júbilo*, 2006). Or, clearly, the large-scale shows designed for the fiestas of the Magdalena in Castellón de la Plana, and in *Sant Pere, per sempre* (1998), a synthesis of plastic images very much alive in the historical memory of thousands of Castellón's

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citizens. Moreover, in all these cases Xarxa not only studied (and understood) the whole series of festive resources that it would put to use in its production, but also sought out the help of local folklore and musical groups. This attitude of respect is a long way from the *imperialisms* of most large touring theatre companies.

Obviously we are aware that this is an option which may awaken certain critical reticence, bearing in mind that in these stagings Xarxa leaves to one side the critical, distanced vision that, as pointed out earlier, typifies their most complex and successful work, and replaces this with the quest for an emotive communication, in which it does not hesitate to “sweeten” history (or mellow the past, if you prefer). The coexistence of the three great cultures in medieval Spain was, without doubt, an extraordinarily significant phenomenon, but it was not without its tensions and controversial episodes; the same might be said of the successive *repopulations* of our lands. All these aspects are diluted in, for instance, *Elx: un llegat de cultures* (2002), the celebration of the city’s history from a clearly optimistic perspective and in which this conflict is limited to an aerial *bumping off* (spectacular, but not particularly violent) of the knights hanging from a crane.

In spite of this, it should be noted that in these cases, Xarxa does not simply resort to the most obvious justifications; when all’s said and done, these are commissioned productions. And it does not limit itself to these justifications because during the preparatory documentation stages that form part of all its projects, its creators are not content to simply accept the pre-existing collective conscience (aware as they are that this is ideologically charged) and therefore set out to highlight alternative cultural and historical references, infused with a strong progressive character and in which, once again, the group rejects traditionalist nostalgias in an attempt to make them operative in the present. Hence, the past is seen as a path towards progress (*Prohibido bañarse*), while the effort and work that underlie every activity of daily life (present and past) are not spared or hidden when they are emotively remembered: in this line, *Sant Pere, per sempre* is exemplary with the auctioning and then cooking of the fish, and in particular, by incorporating into the unfolding of the show the harbour cranes and the fork-lift truck, turned into an extraordinary bull with flaming horns.

Moreover, the fiesta, which can never be absent from these commemorative productions, is not a dematerialised product; for Xarxa it is also the consequence of the work, the effort, the organisation and solidarity of the group. And, it must be said, it is pointless to look for examples of the dominant culture (or the culture of the dominant strata, if you prefer) in the fiestas that structure the commemorative show in question. In the case of the show in Pamplona, what is highlighted –and by no means arbitrarily– is the modernisation and progress that the foundation of the swimming club brought to the city, leaving out any possible elitist connotations of the founding society. No evening soirees then, nor upper class tournaments, nor royal entrances, nor solemn Corpus processions nor enthroning of saints nor any type of dedications to the Virgin. Living folkloric fiestas that are the heritage of all (regardless of who might manipulate them today), like the Magdalena, the *fallas*, the Moors and Christians, the *santantonadas*, the Pyrric dances... and the bulls, but significantly not bullfighting.

We close this chapter with the confirmation of what for us is very clear: the progressive, modernising interpretation of folklore and the fiesta. Xarxa (its creative members) never sets itself above the fiesta in the name of misunderstood cultural elitism. The opposite in fact: it always tries to understand the socio-cultural foundations on which the various festive manifestations have been built. And when it works on a commission, it never does so from a position of superiority accorded by professional status, but rather it sets out to coexist, share and learn from the environment in which the show will be performed. Always with the utmost respect for the resources it uses and for those for whom the production is designed.

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### 8. For a new culture of theatre

When there is no entrance ticket to be paid for, there are always plenty of people who will watch a theatrical performance. And that is a good thing; that a specific cultural policy enables theatre to become more widespread and within everyone's reach. We have a radio station we can listen to, television we can watch, films and videos we can download from Internet, and why not accessible theatre, promoted by our institutions with due quality and efficiency? For the moment, street theatre, which comes under the umbrella of Street Arts, is free and aimed at different sections of the public. In the street, all members of the audience share –equally- the same performance without their visibility being conditioned by the price of the ticket. The public that shows an interest in street theatre is totally different from the conventional audiences in theatres where you have to buy a ticket to see the show.

This type of theatre is a new dramatic culture, a 21<sup>st</sup> century culture, even though it took its first steps during the last century. Despite this, it should be noted that theatre has always been performed in the open air: the origin of the dramatic art goes back to Thespis and his handcart, where the stage travelled around the streets and the countryside. Now, the new theatre of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has grown up and can walk on its own. It has begun to demand the same rights as indoor theatre, together with the right for its presence in society to be confirmed and its work in defence of the theatre recognised, a new theatre that has won over many spectators.

As in the times of the artistic avant-garde when painters searched in the origins of pictorial art for new languages with which to oppose the prevailing powers, the creators of these new dramatic languages have had to be extremely alert so as to avoid having to move in a theatrical terrain deep in crisis. And, all in good time, these new creators have confirmed, with their projects in the streets, that they too are right to defend the theatre with professionalism: a truly thousand-year old culture.

