

A Non-Typical Curriculum Vitae: from science and technology to the Humanities and the Classics

By Elizabeth Antébi, President of the association « Fortuna Juvat »

What is the connection, you may wonder, between the publication of coffee table books specialising in the vulgarisation of Sciences and Technologies (that were written in French, and translated in English, Japanese, German, Dutch, throughout the States and Europe, which is quite rare¹) and the creation of an International Latin and Greek Festival (IFLG, 2005)?

What is the connection between such a festival and my own work - which ranges from the writing of books and articles, to the broadcasting TV or radio shows on the history of religions and systems of thoughts, to the design of Web Sites and DVDs?

Perhaps the necessity to find a new meaning to this whirlwind of activities in our « global village », as predicted by Marshall Mc Luhan and the desire to re-establish a continuous current of information, so as not to be drowned any longer in an excess of information, which is often disinformation or just pure non-information.

An Inter-Generational and Inter-Cultural Dialog

Today, we witness the reign of what could be called a kind of « fragmentation of information », with a real gap existing between those who master technology and those who do not – therefore creating a real break between generations; a break in the way “techniques” (which increasingly lose their ancestral roots) and knowledge are transmitted; a break between those who are mindful of the high scientific and technical issues at stake, and those who are minimally aware of them.

This constitutes a real danger for any democracy, where experience and dialog are prerequisites for survival. As is, the “*demos*”, the people, are increasingly unable to exert their power of decision (*-cracy*) in order to vote for or against the important choices in their political and economic lives.

Words are often misused, and can even end up meaning the opposite of their original intent, starting with the word “*culture*” itself which is often reduced to the notion of “market culture”

¹ These books were published by Hologramme.

or “the culture of strikes” (as heard on French television). When words are lacking or failing, images and emotions become powerful and we find ourselves no longer able to exchange any kind of thought or argument any more, just blows. In our globalised world, the need for real cultural exchanges is essential, as is knowledge of cultural contexts. This is crucial, and a platform for inter-cultural dialog has become a necessity

It’s in a way the same kind of research with which I proceeded, when founding the association “Fortuna Juvat” and the IFLG – three days with theatre, amusing spin-offs, films, videos and live lectures, round-table discussions, dance, exhibitions, in order to transmit our common cultural and very alive heritage : the disciplines range widely, as do the ages of the participants. With International partnerships and exchanges.

My own background serves me well in this endeavour, as I have two MAs in the Classics and History of Arts and a Ph D in the History of religions. I am the author of two books of scientific and technological popularisation - “*The Electronic Epoch*” and “*Biotechnologies : Engineering of Life*” published in the States (MIT Press and Van Nostrand), in Japan, Germany, and I have also worked for a long time with the historian Jacques le Goff, the writer Umberto Eco, and also with David Landes, Historian of Economics at Harvard University, and many others, with the goal of establishing a collection of eight books - a list of the “values” of the Western World : <http://www.antebiel.com/EN/books/col-europe.html>

My current view is that Europe cannot be efficient or establish deep, enduring connections, if we deprive it of its memory, cut it from the cultural currents and legacy that have irrigated it as a sap, from its heritage of Universalism, Humanism, Human Rights, as guaranteed by the Law.

Looking at our problems of today through the prism of two thousands years’ legacy (and more) is the best way to create inter-cultural connections through time and space. It is essential if one wants to create a real and effective dialog between different European countries, between the Ancient and the Brave New World, and even between other kinds of civilisations..

Humanities or Classics : what for?

Boris Johnson, Mayor of London, gave us an interview, saying that Demosthenes and Pericles have been very good teachers for his own profession: « **Latin and Greek were the bedrock of my own education. I think, it's invaluable. They teach you about Civilisation, about Politics, about Democratic participation and all sorts of difficulties that leaders encounter.**»

Even an **entrepreneur** has a leading role to play in our society : for that reason, in our International Festival, we created a « Jobs and Careers' corner », aimed at communicating the message that studying the Classics can open doors for job-seekers : Each year, we invite famous examples of **entrepreneurship** or famous "people" explaining their own career, **pursuant to** classical training and a background in Humanities. With employers reporting a drastic decline in the standard of spoken and written European languages, knowledge of a classical language is increasingly being seen as a sign of being able to think clearly and construct an argument, campaigners say.

More often than not, companies - because of numerous issues ranging from spelling mistakes, to a lack of general cultural background and the inability to distance themselves from their day-to-day problems - are wasting their reactivity and therefore time and money. Going back to the origin of words leads to a better understanding of the other, and even allows gaps in a curriculum to be filled. Culture, what for ? As a wonderful tool for a better efficiency. Even on our bank-notes, we have engraved our mottos or monuments or historical famous faces: money is non-neutral.

As the website www.promotelatin.org says :

“Not every parent is happy about a child majoring in classics. This father wasn't but perhaps should have been, considering the success his son is now. Maybe he never read the : "I am appalled, even horrified, that you have adopted Classics as a Major. As a matter of fact, I almost puked on the way home today. . . . I suppose everybody has to be a snob of some sort, and I suppose you will feel that you are distinguishing yourself from the herd by becoming a Classical snob. ... I think you are rapidly becoming a jackass, and the sooner you get out of that filthy atmosphere, the better it will suit me." Ed Turner to his son Ted Turner, founder of CNN, c. 1958, when the latter was a student at Brown University.

A very unusual network, maybe, but very alive

For all those reasons and many more, we will continue to transmit that cultural heritage which our Festival has brought to life for the last five years, through **hundreds** of lecturers and performers, thousands of spectators, our partners and sponsors, with almost a **dozen** foreign countries having exchanged pupils, exhibitions, lectures or performances with us, and - last but not least ! - our growing Virtual Network.

We are now planning to launch **Special Days « Cursus and Curriculum »**, with debates, round-tables which, while focusing on intellectual and humanistic endeavours, will also include a lighter and more humorous fare, such as the rendition of « *Little Red Riding Hood* » in Latin or the Dance of the Crab in *The Wasps* of Aristophanes.