

## ANDRES NEUMANN, MERCHANT OF THE IMAGINARY

In Nancy, then in Rome, Andres Neumann, a Bolivian-American, has been organizing theatrical events, from Kantor to Gassman, since 1975.

Were he to let himself go, Andres Neumann would spend his life watching television, the remote control in his hands, fascinated by the 50 different Italian TV channels, by this succession of images without connection and without sense. But Neumann really hasn't the time for this. He is above all a man of communication and seldom stays two days in the same place.

Officially a resident of Florence, as head of Andres Neumann International, he is frequently to be met in Rome, where he had a contract with the Municipality for the organization of theatrical events, but you may also find him in Paris, in Berlin and regularly in Spain, which he compares to Italy as it was ten years ago. Everywhere he is looking for the best artists and for the money to permit them to work. In the past he was more of an artistic adviser to the festivals. Nowadays he calls himself an impresario, "something between the artistic agent and the organizer of tours". This "merchant of the imaginary" admits he has had three models: Jack Lang (of the Nancy Festival), Renato Nicolini (councilman for culture in Rome) and Paul Virgilio ("the only one who understands our time").

Neumann looks more like a professor of nuclear physics — or a conjurer: beard, round glasses on small dark eyes, and a disquieting appearance. He was born in 1943 in Cochabamba, which has since become the capital of cocaine, of an Austrian father and a Polish mother. He left his native Bolivia to complete his studies in Uruguay. A youthful flirt kindles his interest in the theatre, and he ends up directing the theatre of the Centre Culturel Français in Montevideo. A French government scholarship allows him — a dream come true! — to come in 1972 to Nancy, the world capital of festivals at that time. He works there for five years, which he cannot recall without a change in the tone of his voice. Nancy. "Gypsies" from all over the world, ready to die simply to be there, often arriving with a one-way ticket, to help Lang, the "myth", "an extraordinary character". Together with his friends, Neumann was "at source of the market of the imaginary, like the spice sellers in the East in the days of Louis XIV".

Neumann speaks five languages, "therefore, none" he adds in his very elegant French. Of his time in Nancy he speaks with enthusiasm: there he could engage in discussions with the whole world. He has since understood that "language is the only home, the only structure of existence". Condemned to an existence as a wanderer, he always prefers the language he happens to be "living" — so for the moment it is Italian. Since 1978 — the second important experience of his life — Neumann has lived the experience of socialist municipalities, in Flor-

ence and later in Rome, "where everybody has come at some time during the last four years". The entire theatre world, Kantor, Wilson, Foreman... All the same, Neumann asserts in a firm voice that «he is not interested in the theatre». Only one thing is important: communication.

Neumann is a man who learns. He tries to follow his "studies on communication". But it isn't easy to give up the "network", this very secret labyrinth populated by "some suspicious characters, very often South American Jews", almost all of them a product of Nancy, who organize Europe's theatrical pleasures. At present Neumann is busy organizing the European tour of "Mahabharata", after assisting Bergman in Barcelona with "King Lear". Neumann, European by choice, French by culture and Italian by calling, is reluctant to change his home. Last year he spent a month at the Los Angeles Music Centre: «that's where things are happening at the moment. The Pacific is the Mediterranean of the future.»

Everything changes, so he too is evolving. At the moment he is finding his truths in the great masters of tradition: nothing in common with what he used to defend ten years ago. Eduardo de Filippo, Vittorio Gassman — who in 1984 said to him: «I give you five months of my life, organize a show for me». Five months on tour, all over the world.

Neumann is a great traveler, and there is nothing he hates so much as extended stops. «If you stay two days in the same place, you get lost.» He adores good restaurants — not the most expensive nor the best-known — but those where he feels comfortable, where he can talk for hours, sarcastically or seriously like an avid student, wordly only insofar as is required by his job. On a Roman terrace he nostalgically admits that he still has to "start all over again". He is rather tempted by television: «but it is hard to get in». In Montevideo the theatre was in the streets: Neumann lived through the Tupamaros experience, urban guerrilla warfare — totally theatrical, imaginary, but very dangerous.

In Nancy, in Florence, in Rome (as everywhere in Europe) Neumann states that, together with his friends, he has "drained the collective imagination in a few years and sucked the brain of our planet". "There are no model-images anymore", like at the time of Nancy, with Bob Wilson, the Bread and Puppet etc. No more basic images that change one's way of looking at the world. No more object, as Virgilio says. All that is left are screens — to be incessantly fed. His desire to flee resembles that of a disappointed lover. «I am a traitor» he says, a little amused by his provocation. «I have betrayed Kantor in preferring to him the Comédie Française...».