This theatre has opened up new paths, has gone out to look for the public where it is most likely to be found: in the public highways and byways. Xarxa Teatre, as is set out in this book, is a paradigmatic street theatre company. Evolving and transforming dramatic genres with new bold proposals so that theatre might also be a popular mass culture, and not stuck within four walls only for a limited audience of theatre enthusiasts. Just as other artistic languages like the circus or the opera have survived reductionism and have brought back, through a range of most varied strategies, their presence in society for a massive number of followers. A new dramatic culture that is, therefore, far removed from the model of theatre which settles for a scant public; a new culture concerned to find new stages and new publics in this globalised world that has now learned to communicate without borders.

But... why has Xarxa Teatre defended a new dramatic culture? Because what it has meant in these twenty-five years of artistic work, in each of its stagings, has always been a creative innovation ahead of the market, ahead of the prevailing cultural norms and the trends in making theatre that, on the whole, have been dictated by indoor theatre. The company as a group can talk, and quite rightly, of those who supported them and those who did not, of those who understood their work and of those who closed the doors that would have allowed them to cross borders. And that is where their novelty lies, precisely, in their different background with so many innovative contributions: in art and in business, creators of a specific cultural identity in the field of Street Arts.

Xarxa Teatre has been able to direct the professionalism of its work by defending artistic and business values that have taken on greater value in the long term. They have made possible the artistic reality of their existence, new and classical together, in an international world. Because as creators, their members have given the artistic market lasting works in the repertoire of street theatre, such as *Veles e vents* –performed three times in Denmark-, *El foc del mar*, *Nit màgica* and *Déus o bèsties*, that have now become classic shows because the passing of time makes them every day more current and interesting. The determination to develop an aesthetic and a dramatic art with its own style has characterised Manuel V. Vilanova's direction since the beginning, as he explains in an interview with Vicent Rubio:

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I always had the idea in my mind of creating a theatre company the fundamental meaning of whose existence would be based on the strictly dramatic, and that led to the appearance of Xarxa [...] which, because of the market circumstances at that time, due to the inexistence of open [sic] theatre groups in the entire Valencian region, we had to devote ourselves to working in the street, generating and creating shows for that environment, in the knowledge that it may be considered inferior, but that we knew how to value in the form of expressive resources. (*Levante-MV*, 1-12-1991)

When a university education and an admiration for the great authors of universal dramatic literature have been acquired, it would seem logical to go into directing in this type of theatre; but the path chosen –conditioned by the circumstances- to make a living as professionals in the theatre was far removed from the models of academic training. They accepted the reality of the street as positive and with expectations for the future in creating and directing dramatic productions. There, in the public space belonging to all citizens, they put to the test what they had learned in so many years of study, but without neglecting the continual training that would guarantee the company's survival. An unexpected challenge that they had to face with sufficient enthusiasm to be able to show to themselves that the stage erected in the street or in a square was equally worthy of the same dignity as any other.

Now twenty-five years have gone by, Xarxa Teatre is an unprecedented historical reality in the Valencian cultural and dramatic sphere, because it has consolidated a history of artistic influence with a vocation for innovation and towards the international market, based on solid premises rooted in the knowledge of Valencian cultural tradition. It committed to create new discourses, new languages and a new drama to win the public's loyalty, at that time nonexistent. The audiences, very different in each performance, are what have always determined their stage projects, for the simple reason that their spectators have represented nothing less than the collective of the social context in which they have acted as cultural creators. A public from different cultures, in a state of constant renewal, that they have set out to surprise and win over to a love of the theatre. In Santo Domingo, Leandre Escamilla stated:

What we cannot do is fill a hall or a square with an eager crowd who are keen to see and feel things, to experience emotions and feed their intellect, we cannot let them be there and give them nothing, let them go home empty. (*Listín Diario*, 2-10-2003).

A public on different continents that has been receptive to the cultural exchanges and artistic ideas Xarxa Teatre has put forward. A taste of their theatre has been savoured thousands of kilometres away, in other cultural environs where the spectators have had the chance to discover the drama of Mediterranean cultural references created by Xarxa. Whether in Europe, Africa, America... or Shanghai. Places where the company has gone to strengthen the ties offered by this multicultural encounter. Places across the globe reached by a theatre created in the spirit of universality, built on the foundations of Mediterranean roots, on the foundations of universal cultural references.

Awareness of belonging to a unique and increasingly interrelated ecosystem may be one of the chief characteristics that lends cohesion to Xarxa Teatre's artistic production. Its members, although young, represent a total of many years of experience gained by dint of constantly changing spaces, languages, audiences and legal frameworks, so as to perform in the streets and squares in different places all over the world. An entire lifetime deserving of its own book, an account of their travels to tell how they have brought the art of street theatre to so many places, new Marco Polos who have built

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cultural bridges between cultures. For instance, the adventures they have had tackle to get round the legislation in different countries, to obtain permits and enable Xarxa Teatre's performances to become a reality; adventures in which they have always strived to find a fruitful ending.

When they first began travelling abroad, the market for companies that performed their art in the streets was still undeveloped. Today, new companies are starting to emerge, in all countries, evidence that there is now a potentially expanding market for the Street Arts. However, the legal frameworks in each country are extremely fragmented, which by no means favours the introduction and development of these artistic activities, just as the instigators of this new art and new languages for open space communication have reached full creative maturity.

At the Diversity of Street Arts in Europe International Conference, held on 6 September 2007 in Tàrraga to promote the exchange of experiences in countries across Europe, Manuel V. Vilanova participated as chairperson of one of the sessions. Perhaps this meeting will spur the creative community to find points of common professional ground. Perhaps it will be the starting point from which to demand cohesive cultural policies within the framework of the European Union. Or perhaps it is a new beginning for a united front in the demand for the rights of artists that have been in the profession for many years. When all is said and done, the defence of street theatre today is just as exciting as in its beginnings, in 1983, when the Vila-real company was planning its first tour of shows outside the Land of Valencia.

