

Sandra Pasini

The Secret We Have in Common

I was in charge of the Sun Dance over the last few years and I led the ceremonies, but this year I turned the job over to a witch-doctor, younger than myself, who was my student. Perhaps what I bring today is my offering - I renounce my own power and pass it on to another; I leave the honour to someone else.

For us Sioux, there is no generation gap such as you have. We believe it is correct to lead our young people this way, so that they can take our place. This is the path that nature shows us. Maybe this willingness to share our power with the young people is the reason why old people are loved and respected among us and there is an easy flow of dialogue between the generations.

From *Did You Know that Trees Can Talk?* by Lame Deer

Generation: mother-daughter, teacher-student, past-future. I can't seem to penetrate the subject of this article with words, except by walking in my mind along two paths - one personal and the other professional.

When I think about my mother and her generation and myself and my generation, I am not able to feel a transmission from one generation to another, but only from my mother to me. It is as if Lame Deer's words explain why.

In our society, there is no interest in carrying forward or developing a culture of the past, or in creating bridges that could unite two different generations. There is an art to the passing on of knowledge just as there is to learning, but both are difficult to develop in a society which puts more and more barriers between the young and old; a society incapable of using the knowledge of those with experience or remaining open to those who may be able to "surprise" our knowledge.

I can't change what my parents and their generation have built. What I can do is listen to their dreams, which are hardly ever passed on from parent to child, especially these days. What interests me is the possibility of communicating with them through that which leads us to fight and to believe, to discover what secrets we have in common. I

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know that my parents didn't choose the life they really wanted, that they had to accept roles and obligations, with no help from the society we live in, to give them the possibility of finding their own path.

I come from a big family. There are seven of us children; my father is a factory worker and my mother is a housewife. I remember my mother as a woman on the run, with no time to enjoy herself. When she was young, she wanted to keep studying, but because of the war, she had to leave school when she was thirteen (1943). With seven children, she didn't have the time to think about herself, to dream, to lie down and look at the sky, as she said herself in a letter to me recently. When she was left alone with my father and the youngest child, she began painting, writing and reading. She took a painting class and went to a gym.

My mother taught me never to give up, to keep believing, to fight for the time to look at the sky and never to forget the dream of the child inside me.

When I was fifteen, I left my family and my city to work with a theatre group my sister was also working with. My mother made me choose between school and theatre, since I would have to work mornings to be able to do theatre in the afternoons. I moved to a different city and began a new life. I felt that this choice would take me on a very different road than I had ever travelled before. And it did. Doing theatre has given me the chance to choose and build my own life. But what does it mean to "do theatre"?

It is not just an artistic job that requires discipline and perseverance; not just a continual confrontation with the problems of trying to dedicate your life to the theatre. It is sharing a large part of your time with people very different from yourself, but who all have a great need to believe that dreams can come true. It is through the performance

and its preparation that your dreams and beliefs can live, that you can fight and defy all that you find unacceptable in society. In every performance you learn something new - not only as a professional, but as a human being. It is a continual encounter between you and what is around you, between past and future. It is a way to simultaneously go through time and to stop it. The performance is the moment when a group of people prepare to change direction. When it is finished, we find ourselves at a different point in our history as a group; another road opens itself before us.

I have been living in Denmark for many years now, in a small city where the winter is long and dark, where the culture and the language have slowly become part of me. Danes are completely different from the people I come from, the Italians. And yet, despite all the problems, the separation from my family and friends, I know that this is where I am supposed to be. Why?

Before I moved to Denmark, I had worked with two different groups in Italy. In the first few years, I was fascinated by the director/actor relationship; the giving of oneself trustingly, without judging or using too many words. But little by little, I realised how difficult it is to find a really good director.

A director has to know not only how to observe the actor's material and decide how it should be staged. He or she also has to know how to interpret the needs and secrets we carry inside ourselves - perhaps inherited from our parents' generation or maybe from the culture we are part of, which we rediscover through theatre.

All living beings are fossils. They carry inside themselves, even in the microscopic structure of their proteins, the traces - if not the stigmata - of their ancestors.

From *Chance and Necessity* by Jacques Monod

At first, I visited Denmark to learn all I could about the actor's work from Odin Teatret that lives there. Two years later, I moved to Denmark where I have been living now for five years. In these seven years, I have been part of the Vindenes Bro group of actors, led by Iben Nagel Rasmussen. The group meets for one month a year to work together. If I have to answer why I live in Denmark, I would say, "I've found a master".

The Dance of the Sun is the most ancient and solemn religious ceremony of the Sioux people. During the dance, young men take on terrible physical pain, because their bodies "are the only thing that truly belongs to them alone that they can offer in sacrifice".

From *Did You Know that Trees Can Talk?*

When I began to work with Iben, I was forced to confront my illness. I had had an operation on my head seven years before which kept me from working physically. I often had to lie down during the physical training. I felt Iben supporting me, with her eyes and her warmth, but she always left it to me to decide how and when to stop. She had given me so much responsibility and trust. I had to be able to accept the limits without feeling like a victim and go on to find a way of working. After a month of work with her and the other actors of Vindenes Bro, I learned to trust that I could continue to do the training and that's exactly what happened.

Like my mother, Iben taught me to fight and to believe. She offered me the chance to fulfil my mother's dreams and to build my own.

Iben Nagel Rasmussen and Sandra Pasini.



In the most difficult moments - when it all seems impossible, when the dreams are blocked by the reality that surrounds us, when society gives no recognition to the work being done and you have no strength left to continue along the path you have chosen, and that you believe in - that is when I have to discover what drives me to withstand "terrible physical pain". It is this discovery that makes me recognise my body as the only thing that truly belongs to me and that I can "offer".

Theatre is the place where I can offer.

The need to do theatre drives me to withstand "terrible physical pain".

My group, Teatret Om, has no director. Sometimes I do the directing or we call in other directors, but we don't have one who follows our daily work.

A few days ago it was our tenth anniversary. Many different people have been part of the group over these years - people join and people leave. A theatre group is also a kind of container for generations. Maybe that's why we decided to celebrate this anniversary with a show that would bring together many characters from the past and the present, young actors with older ones.

I founded Teatret Om in 1989 with Antonella Diana, a painter and set designer. In 1995, the actress Petra Lindblom joined the company, and together we created a number of shows in collaboration with musi-

cians and directors. We have established good relations with Vinderup, the small town where we live, and with the region. The people of Vinderup are peasants. It wasn't easy to get them to accept us, but now they are proud of us and that has been a great victory. We have won over a generation that considers theatre to be useless. Maybe we have discovered a secret we have in common.

Translated from Italian by Lauren Sunstein

SANDRA PASINI (Italy/Denmark) was born in 1964. She was an actor at Teatro dell'Arco based in Ascoli Piceno and at Teatro Abraxa based in Rome. She has toured and given workshops in several Latin American countries. In 1989 she founded Teatret Om with Antonella Diana. Since 1993 she is a member of the international group Vindernes Bro directed by Iben Nagel Rasmussen.