

Cultural commons

The occupation of Teatro Valle

The impact of the economic crisis on the cultural scene in Italy has laid bare the complex question of arts funding, as insufficient public and private models meet – and at points clash with – a third alternative for cultural management: the ‘commons’ or *bene comune* (‘common good’).

The institutional inspiration for this last option has been Article 43 of the Italian Constitution, providing for the management of ‘essential public services, energy sources or monopolistic situations which have a primary public interest’, by the ‘state, public entities or communities of workers’. That article has been central to debate within the Italian Left since 2007 when the centre-left Veltroni government commissioned an inquiry into the commons, headed by Stefan Rodota – who in 2013 went head to head with President Giorgio Napolitano in the Italian presidential elections. Sidelined by successive Berlusconi administrations, the *bene comune*, which is also enshrined in Article 822 of the Italian Civil Code, has become the rallying cry and chief policy aim of an Italy-wide art-activist movement spearheaded by Teatro Valle. Teatro Valle is Rome’s oldest functioning theatre, built in 1726 and declared a *bene comune* when it was occupied in June 2011, to prevent its feared sale to private interests. The occupants subsequently tried to turn the theatre into a private foundation – the Fondazione Teatro Valle Bene Comune – open to and owned by anyone and everyone, with membership costing a mere €10, so that no one would be excluded, making Teatro Valle effectively a ‘common’ entity. That €10 then enabled the donating *socio fondatore* to participate in assembly meetings with decision-making ability conferred upon those willing to help with the daily upkeep of the theatre. Official foundation status was never achieved, rejected via legal channels, although attempts to blend illegality and legality along with a strict adherence to principles marked an approach which was difficult for the administration to deal with. At one point calls for representatives of Teatro

Valle to go and talk to the Comune di Roma met with the response that, as a *bene comune*, the Comune di Roma would have to talk to *all* of Teatro Valle’s occupiers or none.

This unflinching attitude reached its climax in early July of this year when the occupants of Teatro Valle occupied the offices of Rome’s assessor of culture – a post that had been vacant for over a month, leaving the city’s cultural programme leaderless. Calling the occupation a ‘happening’ entitled ‘Summer Holidays’, around fifty occupants of Teatro Valle unveiled their future programme dressed in beach gear, before heading home to the theatre. It is just such a pragmatic mix of sharp reasoning with high jinks which characterized the experience of the Teatro Valle from its occupation in June 2011 to 15 August 2014, when the keys were handed over to the council under the threat of forced eviction and the curtain has closed on a unique period in Rome’s cultural history, in which the single most cited contemporary cultural entity at both a national and an international level was an illegally occupied space. It was Ignazio Marino, Rome’s centre-left mayor (appointed in April 2013), who directly called for the eviction of Teatro Valle’s occupiers in an open letter on 3 July of this year.

The reaction to the call was swift and international in scale, with a petition circulating against the theatre’s closure signed by, among others, the prominent Italian academic Ugo Mattei – a legal expert who holds professorships at Turin University and the University of California and is at the forefront of the *bene comune* movement. He had drafted the referendum question on the privatization of Italy’s water system, which led to it being declared a *bene comune* by an overwhelming vote on 12–13 June 2011. This set the precedent for theatre workers to occupy Teatro Valle just one day later, an act which would ignite the imaginations of artists and activists across Italy, from MACAO (Milan) to Teatro Garibaldi Aperto (Palermo), SaLE Docks, Morion,

Teatro Marinoni (Venice) and La Balena (Naples), all of which have explored the notion of the commons in their own unique and localized way.

Given the success of this movement in capturing imaginations and the quality of programming at Teatro Valle – which drew artists, actors and activists from across the world – Marino has taken a big gamble in calling for its closure. This is especially so when one considers that the previous right-wing mayor, Giorgio Alemanno, lived side by side with the occupants for the last two years of his tenure, allowing a unique cultural and political phenomenon to take route and flourish, albeit unwittingly. With Rome's contemporary art museum, the MACRO, operating a limited programme in the absence of a director – since Bartolomeo Pietromarchi was asked to leave by the incoming Marino in July 2013 – and its exhibition rooms being effectively on hire to the highest bidder, little now happens in the cultural sector in Rome without private investment. This echoes a nationwide situation, with Turin's contemporary art museum

Castello di Rivoli currently without a director and Milan without a dedicated contemporary art space, despite the money spent on the redevelopment of the city ahead of the 2015 EXPO.

The situation of the MACRO has become a symbol of the ineffectual character of Marino's regime, in a city in which the rubbish begins to pile ever higher and small makeshift tent complexes begin to appear on the streets to house the ever-growing homeless immigrant population. Teatro Valle's success highlights the Comune di Roma's abject failure in developing alternative forms of arts management adequate to the times in which we live.

As the previous occupants of Teatro Valle prepare to negotiate with Teatro di Roma – which will now be responsible for Teatro Valle's management – over the theatre's future, international pressure is needed to ensure that the innovative gains and lessons in cultural management of the last three years are not lost.

Mike Watson

VALE Google Ricerca personal

AUTOGOVERNO

CHI SIAMO | AGORÀ | FORMAZIONE | PROGRAMMAZIONE | FONDAZIONE | BENI COMUNI | streaming

la bellezza non può attendere

Nunzio D'Erme e Marco Bucci agli arresti cautelari. Presidio giovedì 25 settembre alle ore 18:30 sotto Regina Coeli

Nessun ultimo giorno | di Marianna Salzmann per Nachtkritik

Più di **5.000** ore di formazione sul teatro e i linguaggi della scena è solo uno dei motivi per cui è importante sostenere la "Fondazione Teatro Valle Bene Comune".

PROSSIMAMENTE

scegli

13 ott 2014	27 set 2015	RABBIA Una scrittura che genera altre scritture a cura di Cristian Ceresoli A production of Foundation Teatro Valle Commons
15 ott	16 ott	
15	16	

a production of Foundation Teatro Valle Commons with Riccione TTV Festival and support of Arti Vive Festival WRITING PRODUCTION MACHINE una scrittura che genera

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Il Macello di Giobbe, the 1st collective production of @valleoccupato will be performed @BOZARbrussels on 15-16/10: bozar.be/activity.php?i...

↳ Ritwittato da TeatroValle Occupato

Espandi