Xarxa Teatre, despite being a very young company, has also known how to gain experience through good practical training in creative fields: it has woven market networks wherever it has performed, wherever it has explored the viability of taking its theatre. And that is why, after all these years, time has united all the spaces in which the group has performed, and has given us the best image of itself: a network of stages spread across the whole world.

## Peddalling the bull on a bike has taken us round the world

MIREIA MARQUÉS

LEANDRE LL. ESCAMILLA

MANUEL V. VILANOVA

### Encounters

One of the characteristics we believe has marked the development of Xarxa Teatre is the ease with which we have been able to adapt to the continuous changes the theatrical market has demanded. Instead of considering that we were right and the programmers were an incompetent bunch for not billing our works, we set a course, sometimes against the advice of the "experts", with one eye on our own experience, another on the market and a third on what we actually fancied doing. The right balance of these three factors has allowed us to effectively handle periods of "crisis" in the sector, differences with cultural directors or public censures: "As long as I'm in this job, you won't get another cent out of this institution." A period of 25 years gives us enough perspective to see where we made the right decisions and where we have failed. We could not predict the future in the beginning, and we still cannot. Our devotion to street theatre started off with a piece of advice from Toni Cots, of Odin Teatret, at that time: "If there are no theatres in the Land of Valencia in which you can perform your work, then do it in the street". And it is true that on those grounds, we focused our first shows on festive theatre and came face to face with the emergent world of the Valencian fiesta with which we have maintained an intimate romance ever since. Despite the fact that certain sectors of the theatrical profession or culture professionals consider the fiesta scene as a place for drunks, the uncultured and gluttons, we understand it as an ideal space in which to have a theatrical effect with shows designed specifically for it. While it is difficult to stop and reflect in the middle of the hullabaloo, it does not mean that in this moving mass of thousands of citizens all sharing public spaces, there are not also some, many more than we might imagine, who are looking to enjoy new aesthetics, unknown sensations, original music

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and shared activity. Those who believe that quality theatre can only be sampled from the comfort of a theatre seat are, in our humble opinion, completely mistaken. What defines good theatre is not the place in which it is performed, but the proper use of the stage means available considered in line with the profile of the spectators. Clearly, theatre aimed at children is not the same as that addressed to adults, but in both cases, we are talking about theatre. Whether good or bad. The age of the spectators and the place in which the work is performed are not criteria that determine quality theatre. Exactly the same happens in street theatre. Theatre is still theatre, whether performed in a theatre or in the street. We should not however be surprised that some of the techniques used in one space would be impossible to use in another. The control of silences that can be achieved in a closed space is unthinkable in the open air and the use of pyrotechnics that can increase the vertical extension of street theatre is impossible indoors. An understanding of this simple way of seeing things is what drives the three authors of this text to dedicate ourselves, despite our university education, to working in street theatre. The close contact with a new public made up of both habitual indoor theatre-goers and those who have never been inside a theatre in their lives. And this is what compelled us to find a language that would be equally accessible and enriching for the cultured spectator and for children with a very limited cultural background.

### **Added value**

Contempt for the street as a place for social, cultural and even civic gatherings is invading our contemporary society. This denigration of the public space was a concept that spread across all Europe after the Second World War. Everything that might get in the way of people's movement had to be restricted or even prohibited. Only certain religious or sporting displays were able to open up a path amidst the flow of the traffic. Governments attempted to control any activity that took place in the streets. It was the revolutionary French of May '68 who set up the shout demanding that theatre be taken out of its usual venues, into the open air, onto the streets, in effect. The demands of the spectators and actors of the Living Theatre, all of them half naked, after a performance of the Festival de Avignon de 1968, "*Le théâtre est dans la rue. Vive le théâtre*", were taken up by the new cultural policies in the country and France has gradually reached a pioneering position in European street arts to the detriment of countries like Spain, which despite being at the forefront in the initial stages of the blossoming of open space theatre, has witnessed how an erroneous theatrical policy has turned street theatre creators back to putting on shows in indoor venues. Spain has not granted street creation the same merit as creation in theatrical buildings. And this has led to many artists abandoning the space in which they had become known.

The current European trend is going in exactly the opposite direction to the reality created in Europe during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The rejection of public space as a place of social use has led to isolation among citizens and consequently has prevented normal interrelation between them. Many people are only on "good morning" and "good evening" terms with their neighbours. And this isolation has been felt even more deeply by those from cultures in which it was normal to meet up in the street to talk to your friends or neighbours. All of this has made integration of recent arrivals more difficult and has created ethnic or religious pockets that have become fertile ground for instilling violent ideas in the minds of some of their inhabitants. For this reason, the new social policies in countries like the United Kingdom are designed to strengthen social interrelation among neighbours by using the street as an ideal place to get to know one another and share experiences, joys and learning. And in the attempt to bring this new concept to the use of the streets, theatre takes on an essential role. Simply telling people to "Go out into the streets" would not get them up from in front of their televisions. Excuses have to be found that will attract the attention of those who are shut away in their houses. And street theatre, dance, music, fiesta or sport have become socialising and integrating tools of the first order. Those of us who follow street theatre performance have for some time been aware of this power of attraction for spectators from different countries, ethnic groups or beliefs. Henry Krul's or Jordi Bové's photographs of European spectators are clear examples of the ethnic diversity on this earth. Street theatre has acquired this added value: as well as a cultural, social or festive occasion, it is an integrating event that breaks down the barriers between us.

