

From: *AVVENIRE*, November 26, 1986

ANDRES NEUMANN: THEATRICAL AGENT OR ART MERCHANT?

Milan. Andres Neumann, 43, who was born in Bolivia but settled in Europe many years ago, is the new prototype of what is still called — to use a slightly outdated terminology — a “theatrical agent”. Outdated by events — and rejected by Neumann himself, who with a hint of vanity defines himself an “art merchant” and who, thanks to his profession which is so closely bound up with the theatrical milieu, daily controls huge international, cultural and economic interests, and is responsible for the success of seemingly incredible operations which bear his unmistakable signature next to that — more conspicuous on playbills — of renowned directors and actors: from Peter Brook (whose re-edition of the famous “Tragédie de Carmen” is being viewed by Italian audiences thanks to Neumann) to Vittorio Gassman, Bergman or Jérôme Savary, all of whom rely on him for the circulation of their works.

Specializing in international tours — «mainly from one country to another» specifies Neumann, whose name commands respect but also arouses some envy among his Italian colleagues — he divides his time between his new office in Rome and his many missions abroad.

«I learned this profession», he says, «doing all possible kinds of work connected with the theatre, directing included, for about ten years. The most important training school for me was the Festival of Nancy — a great melting pot, at the time, of the international research theatre — where for some years, from 1972 to 1975 I handled the selection of the various groups, learning to evaluate and to resolve the particular technical, human and cultural problems connected with exporting a show from one place to another, from one country to another.»

Why, Neumann, did you start an agency?

«It started itself, through successive stages of work. From '74 to '78 I ran a small theatre at the Palazzo Pitti in Florence — it was called “Rondò di Bacco” — where I was the first to bring the shows of Meredith Monk, Bob Wilson, Kantor’s “The Dead Class”, at a time when in Italy only the Venice Biennale existed. When the era of the municipal councilmen for culture began, I was called to Rome by Nicolini and there, in 1978, I became “assistant buyer”, on behalf of the municipality, of the works of Ariane Mnouchkine, Krejka, Brook, Grotowski... So,

cooperating with festivals and public institutions, I was always face to face with the problem of the “market”, since I always had to buy at the best possible conditions, with an eye on the budget at our disposal — in this case, public funds.

Now the problem is different, because I am on the other side of the fence and I cooperate directly with the producers in putting together — with a procedure that is typical of the cinema — a “package” that breathes new life into the productions themselves: a package consists in the advance sale of an international tour which is very often needed not only for the distribution but also for the production of a certain show.

Brook’s “Carmen”, for example, completely restaged after four years, was produced with the money from these advance sales. There is here an evident analogy with films, where the producer sets up a film with money from the distributor.» This “enlarged” conception of theatrical organization can at times produce pleasant surprises: on Neumann’s agenda at present there is “Crime and Punishment” directed by Wajda — whose debut in Parma was enormously successful — now part of the program “Florence European Capital of Culture”. The show, which was brought to New York a few months ago, drew such an enthusiastic response from the American public — in spite of the difficulties due to the Polish language — that someone was prompted to start a new, American production of Dostojevskij’s plays, always under the direction of Wajda.

Given that the dreams of organizer, and “art merchant”, Andres Neumann almost always, sooner or later, come true, we are moved to ask him, not so much for the secret of his personal success, as for his evaluation of the internal market compared to the international situation, and also for some advice, so long as it be unbiased. His advice? «Never forget the audience».

His evaluation is implicit: «In America, when thinking of the word “audience”, one immediately associates it with the box-office, whereas in Italy — and also in France and in Spain — the word invariably refers one to an idea of subsidies, public funding, political parties. The same as on the international currency market, where there is no longer a law of free market but where the rules are laid down by political intervention, so in Italy a real market for show-business does not exist.»