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### The text

All the European cities that have been cultural capitals have taken on board the idea that theatrical performances should reach all corners of society and that cultural capital status is not limited to the “cultured” elite of those who habitually fill the theatres and devour books. One of the unmistakable notes in all these cultural capitals is that of “the more citizens, the better”. And this concept is not just applicable to European cultural capitals. Large sporting events, opening ceremonies for major feats of engineering or large public constructions, the launching of new brands or the beginning of tourist projects all turn to the street arts to create a bigger impact in society. The fact that most street theatre has rejected the use of the spoken word to communicate their art has made the European area more permeable and companies are billed regardless of which country they are from. In order to be able to get the message across without the spoken word, visual theatre, music, gesture, physical movement, circus and so on are all used. The theatrical text has changed its content. Words are no longer required, images are enough. The dramatic text is no longer literary. Down to the last detail, a street theatre text includes everything that is going to take place with time breakdowns that look like a TV programme edit play list or many film scripts. Yet these breakdowns are not recognised elements in the world of literature, nor even in film scripts. We know there are exceptions and Billy Wilder’s scripts enjoy unanimous literary recognition. However, street theatre has yet to contribute written texts that may delight a simple reader. This is one of the obligations that street theatre art has yet to fulfil, but it is not a condition *sine qua non* for having good street performances.

### Tradition

One of the signs that a tradition is losing its vitality is seen when some of its followers try to introduce norms that would make it immobile. Before all traditions reach us, they have passed through the hands of many others. Throughout this journey, the tradition is constantly being modified. It loses its freshness when there are people who believe it should be set in stone. Moreover, many traditions in fact have a short history. In fifty years, a tradition is established and some soothsayers will defend it tooth and nail as something that has “always been done like this”. Despite these moves to stagnate tradition, it is a huge source of inspiration, it provides a wealth of popular material and creativity, often anonymous, and deviation from the original idea that sometimes enriches, though other times it is weakened. This is the great vitality of tradition. We are told the stories of the giant *Tombatossals* when we are small. We fall in love with all the characters in the tale: Tombatossals, Arrancapins, Bufanuvols, Cagueme, Tragapinyols, el Rei Barbut, la Infantona... without having read the original by Josep Pascual i Tirado published in 1932. For that reason it is not surprising that we decided to put on a children’s show, *La barba del Rei Barbut*, at the beginning of our artistic career. The plot was ours alone, but the central character of the show was taken from the popular tale. Pasqual Juan, newly arrived to the company, included the melody of the bugles from the “*La marxa de la ciutat*” (inspired by “*La marxa del Rei Barbut*” by Matilde Salvador) to announce the entrance of the king. The distinguished Castellón composer even saw our performance when we were just young actors making street theatre. And despite our inexperience, she congratulated us effusively on our work and thanked us for having incorporated a fragment of her music into it. That was our first contact with Matilde, a bond that the future would strengthen.

On the occasion of the 750 anniversary of the founding of Castellón, the Junta de Fiestas proposed that we create a show based on *Tombatossals* by Josep Pascual i Tirado and the Town Council committee set up for the event backed the initiative. By 1990 we had read the story, but simply as readers, not with a view to staging a play of the work. The analysis we made of the text devastated our previous conceptions, almost all of which had arisen out of the popular narrative that is passed on by word of mouth. The definition of the characters that appear in the show was even different from the generally accepted definition and in the end, the meaning of the play was as a criticism of war and a defence of nature against the advance of industrialisation. The hero Tombatossals became a war machine that destroyed everything in its path and when he realised what he was doing, he decided to shut himself away in the *Cova de les meravelles* (Cave of

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Wonders) to purge his feelings of remorse and sadness. Even God condemned the Bearded King by preventing him from founding the city of Castellón because of his greed and cruelty. The enemies they exterminated were the animals that lived on the Columbrete islands: wasps, seagulls, snakes, rabbits, lizards... The play was a tremendous farce that had managed to hoodwink the popular tradition. These characters and the modern message of the play convinced Castelló Cultural to commission our staging of the opera *La filla del Rei Barbut* (1943) with music by Matilde Salvador and the libretto by Manuel Segarra.

Our relationship with Matilde had already become closer following our participation in various forums as representatives of Castellón culture. She enthusiastically received the idea of re-staging the opera she had composed in her youth and that had been performed with very precarious means: the characters were puppets built by the Segarra family. Most of the original characters from *Tombatossals* are preserved in the opera, although with major changes to the plot. The Infanta, who falls in love, or tries to have relations, with Garxolí, Tombatossals and Cagueme ends up marrying an Aragonese nobleman with whom she founds the city of Castellón in the story by Pascual i Tirado, while in the opera, the Infanta falls in love with Tombatossals and eventually marries and founds the city of Castellón with him. Only one verse is dedicated to the conquest of Les Columbretes in Manuel Segarra i Ribés' libretto, whereas it was a fundamental part of the first. Perhaps the popular and most well-known version of the story in the area of La Plana is also different because of these two early versions of the tale, in turn, different from each other. Nonetheless, both texts were fundamental in the construction of the Castellón's current festive tradition. The city's fiestas, La Magdalena, commemorate the descent of the inhabitants of the *castell vell* (old castle) where the Rei Barbut lived, down to the plane, carrying a cane and a lantern, to found the new city. The fiesta relives these events in the *romería de las cañas* in which the citizens of the city walk, carrying canes, up to the Magdalena hermitage and then return to the city. Fiction, cultural, tradition and popular fiesta are blended in a recently created legend with a markedly epic air. However, both literary works are farces. *La filla del Rei Barbut* is defined by its authors as "a comic opera in three acts". And in *Tombatossals* the only way to understand the work is by not being caught out by the lies that the narrator himself tells you. His exaggerations mean exactly the opposite. Tradition is evolution, but here we also have a clear example of what we stated above: a huge source of inspiration, it provides a wealth of popular material popular and creativity, often anonymous, and deviation from the original idea that sometimes enriches, though other times it is weakened.

When we premiered *La barba del Rei Barbut* in 1985 we had no idea we were destined to stage the two literary texts on which the narrative was based, and that we, in turn, had modified. The strange coincidences that life brings meant that at the end of the 25<sup>th</sup> year of our artistic career, we staged the opera *La filla del Rei Barbut*, as though it somehow marked the end of a cycle. The idea is lovely, although it was not consciously thought out beforehand. Sadly, Matilde Salvador, with whom we has begun to talk about putting on the opera she composed in her youth, was unable to attend the premier; she passed away just six weeks before, although she left us her artistic legacy, her enterprising vitality and her faithfulness to her land and to her language.

### The group

The artistic journey over these 25 years is fruit of a combination of numerous efforts and a huge number of people. Marathon work sessions, frenetic hopes, monstrous rages, shouting matches, depressions, grudges, sleepless nights, days and days in the cramped space of vans and trucks, steadfast hopes to discover new countries... and an overflowing enthusiasm that has bonded us together to form a great community of friends, anxious to discover the world. We don't think that many of those that have formed part of Xarxa Teatre over the last 25 years would describe their experience simply as a job. This project has required and obtained the absolute dedication of all those that have come on board over the years. There have been many of us, but perhaps not that many, because almost all those who have helped to drive forward this bike-bull that has taken us around the world are present in our minds. However incredible it seems, we have not only dreamed of new realities, but we've actually touched them, perceived them as part of ourselves. To all of them (actors,

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musicians, technicians, make-up people, directors, composers, pyrotechnicians, costume makers, administrative staff, transport firms, lawyers, scenographers, writers, designers, painters, builders...) many, many thanks for letting us share our dreams with yours. Tomorrow we'll load up the van with dreams again. We still have so much to learn, to innovate! And please, nobody be late!

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## Time

### The story of a journey that's only just begun

#### 1980-1982

In 1980, Manuel V. Vilanova begins his theatrical activity in La Vall d'Uixó secondary school. The group Teatre Carbonaire is born out of the theatre workshop he organises, and premiers *Eco* (1980) and *Feliç Aniversari* (1982). The ecological reflections and anti-war critique, constant features of Xarxa's work, are present in both plays.

His organisational skills lead him to involve the group in a variety of festive activities in the area (such as the Twelfth Night procession). He also organises the Theatre Fair in La Vall and children's theatre fairs in various neighbourhoods of the town.

Also during these years, Manuel V. Vilanova reflects on the difficulties of making theatre in the northern districts of the Land of Valencia, where there is a distinct absence of theatre venues, and professional expectations are practically nonexistent. These reflections lead Vilanova and his group towards street theatre; a need that they are able to turn to their advantage.

Finally, several educational initiatives spring from Teatre Carbonaire to improve training for the group's members. In November, he manages to bring Odin Teatret to La Vall; the links established with this group, and in particular, with one of its members, the Catalan Toni Cots, advocate of the aesthetics and praxis of the Danish group, will prove decisive in defining the objectives and lines along which the group will work. As a direct consequence, the decision to form a street theatre group is taken.

#### 1983

In March, the *Associació Cultural Xarxa Teatre* is founded in Vila-real. In July of the same year, Xarxa puts on its first show in Tírig: *La bruixa Marruixa*. The two versions of the show, designed for a children's audience (or rather a family audience), is extraordinarily successful from the very beginning, which enables a stable group of actresses and actors to be consolidated, many of whom are still linked to Xarxa in one way or another: in acting, artistic or technical teams or as researchers into the dramatic art and for the company itself.

#### 1984

The group performs *La bruixa Marruixa* (a second version of which soon appears) on a total of ninety-six occasions, a landmark not only in terms of this dramatic genre, but also in the context of Valencian theatre at this time.

At the same time, Xarxa becomes involved in reviving carnivals in the northern districts of the Land of Valencia, this year, specifically, in La Vall d'Uixó. This involvement is a clear sign of its interest in the area of Valencian festivities and in using their dramatic elements to make theatre.

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### 1985

One consequence of the above is that, this year, the company is awarded Generalitat Valenciana grant for drama promotion. Rodolf Sirera, head of the regional government's Theatre, Music and Cinema Service, backs the group as one of the most dynamic to come out of Valencian theatre and with great expectations for the future. This support helps the group to put on their second show, *La barba del Rei Barbut*, in which –albeit superficially– they first enter into the rich mythical universe of Josep Pasqual i Tirado's *Tombatossals*. They are helped by the group Bagatela in the technical production of the giants and the masks. Ninety-five performances are staged in just one season.

### 1986

The group's link with pyrotechnics is born: the manual bull, used alongside the bull with flaming horns in the previous shows, is now ready to hand over its place to the fire-bull. *Nit màgica* is born, following a long process of research into traditional Valencian pyrotechnics, and with the invaluable support of Pasqual Martí's pyrotechnics workshop. Family audiences now give way to a broader, essentially adult, public. This show, always identical yet always different, will have numerous versions and will always be incredibly well received, even by spectators who have no notion of traditional Valencian fireworks.

This foray into traditional Valencian pyrotechnics goes hand in hand with the furthering of Xarxa's aesthetic links in the world of Valencian fiesta: the publication of the book *El dolçainer de Tales* detailing the research (folklore and musicological) that will come to fruition the following year.

On the administrative side, this year Xarxa becomes a jointly owned partnership.

### 1987

*El dolçainer de Tales* comes out. The success of the show is due to the way the creative members of Xarxa have judiciously extracted from very specific, determined folkloric and anthropological references, an aesthetic and socio-cultural base that can be perfectly understood outside the Land of Valencia, despite the use of the Valencian language in the spoken parts of the staging. A record is produced of the show's music.

### 1988

The regional government's support for the Vila-real company now materialises with Xarxa's performance of *Nit màgica* in the *Festival Internacional de Teatro de Expressão Ibérica* in Porto (F.I.T.E.I.). This first international performance closes to huge acclaim, and marks the opening up of the European market and categorically establishes the group's project as professionals. Xarxa also opens the *XXXIV Festival de Teatro Clásico* in Mérida.

To cement institutional resolve to consolidate street theatre in the Valencian region the *Festival de Teatre de Carrer* in Vila-real is created, which is still held today and will be directed by Xarxa during the first six years of its history.

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### 1989

While continuing the performances of *El dolçainer de Tales* and *Nit màgica*, Xarxa tries its hand at indoor theatre. *El-lisístrata* is premiered in Castellón de la Plana's *Teatre del Raval*, a project directed by Édison Valls that, despite the play's quality, had to be abandoned following reservations aroused by the supposedly provocative nature of certain scenes.

The group performs for the first time this year in Paris (French Revolution bicentenary celebrations) and in Lyon, and *Nit màgica* also enjoys great success in the F.A.R., *Festival des Arts de la Rue* in Morlaix.

### 1990

The group premieres *Ibers*, a reflection (with music by Jorge Gavaldá, produced on record) on the clash between a colonising civilisation with no ethics and another that lives in much closer harmony with nature; the result, obviously, is the destruction of the latter. This is the first show written by author *Vicent Martí Xar* (a.k.a. Manuel V. Vilanova and Leandre Ll. Escamilla); from now on, he will write all the shows for the group and for Volantins.

In addition, the Festival de Morlaix (directed by Yvon Diraison, one of the first beyond these borders to put his faith in Xarxa) stages a co-production with Xarxa, *El foc del mar*, so called after a tradition of the Breton coast, percolated with the aesthetic of the avant-garde (Miró, Picasso, Calder...). Huge success follows its opening in Morlaix in front of 8,000 spectators.

### 1991

Xarxa's longstanding association with the Vinaròs Carnival this year allows for an extraordinary production: *Ice project, carnaval contra la guerra*, in which the group expresses its condemnation of the first Iraq war and reaffirms its ethical and progressive commitment to which it has always remained faithful.

The group moves from its 170 m<sup>2</sup> premises in Vila-real, to an old warehouse in Castellón de la Plana, with 450 m<sup>2</sup>. The Stage Creation Centre is formed.

The lack of drama schools to train the actors and technicians required to perform in the street leads Xarxa to create Volantins, which operates as a training centre and "B company", initially designed to look after the area of children's theatre, an area the group has somewhat neglected. Volantins, however, goes far beyond its initial brief and becomes not only the much needed support unit for the company's large-scale productions, but also a group with its own personality and career path, both at home and abroad.

*Nit màgica* attracts 40,000 spectators in Nîmes.

### 1992

"Forgotten" by most organisers of the cultural and artistic events taking place in Spain that year, Xarxa finds the recognition withheld in its own country in the international market. The group performs successfully in eight European countries; of particular note are performances at the Winter Olympics in Albertville, before a crowd of 50,000 in Lisbon, or in Nantes, where *El foc del mar* attracts a further 15,000. They also perform *El foc del mar* at the Seville Expo '92 to much public acclaim.

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Moreover, as part of the *Festival de Teatre de Carrer de Vila-real*, Xarxa organises the Conference on theatrical debate (directed by Manuel V. Vilanova and Josep Lluís Sirera) devoted to “The roots of contemporary Valencian theatre” (the proceedings are published in book form the following year).

### 1993

Xarxa acts for the first time in Latin America; in the *Festival de las Naciones* in Santiago de Chile, performing *Nit màgica* before some 10,000 spectators, despite the lack of sufficient support from the Spanish authorities. This year marks the beginning of Xarxa’s recurrent participation in Latin American festivals, where its performances are always highly successful.

Over 80,000 spectators gather for the performance of *Nit màgica* in Vilnius. At the same time, *El foc del mar* triumphs at the Stockholm Water Festival. As a result of these achievements, the second channel of Germany’s public television company broadcasts an in-depth report on the group; something that the Spanish television companies have yet to do.

The group’s ties with the Magdalena Fiestas in Castellón, going back to 1987, and their role in helping to invigorate the fiesta and bring it up to date, are further strengthened this year with *Tombacarrers*, a highly special, very favourably received parade.

Xarxa also helps to form a new company: *Teatre de la resistència*, directed by the playwright and director Hadi Kurich, former director of the National Theatre of Sarajevo.

The Valencia regional government theatre award for best street theatre staging goes to Xarxa for *El foc del mar*. This category, incidentally, has now disappeared from the Valencia regional government awards.

### 1994

The resounding success the company has always enjoyed in France leads to their selection by the *Théâtre National de Calais* to create a production for the Channel Tunnel opening ceremony. The show, *Veles e vents*, could not be premiered on the programmed date due to adverse weather conditions. The production wins the European Commission’s Kaléidoscope Award.

The show is re-worked to take on tour and opens in Morlaix before a crowd of 14,000, and in the celebrations to mark the reopening of the remodelled Roman Theatre in Sagunt. From now on, the direction of all shows is jointly credited to Manuel V. Vilanova and Leandre Ll. Escamilla.

This year also sees the beginning of Xarxa’s association with the *Festival de Teatre i Música Medievals* in Elx, directed this year by José Monleón, a theatre critic and historian that has always shown great confidence in the group and its projects. The show created for this occasion is *Al-imara*. In addition, the memorable *Enfarolà del Fadri* is produced as part of the Magdalena Fiestas in Castellón.

According to the groups calculations, this year they perform before 5,000,000 spectators. The company takes on limited company status to provide a more flexible and efficient response to its increasingly complex operations.

### 1995

*Veles e vents* becomes the most important show in the Stockholm Water Festival. Wherever it is performed, it enjoys huge success. Xarxa brings out the music of the show, by Àngel-Lluís Ferrando.

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At the same time, *El foc del mar* triumphs at the *Festival Internacional* in Caracas. In Rostov (Russia), the show is performed in front of a crowd numbering 250,000 spectators.

The fiftieth anniversary of the Magdalena fiestas is the occasion for a *Nit màgica especial*. The *Nit màgica* in these fiestas (with between 30,000 and 40,000 in attendance on average) has become the high point of the Castellón fiestas whenever they have been performed.

## 1996

The Valencia premier of the special production *València, llum de la mediterrània*; an interesting range of experiments using multimedia resources for the purposes of an integrated show. Xarxa will continue to develop this line in similar shows in the future.

Extraordinary success, covered by the international press, of *El foc del mar* at the *Festival de las Artes* in San José, Costa Rica, before a crowd of 80,000. It is also performed in Venezuela, Brazil and Aruba... By now, Xarxa's European performances take place on a regular basis: significantly, Xarxa is one of the groups to be repeatedly invited back to the festivals they take part in.

Xarxa opens its present headquarters of 1200 m2, in Vila-real.

## 1997

The group's tours and national and international success continue.

The Castellón provincial government publishes *Xarxa Teatre: tradició, festa i teatralitat*, written by Pasqual Mas, Adolf Piquer and Xavier Vellón. The first history of the group, in which the company's shows over its first fifteen years are accurately documented and analysed. In addition, a photographic study of the group is published in the book *Imatges*.

In Vila-real, his home town, tribute is paid to Pasqualet, the dulzaina player that has accompanied Xarxa since its very first beginnings.

## 1998

This year, Xarxa takes an important step forward in creating large-scale shows designed for specific events. *Benvinguts a les estrelles*, commemorates Villarreal football club's promotion to the first division, and *Magdalena, vítol!* and *Sant Pere, per sempre*, created for the Magdalena fiestas in Castellón and for the fiestas in the Grao de Castellón respectively, are paradigmatic of this line of work, which over time, will gain importance in the group's calendar. Furthermore, these two examples present extremely significant innovations in the use of aerial space and in acting techniques.

The group's organisational flexibility also enables the *Magdalena Circus* to be included in the Magdalena fiestas.

## 1999

In the line of large scale events mentioned above, this year's outstanding productions are *Sedes Matris*, on the history of the Co-cathedral of Castellón and, particularly, *El ball de les rates mortes* based on the pictorial expressionism of James Ensor; this show, co-produced with the Oostende Aan Zee Festival in Belgium, is the model for the subsequent *Les rates*

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*mortes.*

Xarxa also creates *Carolus V* for the Belgian city of Ghent and *Le pecheur raphaëloise et la princesse*, with which the French town of Saint Raphaël (as part of the Trans-porte 2000 project) commemorates the beginning of 2000.

The group is also responsible for the birth of *Fiestacultura*, a unique magazine on the Spanish scene, defined as a magazine specialising in street theatre creation, festive animation, popular fiestas and plastic art intervention in day-to-day buildings.

## 2000

Before a crowd of 25,000, *Déus o bèsties* is premiered in Castellón's Ribalta Park, one of the company's now classic shows, with an impressive plastic and pyrotechnic conception and an invigorated scenography, that offers a critical and historical dramatisation of the mythology of the bull in the Mediterranean. Eighty programmers attend the opening.

Almost immediately, the show is performed in numerous localities and festivals.

*Veles e vents* is performed for the third time in Denmark.

## 2001

The original music from *Déus o bèsties*, composed by Jaume Gosàlbez comes out on CD. The fiestas in the Cantabrian town of Torrelavega begin with the show *La Torre de la Vega*, created expressly for the event.

Xarxa perform for the first time in Africa, at the International Festival of Carthage (Tunisia).

*El foc del mar* reaches its 200<sup>th</sup> performance, seen by an estimated one million people.

## 2002

The *Festival de Teatre i Música medievals* in Elx (directed since 1996 by César Oliva) commissions a new show from the group: *Elx, un llegat de cultures*. Xarxa also returns to the fiestas of Torrelavega, this time with *Cruce de caminos, confluencia de culturas*.

On the occasion of the 750 anniversary of the city of Castellón de la Plana, the foundation *Castelló Cultural* commissions a special show. *Tombatossals* is created, based on the critical re-reading, though not from a children's perspective, of the classic tale by Josep Pasqual i Tirado. Here, Xarxa experiments with a double stage and aerial representation to create a striking anti-war show of great beauty. An extraordinary show, although unfortunately not as widely seen as it deserves.

*Déus o bèsties* triumphs in Caracas, and the *Festival Cervantino* of Guanajato (Mexico) programmes an extensive tour of *Nit màgica*.

In a true *tour de force*, Xarxa Teatre sees out the old year with two simultaneous large-scale shows: *El foc del mar* in Newcastle and *Veles e vents* in Saint Raphaël.

## 2003

New shows for one-off events: *Boato del capità moro* for the *filà Chanos* in Alcoi; *Llàgrimes* (Tears) to commemorate the miracle of Santa Marta in La Vila Joiosa; *Desembarc moro* in the same town (in collaboration with the French company Carabosse) and the *Quema de la sardina*, grand finale for the fiestas of Murcia. Xarxa will recreate these shows in

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successive years, following the great acclaim the projects receive.

The company successfully tests out its indoor shows with *Don Quijote sueña de nuevo*, performed in Madrid to mark the end of the European Year for the Disabled. The excellent results from this experience will be later used in other shows performed in sports centres or building courtyards.

The company participate in the Odissea 2003 project promoted by José Monleón and his *Instituto Internacional de Teatro del Mediterráneo*, on board the Romanian war ship Constanta, in which Xarxa and other groups (Plasticiens Volants, Group F...) visit and perform in sixteen Mediterranean ports.

## 2004

*Déus o bèsties* is performed, to great acclaim, in the bullring of Bogotá, as part of the *Festival Internacional de Teatro de Bogotá*. The experience has added value in that the audience pay for their tickets, an exceptional occurrence in street theatre.

International performances continue to multiply: the group returns to San José in Costa Rica, visits Shanghai for the first time (although adverse weather conditions prevent them from performing). Further performances in Rome, Nice, Belfast, Besançon, Saint Raphaël, Bèziers... Particularly outstanding is the *cremà* (burning) of ten *fallas* in the city of Lille, as part of the events programmed for the city's status as European Capital of Culture.

In addition, Xarxa perform on a now routine basis in practically all the Spanish autonomous regions. Special shows are created for Logroño (*Quema de la cuba*) or for the *Fira d'arrels tradicionals* in Manresa (*Pir: vint anys envoltats pel foc*). The Basque publishers Artez, in conjunction with Àgora Teatral, publish *Teatro de calle. 20 años aprendiendo* (Street Theatre. 20 years learning), by Leandre Ll. Escamilla, Mireia Marqués and Manuel V. Vilanova. The book not only reviews the history of Xarxa Teatre but also reflects on the historical roots of street theatre in Mediterranean culture and on the theoretical and cultural approaches of the company's aesthetic project.

## 2005

Xarxa perform *Nit màgica* to huge acclaim at the *Festival Internacional d'été de Quebec*, where street theatre and pyrotechnic theatre had never been seen together in the same show. All in all, this is just one of the numerous performances the company puts on: in Portugal (of particular note is the show *Falles*, for the *Festival Internacional de Teatro de Santa Maria de Feria*), France, The Netherlands or the United Kingdom.

## 2006

Tributes and awards for Xarxa: the *Festival de Teatre de Carrer* in Viladecans pay homage to their twenty-five year career with an exhibition of huge photographs of the company's shows; *El Umore Azoka* in Leioa awards their annual prize to the group and to the magazine *Fiestacultura*.

*Les rates mortes* is premiered at the *Festival de Teatre* of Viladecans in a new touring version of the work inspired by the paintings of Ensor.

Xarxa produce *Tierra de Júbilo* for the inauguration of the *Año Santo Lebaniego* in Potes (Cantabria), where, in a masterful display of multimedia, it obtains excellent results, turning it into one of the group's most memorable shows in recent years. These resources, which also included speech (recited and in dialogue), are also successfully used in the show

**Xarxa Teatre. 25 years  
without borders**



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to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the foundation of the Pamplona Swimming Club (*Prohibido bañarse*). *Déus o bèsties* continues to tour successfully; of particular mention is the performance in Santiago de Chile, as part of the *Santiago a Mil* festival.

## 2007

Amongst others, shows for the opening of the Hotel Westin in Valencia, the auditorium in La Nucia and the opening ceremony for the university beach volleyball championships in Valencia. Performance in Shanghai... In spite of all this, Xarxa is not present in the huge shows programmed in Valencia for the America's Cup and other official events in the city.

Xarxa is actively involved in the performance of the opera *La filla del Rei Barbut* by Matilde Salvador, premiered in December in Castellón de la Plana.